

SEP campaigns in Sri Lanka, India for International May Day Online Rally

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka, and supporters in India, have conducted an extensive campaign for the International May Day Online Rally on May 3 organised by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and World Socialist Web Site (WSWS).

Campaign teams have found considerable interest and support when talking to workers, young people and students at workplaces and universities in Colombo and its suburbs, as well as in other parties of the island. Thousands of copies of the May Day Rally announcement in Sinhala and Tamil have been distributed.

The ICFI's fight to build an international anti-war movement of the working class resonates with many workers and youth who have their own bitter experiences of war. A quarter century of communal war by successive Colombo governments against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) cost hundreds of thousands of lives and only ended in 2009.

The SEP and IYSSE are holding a public meeting at the Colombo New Town Hall this afternoon as a part of their campaign for the rally.

In India, supporters of the ICFI distributed hundreds of copies of the May Day announcement in the southern cities of Chennai and Bangalore.

Workers and youth spoke to WSWs reporters.

Madusanka, a young worker at the Brandix garment factory in the Free Trade Zone (FTZ) in Katunayaka, said: "We oppose world war. We haven't got a television here to watch the news. We can hardly find an Internet facility. But we will join your program for the unity of the working class by participating in your meeting in Colombo."

W. Ranmenika, a female sanitary worker from the same factory, spoke about the miserable living conditions under the new Sirisena government. "We are only paid 450 rupees [\$US3.5] per day. No matter how much we work we can't even manage our essential expenses with this salary. All governments that have come to power have cheated us. We haven't been given any benefit. We must stand together as

the working class to fight against this."

An unmarried female worker from Trincomalee joined the discussion. "We have seen the war situation in the Middle East from the news. But you are the only party that makes us aware of the threat of a World War. We really don't want a war. I have many experiences about the civil war's destruction here. The LTTE killed many farmers in our villages. All governments dragged the war on for years by exploiting those terrorist attacks."

Dasun, a Colombo University computer science student from Colombo University, said: "It is clear to me that the destructive war in the Middle East triggered by American imperialism could rapidly spread all over the world. Civilians there have been confronted with an immense catastrophe. We also saw the tragedy of the Libyan refugees trying to make a dangerous sea crossing."

A Colombo University non-academic staff member, who agreed to join the Online Rally, said: "The world situation has reached a critical and explosive stage. When we watch the foreign news it's very clear to us. Today we experience the same situation in Sri Lanka. We have an idea that the world is moving towards a destructive world war. But no one has raised that issue apart from you. We really appreciate your attempt and the awareness that you give."

Rusiru, a Kelaniya University graduate, told the SEP: "The threat of world war is very clear now. With the quantity and the power of the weaponry that America has, we can hardly imagine the destruction that would confront mankind in a world war. It is completely new for me to hear about a movement that fights against it. I was glad to hear about something like that. I will surely join the May Day Rally."

Chamath, an engineering student at the University of Moratuwa, said: "Your campaign against the world war has a great importance and I have heard about this only from you. It's encouraging news for me that there is a world movement which tries to stop world war."

The SEP has also campaigned among plantation workers and youth in the central hill districts including Hatton,

Tallawakelle and Maskeliya.

A teacher from Hatton said: “These smaller scale wars taking place in the Middle East and other places will be inevitably transformed into a world war. Most probably it will be a nuclear war. It must be stopped. But I have no idea how.” SEP campaigners explained that it was only the international working class fighting on the basis of socialist internationalism that could halt the drive to war.

He responded: “American imperialism tries to dominate the world using their military powers. But the American working class is also a very powerful force which could possibly counter that. The workers all over the world must stand together with them to rescue the world from this great disaster. This is the first time I have heard about an Online May Day Rally. This event has a great significance for uniting the working class internationally. I’m very encouraged by your party’s program.”

SEP campaigners won important support in the northern city of Jaffna which was ravaged by decades of war and is still occupied by tens of thousands of troops.

A former LTTE fighter, 32, just released after nine years of imprisonment, said: “I hadn’t heard about the developing threat of a third world war until you explained it. But we had lot of terrible experiences during 30 years of civil war. We witnessed point-blank murders by the military, shell attacks and air attacks as well as abductions and disappearances. Due to the government’s repression of Tamils we were compelled to join the LTTE. But now I am alone and helpless.

“I was subjected to severe torture by the security forces in prison. They cut many areas of my body with sharp weapons like knives and axes. Now I can’t move normally and can’t do any job. Seven of my family, including my father, mother, brothers and sisters were killed in a shell attack at Mullaitivu in the final days of the war. At that time they were taking shelter in bunkers within the so-called government-declared safe zones.”

Pirakash, a shop worker, said: “We have to work about 13 hours for a small salary. I have to travel 20 kilometres to Jaffna to work and spend about 3,000 rupees per month for bus fares. My three family members cannot live on this salary. After the end of the war, governments, including the current one, said that people would receive many benefits but we received nothing but increases in the cost of living.”

In India, ICFI supporters campaigned among workers in the Madras Export Processing Zone (MEPZ) in Tambaram and the Ambattur Industrial Estate in Chennai as well as to IT employees in Bangalore.

Kannan, an IT employee in Ambattur, explained: “I have already registered to participate in the rally. The May Day is not simply a traditional festival, confined to a certain

religion or the borders of one country. This is a day that recalls the solidarity of workers internationally and today it is an indispensable necessity.

“The Fourth International has provided a fantastic platform for youngsters like me. It’s a great opportunity for us who seek to think about the history of the rights won by the working class and the suppression unleashed against them by imperialism.

“I would like to participate in this online rally with the inner urge to get answers to my questions. The worldwide actions of imperialism tell us on a daily basis the need for rereading the analysis of our working class thinkers.

“We must try to follow the path drawn by our teachers and rise above the struggle that confine us to nations and trade unions. Wars and competitions are not for us. But history has shown us how to work out our own strategy, breaking through them. We shall make this an occasion to probe them and analyse.”

Many young workers from the neighbouring Indian states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, have migrated to Chennai and are working in the Ambattur Industrial Estate and MEPZ.

Vinod, 23, from Andhra Pradesh, works for a Business Process Outsourcing company on a temporary basis. He said that the online rally was a good cause and wanted to know how he could support it. “Unlike many other parties and unions, which take out rallies just for the sake of it, this Online Rally seeks to unite workers of all countries in a common course,” he said.

His workmates, Imphisa, Senthil and Abdul, were also eager to attend the online rally. “This is a good idea, that at the same time, workers are mobilized internationally. Otherwise May Day rallies are organized here and there in an isolated manner. This may show the way forward to impoverished workers who are paid very low wages,” they said.



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