

Thousands protest in Sri Lanka against Iraq war

Our correspondents

14 April 2003

The Sri Lanka Islamic Students Movement (SLISM) along with other groups organised antiwar protests in Colombo and the country's eastern province on April 11.

In Colombo, more than 3,000 people, mainly students and young people, participated in a demonstration, including forming a human chain, in front of the Maradana mosque near the city centre. A meeting was held at the Zahira College, Maradana that lasted into the evening.

Protesters held hand-written placards and chanted antiwar slogans including: "Iraq is in the midst of war but Arabs are fast asleep," "Bush and Blair swim in Iraqi blood" and "Today it is Iraq, tomorrow it will be North Korea, Iran or Syria."

SLISM member Baheege said his organisation had sold 2,000 stickers with the slogan "Stop aggression on Iraq" and was going to continue the campaign. "This is an illegal war. America has no right to invade an independent country," he said. The organisers called for a boycott of US goods.

The Muslim United Liberation Front (MULF), the Muslim unit of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), the Sinhala chauvinist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) and human rights organisations were among organisations that participated in the protest.

A number of the speakers attempted to portray the war as a religious conflict. Why are Bush and Blair going to oust Saddam Hussein even though there are other dictators, SLFP leader A.M. Fawzie, asked rhetorically. It was because Hussein was a Muslim, he said, and went on to express concerns about the failure of the UN to stop the war.

JVP speaker Sunil Handunnetti, MP, resorted to empty demagogic bluster, declaring: "Bush and Blair,

you are defeated. Your new technological weapons are defeated. You have today created thousands of Iraqs around the world! You have created thousands of Saddam Husseins in Sri Lanka, Portugal and Syria."

But neither Handunnetti, nor any of the speakers, attempted to explain the underlying political and economic causes of the war, or propose a coherent strategy for working people.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) distributed copies of *World Socialist Web Site* editorial board statement "Build an international movement against imperialist war," outlining the need to unify the working class based on a socialist strategy to abolish the profit system that gives rise to war.

Those at the demonstration who spoke to the WSWs expressed their outrage at the US invasion of Iraq and their revulsion at the carnage being committed by US and British military.

Siddique, a retired government servant, told the WSWs: "You should have the right to convey your ideas. I have my rights to accept it or not. The Bush administration is violating this democratic right of the people. Now the problem we face is whether this war can be stopped only through this kind of demonstration."

Antiwar protests also took place in a number of towns in the eastern province of Sri Lanka last Friday. At Kalmune, 7,000 participated in a demonstration, while at Sammanthurai and Akkaraipattu protests of 8,000 and 5,000 were held.



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