

Sri Lankan SEP and IYSSE demonstrate against Israeli assault on Gaza

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) demonstrated at Lipton Circus in central Colombo on August 5 against the Israeli military assault on Gaza.

Around 50 party members and supporters participated in the protest, which began at about 4.30 p.m. as workers were returning home. Demonstrators carried placards and shouted slogans, including “Hands off Gaza!” “Oppose Israeli invasion of Gaza!” “For the unity of Arab and Jewish workers!” “For a united socialist republic of the Middle East!” and “Oppose the Imperialist World War preparations!”

Addressing the protest, SEP political committee member W. A. Sunil said the Israel military onslaught against Gaza aimed to break more than 60 years of Palestinian resistance. Pointing to the brutal nature of the Israeli attacks, which have the backing of the US and other imperialist powers, Sunil said: “This is a warning to the international working class about what is on the store for them at the hands of the imperialist forces.”

Sunil referred to a July 15 statement issued by Sri Lankan government. “The statement’s call for ‘the parties concerned to exercise utmost restraint in a bid to halt the violence,’ lets Israel off the hook by placing it and Hamas on the same plane,” he explained.

The speaker exposed the pro-imperialist politics of a July 31 protest in Colombo, organised by the Nava Sama Samaja Party, United Socialist Party and Frontline Socialist Party and called under the slogan “Let Palestinians live.” That theme amounted to an appeal to Israel and their US and other imperialist backers, the speaker said. “By contrast, the purpose of the SEP/IYSSE campaign is to mobilise the working class independently, based on an international socialist program, against imperialism and their international allies.”

Before the demonstration, SEP members and supporters marched from Borella and Pettah, moving along several

main streets and converging on Lipton Circus. The marchers passed through the crowded districts of Punchi Borella, Maradana, Slave Island and Union Place.

About 3,000 copies of the WSWs statement “Oppose Israeli invasion of Gaza” were distributed in Sinhala and Tamil. The leaflet advertised a forthcoming SEP/IYSSE public meeting on the dangers of world war, to be held at the Colombo Public Library Auditorium on August 18.

The marchers received a warm response from workers, youth, students and women throughout the campaign. Drivers stopped and asked for leaflets, as did some bus passengers. Students returning home also enthusiastically engaged in discussions with SEP campaigners. Special support was received in Muslim neighbourhoods.

A group of retail workers in Pettah gave comments to the WSWs, including the following:

“We saw in the newspapers yesterday that America has given \$250 million to Israel. America should therefore take the responsibility for murder of thousands of innocent Palestinians, including children and women. Yesterday they [Israel] attacked a school. We condemn these attacks.

“America blamed Russia for the gunning down of the Malaysian plane without any evidence. But Russia has provided evidence that Ukraine did it. America is going to start more disastrous wars.

“Five years after the end of war in Sri Lanka there have been some government-sponsored attacks against Muslim people. The government wants to divide the people. This is the same method used by imperialist powers like America in the Middle East. Look at what is happening now in Iraq where people are divided into three groups, Sunni, Shia and Kurdish.”

A navy soldier in civilian clothes said: “We cannot accept the killing of children and innocent people.” When it was pointed that the US and other major powers supported Colombo’s war against the Liberation Tigers of

Tamil Eelam (LTTE), he asked why Washington was pressuring the Rajapakse government over war crimes. The US had no right to investigate war crimes [in Sri Lanka], he said, when it was carrying out more crimes than the Sri Lankan government.

SEP supporters explained that the US had no concerns over the plight of Tamil people killed and displaced by Colombo's war against the LTTE. Having fully backed the bloody conflict, the US was using the war crimes to force the Rajapakse government to distance itself from China and align more closely with Washington.

A female worker from Colombo National Hospital commented: "Workers should oppose the attacks on Gaza Strip. It's clear that Israel is acting with American support. Some people ask 'what does this have to do with Sri Lanka?' I think such questions evade the essential issue and that this is a part of plan of a wider world war. I will read your leaflet and try to attend your meeting."

A Muslim youth said: "It's very important to speak out on the Gaza Strip. I don't know much about your party but Israel's actions should be exposed. This is not a war between two countries, as some of the media is trying to convince us. Israel is killing Palestinians wholesale."

A telecom worker commented: "I'm opposed to the Israel invasion of Palestine. I think everyone must oppose it, but you can't get much information here on what is really happening there. It's good that you're trying to convince people and I support your campaign ...

"Your actions will help working people understand what is going on. The poor people in the Gaza Strip should be defended. I'll read your leaflet and hope to attend the meeting on the drive toward a world war."



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