

India: NLC contract worker and WSWS supporter Sivakumar dies at 42

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On the afternoon of July 26, Sivakumar, known as Siva, a supporter of the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) and contract worker of Indian government-owned Neyveli Lignite Corporation (NLC), died suddenly at his hut-house in Neyveli. The NLC, located in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, is involved in lignite mining and power generation that provides electricity to Tamil Nadu and three other South India states.

Sivakumar was 42 and suffered from various ailments, including chronic kidney disease and osteoporosis. He left his wife Rani, three daughters and two sons. He had worked at the NLC for 20 years. His late father, Velu, also worked at the NLC as a regular worker.

Hundreds of Siva's relatives and fellow workers came to pay a last tribute to him. WSWS supporters from Chennai participated in the funeral on July 27. They circulated copies of a Tamil version of the condolence message sent by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka among the workers who attended the funeral. The supporters of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in France also sent a condolence message.

Sivakumar, like several thousand NLC contract workers, belonged to the most exploited section of the working class in India. He was a victim of the appalling working and living conditions of NLC contract workers who also lack proper health facilities. He was admitted to a hospital in Pondicherry, 73 kilometers from Neyveli, for kidney dialysis, but discharged before his treatment could be completed, due to lack of beds.

Remarks made by his colleagues to WSWS supporters illuminate these conditions.

Raji, 35, an NLC contract worker for 15 years, said, "I am not affected by disease like Siva because I work

outside the mine. But nearly 5,000 miners are affected by kidney disease. Some have died like Siva. There is no safety for contract workers—no safety equipment or proper medical facilities. NLC regular workers can get the benefit of medical treatment from high-quality Apollo hospital. Had Siva got treatment from Apollo hospital he may have lived longer.

"If a worker died while at work, his wife might be offered a job. But if a worker died of disease caused by the work she may not get the job. No money except his saving fund (PF) will be given to the next of kin of a contract worker who has died. Hardly any benefits enjoyed by regular workers are provided to contract workers."

Another NLC contract worker who wanted to remain anonymous said: "NLC does not provide any financial aid to workers like Siva who suffer premature death. Trade unions also don't offer any help. The only help a family of deceased workers like Siva would get might be a fund raised by his fellow workers in the particular section where he worked. The NLC recruits workers only after a medical examination to make sure they are fit for the job. That is how Siva too was recruited. However, he died as a result of working in the mines."

Elaborating on appalling conditions of NLC contract workers he added, "NLC provides quality houses for regular workers. But contract workers are only provided with land to build their own houses. They have to pay land rents to the NLC. We, the contract workers, do the same work as regular workers but are paid a lower salary, about one-tenth of what is paid to a regular worker, and we also have to live without basic facilities. Most of the contract workers live in huts. For a long time we lived without electricity. Though recently we were provided electricity, we are not given it free of charge despite the fact we are involved in

power generation.”

Sivakumar’s political evolution was a complex one that reflected partly the decay of Indian politics and the disorientation caused by the Stalinist Communist parties and Maoist organisations. All major national and regional parties are active in Neyveli, 180 kilometers from the state capital, Chennai. All the trade unions operating among NLC workers are affiliated with these political parties. These unions are either directly or indirectly responsible for the betrayal of major strikes in the NLC.

Sivakumar had been an active supporter of a Maoist group for several years, thinking he had joined a “socialist movement” against bourgeois political parties and Stalinist parties—the Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPM, and the Communist Party of India (CPI)—who have aligned with various regional bourgeois parties. However, he later realised that the Maoist organisation he had become actively involved in was no different from other bourgeois parties.

Frustrated and disoriented, but still labeled a Maoist, Sivakumar, in the face of a state witch-hunt against Maoists, temporarily sought “protection” under the wing of Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), a casteist party.

Since he met the WSWs supporters after the sellout of last year’s NLC contract workers’ strike, he had shown great enthusiasm for the Trotskyist international socialist perspective of the ICFI and participated in political and theoretical discussions with WSWs supporters.

After three months of discussion he became convinced of the proletarian internationalist line of the ICFI against various forms of nationalism, including the Stalinist theory of “socialism in one country”. His confused position on Tamil nationalism and casteism were clarified on the basis of Trotsky’s theory of Permanent Revolution, which insists that unresolved tasks of the democratic revolution in backward countries like India can only be solved by the working class, who will take power as the leadership of other oppressed masses on the basis of an international socialist perspective.

Sivakumar began to encourage his colleagues as well as his wife Rani in political discussions with the WSWs supporters’ group. His home was always open to the group. His chronic illness, however, prevented him from active participation in the political work of

the WSWs supporters’ group. A week before his untimely death he participated with great interest in discussion on *The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party of Sri Lanka*.

As pointed out in the condolence message of the SEP-Sri Lanka: “Sivakumar’s turning to the ICFI and WSWs heralds a movement of advanced workers, youth and intellectuals in India and south Asia towards the Trotskyist program of world socialist revolution in the coming period.”



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