

Sri Lankan educators' safety committee salutes Chicago teachers

Teacher-Student-Parent Rank and File Safety Committee statement (Sri Lanka)
7 February 2021

The Teacher-Student-Parent Rank and File Safety Committee in Sri Lanka extends its support to the courageous struggle being waged by teachers in Chicago against the murderous policy of the Biden administration and its response to the new varieties of the coronavirus throughout the US.

As the Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee has correctly pointed out, the Republican and Democratic parties in America have employed a policy of death by placing the profits of the big corporates above human lives. In order to facilitate the unsafe back-to-work drive and the reopening schools, the lives of teachers and children are being placed at grave risk.

Well-known medical scientists in America and internationally have explained that the reopening of schools is a serious factor in the spread of the virus. We condemn the campaign by the establishment media, such as the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*, as well as education authorities and Democratic and Republican governors who insinuate that teachers are “selfish.”

The determined struggle of Chicago teachers is an inspiration to everyone involved in organising the fight against similar attacks. The Chicago teachers are in the forefront of the struggle against the universal policy of the ruling classes everywhere, including in India and Sri Lanka, where human life is secondary to the extraction of profits.

The Sri Lankan government ordered the opening of schools on November 23, citing low official numbers of infections and deaths. One of the reasons for the lesser numbers is the small number of tests carried out by health authorities, which are then used by the government to paint a rosy picture and declare the situation is not so dangerous.

While schools were reopened on January 11, only 55 percent of students attended, and many teachers were also absent. Attendances increased slightly over the next few days, following a school reopening campaign by the media. The same media, however, every day reports on school closures because of infections among students and teachers.

The vast majority of students in Sri Lanka and India, as well as teachers in urban and rural areas, have no online facilities. They cannot afford computers or other equipment for online learning.

The terrible situation in these countries was revealed by a Sri Lankan survey showing that many students have dropped out of the learning process. Education expenditure has been slashed by governments and vital facilities are not provided for students and teachers.

There is growing anger among students, teachers and parents towards the reopening of schools in these unsafe conditions. The two-faced role of the trade unions and pseudo-left parties, which work to tie the struggles of the workers, including teachers, to the policies of bourgeoisie, is being exposed.

We read in the *World Socialist Web Site* about the treacherous role of the Chicago Teachers Union. The situation is no different here. Organisations such as the Ceylon Teachers Union and Ceylon Teacher Service Union in Sri Lanka have become tools of the government and endorse the reopening of education institutions.

Our action committee in Sri Lanka is fighting to mobilise teachers on an international socialist perspective, uniting them with the other workers and students and independent of the unions. We will campaign among teachers and students in support of the Chicago teachers' struggle, explaining this important experience. The Chicago struggle is our

fight.

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Enthusiastic about the determined stand of the Chicago teachers, several teachers in Sri Lanka spoke with the Socialist Equality Party.

Kodituwakku, a technology teacher at a high profile Colombo school, said: “The threats against the Chicago teachers’ strike are a serious example of how the workers are being forced back to work in the midst of the pandemic. Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot’s threats that she would ‘take action’ against the teachers, claiming their action is an ‘illegal strike,’ shows the murderous intent of the entire ruling class and its willingness to sacrifice workers.

“I oppose teachers who refuse to come to work being labelled “absent without leave” and having their pay cut and online access blocked. Their concern about the dangers posed to their lives and their families through in-person teaching is entirely reasonable.

“The role played by the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) is a significant eye-opener about the trade unions. Its attempt to impose an agreement that will push teachers back to school exposes the real interest of the ruling class. The experience of Chicago teachers is very important to the international working class, including Sri Lanka.”

Basnayaka, an education industry professional, said: “Chicago teachers have exhibited their strength through an ongoing strike despite threats from the authorities. They clearly indicate that they need a safe school to teach in-person in order to protect themselves as well as their students.

“I’m very much in agreement with the Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee’s insistence that there is nothing to negotiate and that all schooling must remain remote only.

“The decision to open school has seen bad results in Sri Lanka and seen a considerable number of students and teachers identify positive with the virus.

“The kind of opposition expressed by Chicago teachers must be developed wherever the ruling class seeks to open schools unsafely and that opposition must be armed with the right political perspective.”

Niluka, a private school teacher, said: “I completely agree with the Chicago Educators Rank-And-File Safety Committee stand against the teacher union’s

plan to reopen schools. Under a situation where the pandemic is rapidly spreading as a result of the reopening of the economy, including schools, the opposition of Chicago teachers against the unsafe back-to-work campaign is a crucial example for the global working class.

“The response of the ruling class, led by Chicago’s Democratic Mayor Lightfoot who threatened to take actions against the striking teachers, should be condemned and countered by a politically guided movement of the working class independent of all trade unions.”



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