



A step towards revolutionary unity

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The first political party to be founded in the British colony of Ceylon, in 1935, was a workers' party, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party or Ceylon Equal Society Party (LSSP). The first Communist (Stalinist) Party on the island originated from a minority split in the LSSP in 1940. During the Second World War the LSSP itself split with a section of it ? the Bolshevik Samasamaja Party ? rallying to the Fourth International. Re-unification of the BSP and the LSSP in 1950 saw the latter become a section of the Fourth International.

The highpoint of its influence in the class struggle was its leadership of the great hartal (general strike) of 1953. However in the following years the LSSP degenerated, first into centrism, and finally into reformism. In 1964, it entered a bourgeois nationalist government. Various left splits from the LSSP, trying to rebuild revolutionary Trotskyism, continued to split away from the LSSP. One such a split in 1977 gave birth to the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) aligned with the British Militant Tendency, led by Ted Grant. This in turn saw a breakaway in 1982 to form a Sri Lankan section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (led by Ernest Mandel)

The NSSP organisation itself crossed class lines in the late 1980s when it supported the Indo-Lankan peace accord, which meant the deployment of Indian soldiers in Sri Lanka. A minority of the NSSP split away and formed the Marxist Workers Tendency. After an abortive attempt at entrism in the bourgeois Sri Lanka Freedom Party they succeeded in launching a new organization, the United Socialist Party. This organisation was affiliated to the Committee for a Workers' International and indeed was one of its most successful sections in the semi colonial world. In 2005 they stood in the presidential elections and came third with 35,000 votes.

However the policy of the USP's general secretary, Siritunga Jayasuriya, led to a further split. With no proper democratic debate in the party he set about implementing a popular front policy with the right wing United National Party. The UNP has no progressive role to play in the struggle for the Tamils rights or to end the war ? only the workers movement can create a lasting piece in the country by forcing the capitalists to recognise the rights of the Tamils, including national separation if they so wish. The CWI leadership sided with the current general secretary against the long-standing militants who had helped to build the CWI for over 20 years.

Many of the leading members, half the central committee and key leaders in the trade unions left the CWI to form a new organisation ? the Socialist Party of Sri Lanka.

In the spirit of internationalism the comrades immediately began to seek out an international organization that could assist them in the difficult task of constructing a Trotskyist party in Sri Lanka. Coming from a country where the Fourth International once had a mass following, their political investigations took them to the League for the Fifth International. After several months' correspondence between the International Secretariat of the League and the leading committees of the SPSL, culminating with a visit by a representative of the League in May, a Declaration of Fraternal Relations was agreed which we print below.

The comrades of the SPSL are currently making a thorough political analysis of the centrist politics behind the CWI. In particular they were surprised about the depth of the adaptation to reformism that leading CWI members like Ted Grant and Peter Taaffe engaged in when they were part of the Labour Party in Britain.

The League will work with the SPSL leaders and members over the coming months to assist them to deepen their analysis of the centrist degeneration of the Fourth International. The development of our links with the Trotskyist

movement in Sri Lanka and the connections that the SPSL has with sizeable working class forces (especially within the health workers union) opens the possibility for serious numbers of working class militants in Sri Lanka to be won to the call for a Fifth International.

Revolution, the independent youth movement in solidarity with the League also hopes to work with the young members of the SPSL to build a section of Revolution. Continued discussions if they lead to a fusion of our two organisations will allow the struggle for a Fifth International to take further important steps forward South Asia, a region which will be a crucial battle ground in the struggle for socialism in the 21st century.

1 The world imperialist system is in a stage of globalisation. Barriers to capitalist exploitation are being torn down across the world. On every continent, the bourgeoisie is attacking the working class, seeking to privatise and break up the public sector and drastically to reduce social welfare. The US government and its allies are waging their 'war on terror' against those that resist their domination, at home and abroad. They have occupied Afghanistan and Iraq, and the threat of war is used to force countries like Iran to submit to US dominance. The purpose is to prolong the 'American Century' i.e. US dominance of the semi-colonial world, the robbery of its natural resources and the exploitation of its workers and peasants. At the same time, rivalries between imperialist powers are re-emerging, with the EU, Japan and Russia all raising their military spending sharply.

2 From 1991, the propagandists of capitalism claimed that a new epoch of global development and peace had opened with the restoration of capitalism in the USSR and the other bureaucratically degenerate workers' states, and with the 'opening up' to multinational capital of the countries of the 'third world'. Yet within a decade this lie had been exploded by crisis and war (such as the 'Asian crash', the Balkan and Middle Eastern wars). Despite the present boom in the imperialist heartlands, and in countries like China and India, further global crises, even more destructive ones, are inevitable. Imperialism remains the final, declining stage of capitalism.

3 Rapidly mass movements rose up to oppose 'globalisation' and the 'new imperialism'. Hundreds of thousands protested at the summits of the handful of rich and powerful states, the G8, World Bank and the IMF. Millions worldwide demonstrated against the invasion of Iraq, opposition to the war has grown as the death toll rises. In Latin America, Africa and Asia movements of workers and peasants have mobilised to resist the takeover of their natural resources, the privatisation of their public utilities, the super-exploitation of their workforces.

4 In Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan, resistance has mounted against invasion and occupation by the imperialists and their Zionist agents. We declare our solidarity with the struggles to expel the imperialist armies from the Middle East and call for the closing of all naval and airbases from which the imperialists seek to dominate the semi-colonial countries.

5 In South Asia, a social crisis is mounting. In Pakistan a mass popular democratic movement is emerging to challenge the dictatorship of General Musharraf - the proletariat, organising independently of the bourgeois democratic forces, must come to the head of the movement to drive him from office. In Nepal the workers and urban masses have brought down the absolute monarchy of King Gyanendra, but still the monarchy remains and the bourgeois parties retain the power. In India the rapid growth of industry has expanded the working class - but in the government of West Bengal the workers' party - the CPI(M)- has revealed again its completely bourgeois programme by attacking the workers and poor peasants and implementing neoliberal policies.

6 In Sri Lanka the election of the new coalition government - with participation of the vicious Sinhalese chauvinists of the JVP - has opened a new and dangerous phase of civil war. Inflation has massively increased; the government squanders what money it has on the military in its war against the Tamils. Civil liberties are stripped bare as the police clamp down on those who dissent against the government's racist war. The fostering of Sinhalese chauvinism amongst workers and youth is the government's conscious attempt to divert rage against poverty, lack of jobs, social decline towards the Tamil workers rather than towards the true cause of these ills: the bourgeoisie.

7 The alternative to the nightmare of fratricidal national conflict is the formation of a revolutionary workers' party in

Sri Lanka. Such a party must defend the Tamil people's right to self determination ? up to and including the formation of a separate state if they so wish ? and the right of the Tamil people to resist repression by the Sinhalese chauvinists and the government. It must strive to bring the working class to the head of the fight against national oppression, declaring in the words of Karl Marx that ?a nation which oppresses another can never itself be free?.

8 In this struggle, the working class must maintain its independence. We utterly reject the people's front policy of forming a political bloc with democratic bourgeois parties, such as was proposed in 2006 by the United Socialist Party (Sri Lankan section of the Committee for a Workers International), an abandonment of class principle which led to the formation by the proletarian wing of the party of the new Socialist Party of Sri Lanka. This led to the General Secretary of the USP attempting to form an alliance with the bourgeois UNP and not first of all with the left. Only through class independence and a rejection of the people's front policy can the working class party link the fight against chauvinism and national oppression to the fight against capitalist exploitation and oppression of the workers and rural poor of the entire island. In this way the Socialist Party strives to unite working people from Tamil, Sinhalese and all ethnic and religious communities to break the power of the ruling class and their imperialist masters.

9 We fight for an end to capitalism and for the working class to take power and to build a new society based on a democratically planned economy. We believe that only such working class power can fully and finally liberate all those who suffer exploitation and oppression, on the basis of gender, race, nationality or sexual orientation. We look to the Russian Revolution 90 years ago as the model for working class revolution. We adhere to Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution and use the method of Trotsky's transitional programme and the early Fourth International. The crowning point of our programme is the creation of soviets and an armed workers' militia and the struggle for the dictatorship of proletariat.

10 It is our duty to warn the working class that the ruling classes of the world, imperialist and semi-colonial will never allow the working class to take power by exclusively peaceful means, by winning a majority in parliament, etc. They will resort to force long before that and the working class has to be prepared for this. Today political tendencies such as the Fourth International and the Committee for a Workers International ? of which the SPSL was recently a part ? are deliberately seeking to obscure this basic truth. Such equivocation is not Leninism or Trotskyism but centrism, which vacillates hopelessly between revolutionary words and reformist deeds.

11 We cannot fight for socialism in Sri Lanka alone, nor in any isolated country. It is necessary for the world working class to build a new revolutionary International to fight for socialism across the world. The SPSL, after discussions with the League for the Fifth International, believes that it is advancing the clearest revolutionary method on which to build this new world party today. Therefore we call on all political organisations that are fighting for the power of the working class and the overthrow of capitalism, all militant trade unions waging the class struggle, to join us in declaring for the formation of a Fifth International and in discussing the programmatic and organisational basis on which a new world party of social revolution can be built.

12 We agree to establish fraternal relations between the SPSL and the League for the Fifth International with a view to deepening political and methodological understanding of its programme. To this end the SPSL will translate the League's programme From Protest to Power into Sinhalese and Tamil.

13 We agree that the SPSL will discuss with the council of REVOLUTION ? the international socialist youth movement which works in political solidarity with the League for the Fifth International ? the possibility of building a section of REVOLUTION in Sri Lanka.

14 The SPSL and the League will take forward this process of revolutionary unification: the International Executive Committee of the League will discuss with the SPSL how it can become a sympathising section of the League and ultimately be admitted as a full section at the League's next international congress. We will work in conjunction with other League supporters in South Asia to seek out co-thinkers in as many countries of the region as possible and hopefully to build sections there that will work in the closest solidarity.

- ? Down with imperialism's drive to super-exploitation and war
 - ? Down with the Sri Lankan regime's chauvinist war of national oppression against the Tamil people
 - ? Long live the struggle of the workers and poor peasants for the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a socialist order
 - ? Forward to a Socialist Federation of South Asia
 - ? Forward to the formation of a Fifth International ? a new World Party of Social Revolution!
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