

Indian Trotskyists hold public meeting in Chennai against Internet censorship

Our correspondents
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Workers, students, youth, professionals and housewives participated in a public meeting in Chennai, the Tamil Nadu state capital, on April 8, against Internet censorship. The event was organised by Indian supporters of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

ICFI supporters extensively promoted the meeting, distributing thousands of leaflets and campaigning at colleges and working-class areas in and around Chennai. The event was conducted in English and Tamil and streamed live via Facebook.

Chairing the meeting, Sathish Simon said governments, working hand-in-hand with IT corporations such as Google, Facebook and Twitter, were mounting a serious attack on freedom of speech.

Under the guise of “fighting fake news,” socialist, left-wing and anti-war web sites were being blacklisted, with the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS), the internet publication of the ICFI, a central target.

The speaker recalled that Washington’s “weapons of mass destruction” claims in 2003 were a blatant lie, used by the US and its allies to invade and loot Iraq. The operation was part of an unending series of US-led wars aimed at establishing its global dominance and leading up to the latest threats of a full-scale imperialist intervention against Syria.

Censorship of social media sites, such as Facebook, is being intensified, Simon explained, because workers are increasingly using these platforms to organise their struggles in defence of wages, jobs and working conditions. This is graphically shown in the recent eruption of militant strikes by teachers in Oklahoma, West Virginia and other states in the US.

Delivering the main report to the meeting, Arun Kumar said Google began targeting the WSWS last year because of its socialist and anti-war perspective

and a rapid increase in its readership. The ICFI, he said, is building an international movement of the working class to combat the growing danger of imperialist war and had issued major political statements in June 2014 and February 2016 on war and the fight for socialism.

“The imperialist powers led by the US want a free hand to carry out their reactionary neo-colonial wars and treat any attempt to mobilise mass opposition to their militarist policies as treason. This is one of the chief reasons why the WSWS came under heavy attack via Google censorship, an anti-democratic move that has now been joined by Facebook.”

Kumar said the Indian Stalinist and Maoist parties were “downplaying the danger of war, claiming that such warnings would scare the people.” The speaker pointed out that the Lenin and the Bolsheviks had spoken about the danger of World War I well in advance and fought to prepare the working class on the basis of international socialist policies.

When WWI began, the speaker continued, Lenin called for the imperialist war to be turned into a civil war against workers’ own ruling capitalist class. The victory of the 1917 October Revolution was the beginning of the end of the war and opened up a new epoch for mankind.

Kumar reviewed the WSWS’s principled defence of victimised Maruti Suzuki workers at the company’s car assembly plant at Manesar in northern India. The WSWS reported their militant struggles against sweatshop working conditions and exposed the joint company-government witch-hunt against them.

“When 13 Maruti Suzuki workers were sentenced to life imprisonment and 18 given three to five years jail term on March 18, 2017, the ICFI, through the WSWS, launched an international campaign for release of the framed-up workers,” the speaker said.

“The Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM and the Communist Party of India (CPI) and their affiliated trade unions turned the other way. They calculated that any identification with the victimised Maruti Suzuki workers would undermine their close ties with sections of Indian bourgeoisie, which wants to use the witch-hunt as a warning to the entire working class and send a signal to global investors about the government’s determination to establish slave labour conditions.”

Kumar told the audience that Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government, under the pretext of opposing “hate speech” and defending “national security,” is also working closely with Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to censor selected websites and social media accounts.

“These anti-democratic measures are also related to the Modi government’s close strategic partnership with the US and the transformation of India into a frontline state in Washington’s war drive against China. As opposition grows to attacks on social rights and the pro-US shift, the government fears social media being used to organise opposition.”

Audience members asked important questions, including whether planned talks between US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un would avert war and whether it was possible to fight for socialism in India without resolving the caste question.

Kumar told the audience that irrespective of any future talks involving Kim Jong-un, a new period of imperialist war was being driven by the deepening crisis of the world capitalist economy. The caste issue in India, he explained, was interwoven with capitalist class exploitation and was one of the outstanding questions created by the political abortion of anti-colonial democratic revolution by the Indian bourgeoisie in 1947.

“The major social division in India is class, not caste,” Kumar said. “Caste oppression and other unresolved issues of the democratic revolution can be resolved only by the working class rallying other oppressed masses under its leadership and in the struggle to overthrow capitalism based on a socialist program.”

After the meeting WSWs correspondents spoke to some of those in attendance.

Muthukumar, a law student, said: “I support the

meeting’s banner: ‘Oppose Internet censorship and defend freedom of speech.’ International politics revolves around the economy and geographical interests. We have to mobilise the working class and educate workers to become class-conscious and understand that they can save the world from another destructive world war. We can use this same force to overthrow the capitalist system.”

Mani, an accountant, said: “I always support freedom of speech and so I strongly oppose any kind of Internet censorship. Through this meeting I learnt about the perspective of internationalism and how the problems we face, nationally and internationally, are caused by capitalism.”

Referring to the ongoing dispute between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka over Cauvery River water-sharing, he commented: “This is being used by political parties to create divisions in the working class... I previously thought that Marxism could not properly address the caste question but you have provided some direction on how we can counter caste issues. I still have some doubts but we can discuss this further.”

Manikkiam, a press worker, commented: “After Modi became prime minister there have been lots of attacks on freedom of speech and other democratic rights. I thought the danger of war was because of certain leaders but now I understand that the reason is capitalism. What Marx said is correct: The working class should throw away capitalism and form a government under its leadership.”



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