

Indian students speak out against imperialist war drive

Our correspondents
19 August 2017

Indian supporters of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) spoke to students in city colleges during the campaign for a forthcoming public meeting in Chennai, the Tamil Nadu state capital, on August 27. The meeting will discuss the growing danger of war against China in South Asia and the political strategy required to mobilise the international working class to prevent this catastrophe.

Across the Indo-Pacific region, the US is accelerating its political provocations and military build-up against China. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has transformed his country into a “frontline” state against China and further integrated the military into Washington’s geo-strategic agenda.

American warplanes and warships are now permitted to use India’s military bases and ports and the Modi government is backing aggressive US operations against China in the South China Sea. India has also expanded its relations with key US allies in the Asia Pacific, such as Japan and Australia.

Tensions have also intensified between India and China, both nuclear-armed powers. The recent intervention by Indian troops to stop road expansion work by Chinese workers in the Doklam plateau, a disputed border region between Bhutan and China, poses the danger of military conflict.

ICFI supporters campaigned at a number of Chennai colleges, including Presidency, Pachaiyappa and the Ambedkar Arts College, as well as several workplaces and neighbourhoods.

There is a growing hostility among students to the US-led war drive and New Delhi’s support for Washington. Students opposed the huge amounts of money being spent by Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party-led government on the military build-up against China and Pakistan and the intensifying attacks on the living

standards of working people.

Robin, a Presidency College student, said: “I oppose this war drive by the Modi government. If the war were to erupt, it would lead to devastating consequences. The government claims that any war would be to defend the Indian people but what we see is an increasing deterioration in peoples’ living standards through government cuts to subsidies for food, education and health care.

“How can the government talk about defending the people when it is intensifying its attacks on the people? They want to divert the anti-government opposition of the people through this war mongering.”

Robin said no Indian political party was discussing the dangerous consequences of the war. He wanted to know why the ICFI was the only organisation fighting against the imperialist war drive. After campaigners told him about *Socialism and the Fight against War*, the ICFI’s statement in 2016, Robin said he welcomed the fight for a worldwide anti-war movement and agreed to attend the public meeting.

Praveen told ICFI supporters that he was concerned by the escalating government attacks on freedom of speech. “When students protest they are charged under the Goondas Act and if you fight for the cause of the people you face sedition charges. All power is in the hands of the government.”

The Goondas Act, which was imposed by British colonial rulers in 1923, gives the Indian government and police extraordinary powers to detain anyone deemed to be a member of a gang and hold them without bail for up to a year. The legislation was used to suppress anti-colonial struggles.

Prem, a first-year BCom student, said: “If war broke out [between India and China] the people of both countries would suffer because it has the potential to

become a catastrophic nuclear world war. I'm aware of India's close military relations with America and also learnt about the Malabar naval exercises that India jointly carries out with America and Japan."

Prem denounced the Modi government's social attacks on Indian workers and the poor. He referred to the demonetisation of 1,000- and 500-rupee notes, and the government's false promises to give 1.5 million rupees to "every poor man" in India after it confiscated "black money." He said India's Congress Party and the BJP both served the interests of the capitalists.

Hari, a BSC Botany student, said: "I oppose war because innocent people will be killed. When the US dropped atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, innocent people were killed."

Hari also opposed the government attack on democratic rights and added: "When we supported Jallikattu [a protest against the banning of centuries-old bull-taming contests], the police brutally attacked us. Also Valamathi, a female student, was arrested under the draconian Goondas Act because she campaigned to mobilise students and people against the harmful Hydro Carbon project in Neduvasal village, in southern Tamil Nadu."

Payas, a first-year BSC student at Ambedkar Arts College, said: "I strongly oppose this war drive. Unlike the previous war, which was fought with conventional methods and using rifles and military tanks, this impending war will involve nuclear weapons and cause enormous destruction. The people will be forced to pay for this war through additional taxes."

Payas opposed the Modi government's discriminatory attitudes toward Muslims. "Muslims are being told that they cannot eat beef," he said. "Modi should not interfere in the very fundamental rights of the people. What people want to eat is their choice."

Ganesh also spoke out against war. "I think you are right in calling for the unity of Indian, Chinese and Pakistani workers against their respective capitalist governments," he said. "I'm also against the recent police killings of farmers in Madya Pradesh and the government attacks on Muslims and Dalits."

Jaheer, a BA Economics student and a member of the DYFI, the youth wing of the Stalinist Communist Party Marxist, said: "You call for the unity of Indian workers with the international working class but the DYFI has declared support to the Indian government in

the event of a war with China. I'd like to know more about your world party."

Sreenivasan, a Pachaiyappa College student, explained that he learnt about the growing war tensions between India and China, and India and Pakistan, and the joint naval exercises by India, Japan and America through the media. "I agree that the Indian and Chinese armies are not seeking to protect the interests of the people in both countries.

"We see before our eyes how the police ruthlessly attack students and people when they get involved in protests. Indeed if the police could not handle the situation, they would bring in the military to suppress these struggles."

Ayianar, another Pachaiyappa College student, said India and China boast about their strong armies but any future war "will not only be a catastrophe in this region but for other countries in the world as well. The people in the region must unite to stop this happening," he said.

The Chennai public meeting—"Oppose the US-led imperialist war drive!"—will further develop this crucial discussion.

Date and time: August 27, 10 a.m.

Address: First Floor, Periyar E.V. Ramasamy-Nagammai Education and Research Trust (opposite the HPM Paradise Kalyana Mahal)
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