

Workers and students in India and Sri Lanka endorse International May Day Online rally

WSWS reporters
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International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) and Socialist Equality Party (SEP) supporters have been campaigning in Sri Lanka and south India over the past weeks for this Sunday's online May Day rally. They have won strong support for the international event with many people voicing their concerns about war, poverty, attacks on democratic rights and the retrogressive social programs of the establishment political parties in India and Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka

SEP and IYSSE campaigners in Sri Lanka have conducted a vigorous campaign for the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) online May Day rally. Hundreds of leaflets promoting the event have been distributed in Colombo and surrounding suburbs, as well as at universities, industrial zones and nearby coastal fishing areas. Campaigns have been also conducted in the central hills tea plantations district and in Jaffna in Sri Lanka's north.

Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena has tied the country to Washington's war plans against China, but the Colombo media is totally silent about the developing threat of world war. At the same time, the ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and United National Party (UNP) coalition and other bourgeois parties are inflaming nationalism and anti-Tamil communalism to divide the working class.

SEP supporters campaigned in Kajeema Watta in Colombo, where the government recently demolished over 50 low-income homes in a bid to clear land for commercial investment projects. Kajeema Watta residents voiced deep hostility toward past and present government plans to evict more than 65,000 poor families from Colombo city.

Musammil, a three-wheel taxi driver, said the major political parties were only interested in "protecting their own

power and positions." Commenting on the SLFP, he said the party had divided into two camps, each holding separate May Day meetings. "These divisions have nothing do with concerns about the poor. All of them, even the UNP, agreed to the eviction of residents and the attacks on rights of the poor."

Referring to the danger of war, Musammil said: "They [the US] destroyed Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria. What a tragedy. We want to stop these interventions and at the same time we oppose ISIS terrorism. America and other major countries are responsible for making the conditions that created ISIS."

Musammil said he hated racism. "All the ruling class parties are responsible for the promotion of communalism. It doesn't matter what your racial background or religion is—all of us in Kajeema Waththa face eviction."

Dhammika, a Sri Jayawardenepura University applied science student, had a lengthy discussion with IYSSE campaigners. "The present May Day rallies do not provide any understanding of the international unity of the working class," he said. "Actually, I didn't know the real meaning of May Day before your explanation."

Referring to the official May Day rallies in Sri Lanka, Dhammika said: "Look at the rally of the Joint Opposition group of former President Mahinda Rajapakse. This will definitely be used to whip up anti-Tamil racism and exploit the growing discontent among the people."

Dhammika said the Sinhala-chauvinist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), which oppose the proposed Economic and Trade and Commercial Agreement between Sri Lanka and India, were attacking Indian workers. These groups are whipping up an anti-Indian campaign, he added, claiming that thousands of low-wage Indian workers would flow into Sri Lanka.

"How can you expect the international unity of the workers from the rallies [of these organisations]? They are harming the unity of Sri Lankan and Indian workers," he explained. He discussed the ICFI's warnings about the growing danger of the Third World War and said: "I'll

register for your online May Day rally.”

SEP campaigners were told by Homagama industrial zone workers that dozens of factories had shut over the last five years, with more than 3,000 jobs eliminated.

Samanthi, a young female worker from Alexander Garments, said: “You are the only people who have taught me the real meaning of the May Day—the commemoration day of the unity of international workers. At the same time, you’ve pointed out the danger of another world war. Workers should participate in your rally, which is educating and uniting them. We don’t have Internet access, so I’d like to join your May Day Rally in Colombo.”

Chennai and Bangalore in south India

In Chennai, ICFI supporters fought for the international May Day online rally against the background of next month’s Tamil Nadu state election. Many workers and students expressed their dissatisfaction with the establishment parties and said they would not vote for any of them. More than 200 copies of the ICFI’s statement—*Socialism and the Fight Against War*—were sold and hundreds of leaflets distributed about the online rally.

India’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government supports the US imperialist “pivot to Asia,” which is aimed at isolating and waging war against China. Campaigners spoke to students in Madras and visited workers at the Integral Coach Factory (ICF) and at the Sriperambadur Special Economic Zone. In Bangalore, they discussed the May Day event with Jyoti Nivas College students and at nearby technical colleges.

Vinod, a Chennai law student, said he had no faith in any of the political organisations contesting the Tamil Nadu election.

“No party is speaking about the interests of the poor and there is nothing for the poor in various schemes introduced by the Modi government. His ‘Make in India’ campaign assures cheap labour for investors. [Prime Minister Narendra] Modi appeared on TV with a broom to ‘clean India.’ The Modi government made amendments to labour laws to please investors and at the same time whips up Hindu communalism and attack beef-eaters. What one eats is one’s own wish, others can’t dictate it.”

Vinod voiced his opposition to war. “On a daily basis the TV channels are whipping up war tensions between India and Pakistan... I also believe there is the danger of another world war. I’m glad to see at my young age that there’s an alternative party that wants to put an end to war and

poverty.”

Ilavarasan, an information technology student, and **Nathan**, a diploma student, echoed these thoughts and said they were keen to see the emergence of a new socialist movement.

Ilavarasan explained that he had joined the CPM (Communist Party of India- Marxist), thinking it would fight for communism. “I don’t like their electoral alliance with the MDMK and the VCK [Renaissance Dravida Progressive Congress and Liberation Panthers Party, two regional bourgeois parties, respectively]. They didn’t teach me any basic ideas about communism.”

Mustafa, an ICF worker from Chennai, welcomed the ICFI’s political campaign against war. “As you have explained, without the working class taking power in the advanced countries, war cannot be stopped. Modi is in close alliance with US imperialism against China.”

Referring the destruction of jobs under the Modi government, Mustafa explained that 70 percent of the ICF’s work was done on a contract basis and that retiring workers were being replaced by low-wage young workers on contracts. He said he was happy to see an international movement of the working class developing.

Amenulla, another ICF worker, told campaigners he was interested in the idea of fighting to build an independent international movement of the working class against war. “The participation of French troops in the Indian independence day celebration reflected the Indian government’s turn to the imperialist powers. The Modi government provides complete support to the US,” he said.

Although he works for a government sector company, Amenulla said he felt insecure about his job because of growing privatisation. Trade unions and political parties, he added, “have all become enemies to the workers.”

Muralithar, also from ICF, said he was very enthusiastic there was a movement celebrating May Day all around the world at the same time. “Although I don’t have an email address, I’ll get the help of my daughter to register for the Mayday online rally.”



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