

# Indian workers speak in solidarity with International May Day

Our correspondents

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As part of the worldwide campaign for the International Online May Day rally, a team of WSWs reporters spoke with workers in India's southern Tamil Nadu state, including Neyveli Lignite Corporation (NLC) employees in the city of Neyveli and workers in Chennai's Sriperumbudur special economic zone.

The NLC is a state-owned lignite mining and power-generating project that is now undergoing restructuring and privatisation. Nearly 30,000 workers are employed by NLC, with half on insecure contracts with low wages and an absence of basic facilities. The workers have no adequate healthcare services or educational facilities for their children.

The NLC workers, both permanent and contract, went on strike on March 18 against the killing of contract worker, Rajkumar, by the Central Industrial Security Force (CIRF). Rajkumar, who worked at the NLC's Mine 1, was shot dead by a CIRF guard on the previous day after an argument over his request for permission to see a fellow worker.

Sanmugam, a permanent NLC worker, attentively listened to the call for participation in the International May Day rally. He said that he thought that the Ukraine crisis could lead to a war, if the international working class did not intervene.

"Here in India in the ongoing Lok Sabha (parliamentary Lower House) election you can see the political parties promoting religious extremism and nationalism," Sanmugam said. "The BJP [Bharatiya Janatha Party], which is responsible for demolishing the Babri Masjid Mosque in Ayodhya, is instigating religious extremism against Muslims. The Tamil Nadu political parties DMK and AIADMK are promoting Tamil nationalism.

"At the workplace as well as in our living areas, we are working and living like brothers and sisters. But the

political parties are trying to divide us. I am absolutely against that. We don't want religious or communal divisions. What we need is a unity among the workers to fight for their rights. So the International May Day is vital to mobilise the working class against the world war and to defend the workers' rights. I will register and participate in it."

Selvakumar, a sub-contract worker, said: "I was attacked when I was participating in the protest against the killing of Rajkumar. I had been hospitalised for 30 days, and I was paid wages for only six days. I've been working at NLC for 13 years yet I haven't been made permanent. My monthly wage is 5,000 rupees [about \$US82]. My wife is also doing odd jobs and she gets only 50 rupees per day. We went on strike, but the unions isolated our struggle and betrayed us. They have sold themselves to the management."

Krishanan, the younger brother of the worker killed by the state security forces, is an electrical worker. Speaking to WSWs reporters, he explained: "Even before my brother's death I was searching for alternative organisations. I am really encouraged after meeting with you. Hearing that your organisation is going to having an International May Day is very interesting news. We don't want war—thousands of innocent people were killed in the war in Sri Lanka."

Commenting about the Indian election, he said, "I don't believe any of the parties. The politicians come only before elections days. The CPI (Communist Party of India) and CPM (Communist Party of India-Marxist) are no different from the rest. So people need an alternative political organisation that stands for the rights of working people and not for the wealthy."

Sriperumbudur special economic zone (SEZ) in Chennai is one of the largest industrial zones in India, with more than 200,000 workers. The majority have

migrated from poverty stricken rural villages in the south and north of the country. They live in small rooms without basic facilities.

Gopinath, a 52-year-old training officer, spoke enthusiastically about the online rally. “The US has flexed its military muscle to invade Iraq, on the basis of fraudulent claims about weapons of mass destruction. The invasion of that country resulted in the death of hundreds of thousands of people. The US has been waging war against whatever country it considers detrimental to its interests. Now it has installed its puppet regime in Ukraine. Already it has plans to wage war on Russia and China ... I thought that since the countries in conflict possess nuclear weapons they may not go for a war against each other, and would rather engage in peace talks to resolve their differences. But your explanation is correct—the US and other imperialist countries are dragging the world into a war, risking a nuclear conflict.”

Ranjan, a 21-year-old designer at a Hyundai supplier company, said, “I never participated in a May Day rally in my life so far. But I knew about May Day and the historical struggle for the 8-hour working day. Now employers are cutting working benefits and wages worldwide. The trade unions are not defending our rights. Workers need powerful organisations and it must be an international movement based on a socialist perspective, as you said. I am impressed that the International May Day rally is being addressed by leaders from several countries. I am ready to participate.”



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