

Sri Lanka online public meeting: Build workers' action committees to win health workers' rights!

Health Workers Action Committee of Peradeniya Teaching Hospital
29 January 2021

As COVID-19 rapidly spreads throughout Sri Lanka, health workers are in an increasingly vulnerable situation. Hundreds of health workers are now in quarantine because of the deadly and highly infectious disease.

On January 8, Ratnapura General Hospital reported that Shantha Stephen had died from COVID-19. He was the first Sri Lankan health worker to die from the virus. More than one hundred employees—doctors, nurses and attendants—from Peradeniya Teaching Hospital have been sent into quarantine.

In line with the government's policies, health authorities have compelled health staff to keep working and have refused to shut down the affected wards. This dangerously indifferent response is subjecting health workers to severe mental and physical stress and the immediate threat that they become victims of the pandemic.

As in many countries, the Sri Lankan government's policy is "herd immunity," or keeping the economy open and allowing those who are unable to withstand COVID-19 to die. Workers have been ordered to remain on the job and schools have been reopened. Frontline hospital employees have not been provided with high quality personal protective equipment (PPE).

Currently more than 20,000 health workers have died from COVID-19 and 300,000 have been infected internationally since the pandemic began.

The situation in Sri Lanka is the result of decades of cuts to health spending and the undermining of public health infrastructure by successive governments.

The health sector trade unions are directly collaborating with the government to impose its policies. At the same time, they have called limited

protests in order to dissipate workers' anger and then send them back to work.

The Health Workers Action Committee at Peradeniya Teaching Hospital, which is independent of the unions, has been established to fight against these dangerous conditions and to defend our rights. We urge our fellow frontline workers to form similar action committees in other hospitals and health institutions.

These independent action committees of workers are based on democratic discussion and decision-making. They are not limited to one grade of health workers, but are across all grades.

We urgently demand high-quality PPE, safe travelling arrangements and sensible service shifts to protect us from COVID-19, as well as risk and quarantine allowances, the filling of all vacancies to ease the workload, and job security. These are life and death issues. Our fight is bound up with the struggle for a socialist program and in unity with the working class in Sri Lanka and internationally.

The Peradeniya Teaching Hospital health workers action committee is holding an online meeting on February 7 at 9:00 p.m. to discuss these crucial issues. All health workers are invited to register and participate via the link below:

<https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/4438645290934040587>

For further discussion on our campaign please contact us via email (healthworkers-sl@wsws.org) or text (0773562327).



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact