

# Sri Lankan teachers denounce the government and unions

Our reporting team  
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Several teachers involved in Wednesday's industrial action spoke to WSWS reporters, voicing their disgust with the government and the unions and describing the declining state of government schools in Sri Lanka.

**Sumedha**, a drama teacher from Veyangoda, said: "The trade unions have tried to destroy teachers' morale. They keep saying that they're going to stop talking with the government but they repeatedly do this. The union leaders are the government's representatives and regardless of what is negotiated, these governments do not solve a single issue facing the people.

"I didn't vote for either of the major parties and voted for JVP as a protest in the election. But the JVP is now even closer to the capitalist establishment and has no alternative program against the major parties."

**Najeeb**, a principal at an Anuradhapura school, and several other teachers from the same facility, joined in the discussion. They said that teachers were fighting not just for their rights, but in opposition to the government cuts to the education sector.

"Students are being made to pay for various activities within the school," Najeeb said. "Students and parents have lost confidence in school education and, as a result, have turned to private classes. There's no money for effective academic and extra-curricular activities in schools. Every government has cut allocations to education and started to privatise it. There's a need for a wider struggle to protect free education."

Another staff member from the same school said that he and other teachers were being compelled to take more private tuition classes because their salaries were too low. He said he had no free time and that his life was hard.

**Udara**, a science teacher at a school in Ja-Ela, said: "The teachers' struggle has reached a very critical stage. Discussions with the government have not

produced a solution and it's clear that governments have no intention of solving teachers' problems. The trade unions are aware of this but keep calling for further talks. The discussion among teachers is for an indefinite strike. They believe that they can't achieve anything without this sort of a fight."

Udara said he was interested in the SEP's perspective and its call for the establishment of action committees. "All workers, including teachers, need to have a movement that can fight for their real interests. It's clear to me that action committees are the sort of organisation that gives the workers the opportunity to fight based on their strength and their real interests."

A vice principal from a Jaffna school told the WSWS: "The unions do not make any proper announcements or preparations regarding our struggle. They only share information through press releases. Because all the unions work separately, there's a lack of solidarity among teachers.

"It's a good sign that all the teachers in the North have expressed their support for this struggle even though the Ceylon Tamil Teachers Union did not participate in the strike. Their stand on Tamil nationalism is an act that opposes solidarity between Tamil and Sinhala teachers in this country and is a dangerous thing."

**S. Tiraviyanatan**, said: "The government is ignoring the teachers' struggle and its demands. It keeps cutting social spending and refuses to agree to the strikers' demands. This is all happening because it is under the dictates of the International Monetary Fund.

"All workers must unite and fight together. They cannot do anything by standing separately. It's time for all workers—teachers and workers from the railway and the banks—to fight together and not be divided by their professions or trade unions."

**Sanjeev**, an Advanced Level Student from Jaffna Central College, said: “Everyone at our college fully supports the teachers’ struggle. Teachers face many difficulties and unless their problems are resolved and they’re in a happy situation, they cannot teach us properly. Many teachers are in debt to the banks and after paying their loans they only have a small amount to live on each month. The government has to pay the salaries that the teachers are demanding.”

Sanjeev said many students were from poor families and did not have access to a decent education. “It’s the government’s responsibility to provide proper education facilities for students,” he said.



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