

Sri Lankan workers and youth denounce police murder of George Floyd

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Sri Lankan workers and youth have used social media to voice their outrage over the brutal US police murder of George Floyd and to endorse the ongoing global demonstrations.

The protest movement gave expression to rising anger over social inequality, poverty, mass unemployment, government attacks on social welfare and ongoing imperialist war.

Video of Derek Chauvin, the Minneapolis cop who kneeled on Floyd's neck until he choked to death, with three other police officers assisting, has been widely watched, and shared on social media by young Sri Lankans shocked over the cold-blooded murder.

By contrast some editorials and columns in Sri Lanka's mainstream media have attempted to present the protests as a rebellion against "white racism." The *Daily Mirror*, for example, published an opinion piece on June 2 by P.K. Balachandran entitled "Murder of Floyd and the aftermath show deep roots of racism in US."

Balachandran, a prominent columnist for the newspaper, insisted that "racism is deeply rooted in the US" and added "the coronavirus may recede with the coming of a vaccine, but racism is endemic in the US."

These claims are in order to cover up the multi-ethnic and mass character of the protests in the US and elsewhere. Racism obviously plays a role in the police violence but the source of this violence is capitalism and class oppression.

As the Socialist Equality Party (US) noted in its May 30 statement: "The eruption of mass demonstrations of workers and youth of all races triggered by the brutal murder of Floyd has given expression to a tremendous social solidarity, which belies the racial narrative. It is not a question of black against white, but the working class against the rich. This is a tremendous step

forward. The demonstrations mark a new stage in the development of the class struggle."

Most of the social media comments in Sri Lanka express the underlying international unity of the class struggle.

In one Facebook post, Priyantha Chandrasiri writes: "These capitalist rulers, irrespective of ethnicity, exploit labor forcefully. We must act against this system."

Tharaka Vijayabahu says: "The American struggle is not between whites and blacks. White and black [must] join and fight against rulers' persecution and repression, against racial divisions and for the rights of black people."

A Facebook post from Karunadasa Munagama states: "There may be no social transformation in this struggle but creating the mood needed for a future social transformation is unavoidable. Capitalist society, led by America, will undergo a transformation in the near future."

P.G. Punyawardana also noted on Facebook: "Using religious and racial segregation along black and white racial lines within the barbaric capitalist system is used to maintain capitalist rule. Where the bourgeoisie has taken the right to live and breathe this must be strongly condemned. Let us fight for world socialism to put an end to all the attacks of capitalism by rallying American black and white youth, intellectuals, artists, writers, along with thinking sections in the other parts of the world, under the leadership of the working class."

Outraged by the police killing, journalist Wasantha Wijesiri told the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS): "Although George Floyd's murder has been the focus of these protests, the demonstrations are also a result of the social crisis and stimulated by the socio-economic

problems facing the American people. These protests are developing against the repressive measures carried out by Donald Trump and that expresses the militancy of the working class against this state repression.”

Wijesiri compared Trump’s reactionary measure to the political situation in Sri Lanka: “The ruling class in Sri Lanka is also preparing to establish a military regime in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis. It’s attempting to militarise every section of the administration, utilising the media to eulogise the military as “war heroes” in preparation to unleash it to suppress the working class.”

Randika Hettiarachchi, a young supermarket superintendent and regular WSWs reader, said: “The emergence of international struggles against Floyd’s assassination shows that opposing state repression is a common concern of the working class and oppressed throughout the world. It is clear that there are conditions for achieving international socialism.

“I fully support these growing protests around the world. The working class must break from the opportunist political tendencies and be aligned with their own independent political program.”

Chathuranga Mahagama, a 14-year-old student, sent a letter to the WSWs denouncing Floyd’s murder. He wrote: “I watched an online video about how Floyd was killed. There I saw a policeman kneeling down on Floyd’s neck. With his neck trapped, Floyd says: ‘I can’t breathe. I can’t breathe. Are you trying to kill me?’ The 46-year-old Floyd screams for his life but the video shows that the policeman is not listening... [and] that Floyd passed away before he was taken to the ambulance.

“Two days after the assassination, my school friends began circulating the video widely on Instagram. In sharing the videos, they expressed their deep concern and anger over the assassination.... Videos of American protests against Floyd’s assassination also began circulating on social media. One video shows angry people attacking a police car. After I shared the video, many people watched it and shared it with others and all have said that the people’s anger is justified...

“Many of my friends have stated that irrespective of black-and-white differences, the police must be opposed over these killings, which is the way I think. We have seen in these protests that there was no segregation between blacks and whites.

“I learnt from a WSWs article that there are about a thousand such killings in the United States every year. These killings are not just occurring in America but all over the world, including in Sri Lanka. It should be reduced to zero. It also must be pointed out that workers have more power than the police and the army. The masses of all countries should unite and demonstrate. Proper leadership is essential to these protests.”



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