

Sri Lanka health workers discuss need for action committees at public meeting

Our correspondents
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The Health Workers' Action Committee at Peradeniya Teaching Hospital held an online public meeting on February 7 entitled "Build Workers' Action Committees in Hospitals to Win Health Workers' Demands."

Over 60 people, including doctors, nurses and other health staff, as well as young people from various fields, participated. A Facebook video of the event posted on February 14 has been watched by over 1,000 people so far.

The meeting was chaired by a member of the Peradeniya Hospital Action Committee who explained that hundreds of health workers at the facility and other hospitals across Sri Lanka were being infected with COVID-19 and placed in quarantine.

The health worker said that a doctor and a worker from the public health service had succumbed to the coronavirus and several hospital wards and units forced to close. This occurred, he added, as millions of people around the world, and nearly 60,000 in Sri Lanka, have been infected by the virus because capitalist governments everywhere put profits before the lives of the people.

The chair pointed out that about 100 years ago the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918 had killed an estimated 50 million people worldwide, including 700,000 people in the United States alone. Medical experts were now warning that the number of coronavirus deaths in the US was expected to reach 700,000 by May.

"This disaster has occurred under conditions where the US has been the world's richest country for more than three quarters of a century and amid astonishing developments in the medical sciences," he said.

Socialist Equality Party (SEP) General Secretary Wije Dias, who is a member of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, began his address by describing the intensifying crisis of the global capitalist system. He then explained the historical origins of action committees, how they differ from political parties, and their objective revolutionary significance.

"Not only the health services but all social and political establishments are in a grave crisis as global capitalism sinks

deeper day by day into the abyss. This does not mean, however, that the capitalist system, with all its destructive characteristics and barbarism, will disappear automatically. The working class, as the most consistent anti-capitalist social force, must first of all seriously recognise what kind of intervention is required to overcome the life-threatening political challenges it confronts.

"The spread of COVID-19 globally is a trigger event which is not only escalating the crisis of world capitalism but also intensifying the political resistance of the working class and the oppressed masses in every continent. This makes the historic need to build the International Committee of the Fourth International as the world party of socialist revolution, and its national sections as mass revolutionary parties in every country, ever more urgent in order to lead the coming anti-capitalist struggles on the basis of an international socialist perspective."

From US President Joe Biden's administration, to the Narendra Modi government in India, and President Gotabhaya Rajapakse's regime in Sri Lanka, all operate according to a similar political agenda. These rulers, notwithstanding their democratic rhetoric, are moving rapidly towards the establishment of autocratic regimes.

US President Biden's blatant cover-up of his predecessor Donald Trump's fascistic coup attempt, Modi's brutal repression against the three-month peasant uprising, and Rajapakse's militarisation of the civil administration in Sri Lanka, expose the anti-democratic turn of these rulers.

These developments have also laid bare the bankrupt and reactionary role of pseudo-left organisations and the trade unions which attempt to hide from the working class the counter-revolutionary preparations of these capitalist rulers, Dias said.

In this context, Dias explained the historical relevance of the action committees that need to be formed by the working class. He reviewed the emergence of action committees or Soviets that arose in Russia in early 20th century; the development of factory committees by workers in Europe; and the formation of rank-and-file committees in the United

States.

The speaker said these sorts of committees would function as the main political and organisational instruments of the coming revolution and through which workers and youth would be educated by the revolutionary party and prepared politically for the historic task of overthrowing capitalism.

Dias then quoted from Leon Trotsky's *Summary and Perspectives on the Chinese Revolution* written against the Stalinist falsification of the experience of the Soviets in Russia. "The Soviets appear most often and primarily in connection with the strike struggles which have the perspectives of revolutionary development, but are in the given moment limited merely to economic demands," Trotsky wrote.

"The masses must sense and understand while in action that the Soviet is their own organisation, that it marshals the forces for a struggle, for resistance, for self-defense and offensive. This is perceived and understood by them not from an action of a single day nor in general from a single act but from the experience of several weeks, months or sometimes years, with or without interruptions."

Dias further elaborated on the meaning of the quote and its relevance to the establishment of action committees.

The tendency within these action committees, and under the influence of the revolutionary party, he said, is to dynamically develop from defensive actions to offensive organs against the capitalist system and of the revolution. "It is because of this inherent revolutionary character of the action committees that the pseudo-lefts, like all reformists and class collaborators, are vehemently opposed to the building of these organisations. They prefer to maintain bourgeois parliamentary institutions and trade union organisations which are real barriers to developing and releasing the revolutionary potential of the working class," Dias said.

"It is important to draw into the action committees, not only the politically experienced workers who understand the betrayals of the reformist trade union and parliamentary leaderships, but also the new layers of workers who are pushed to the battle front by the intolerable and worsening social conditions.

"Through political discussions and practical activities of the action committees, the workers will glean new knowledge about the national and international implications of the struggles they are engaged in. On that basis, they learn to combat all shades of enemies within and outside the action committees. This is how the members of the Bolshevik party of Lenin and Trotsky developed workers to lead the revolution in Russia in October 1917," Dias said.

"While the revolutionary party and the action committees are organisationally independent of each other, the party is a

decisive factor in the committees and party members involve themselves in the work of the committees under the discipline of the party.

"They fight to guide the committees through democratic discussions and a decision-making process. The party wins the best elements of the action committees to its perspectives and recruits them to the party to penetrate deeper into the working class," Dias said in concluding his remarks.

Several questions were asked by attendees following the speeches. One health worker from Gampola Hospital said: "We are tired of the unions. We have been at loggerheads with the union leaders. Many workers are frustrated and angry. How can we bring the Health Workers' Action Committee to workers and convince them to join under these conditions?"

Dias responded by explaining that the necessity for action committees emerges from the objective development of the class struggle itself.

In these struggles, he said, the bourgeois parliamentarians and the trade unions will not just be exposed as inadequate to fulfill the aspirations of the workers and the oppressed but revealed to be thoroughly retrogressive.

The capitalism system cannot provide any progressive solution to the economic, social and democratic problems and so the workers and the oppressed will feel the need for alternative organisations. The action committees proposed by the SEP represent this need, Dias added.

"We have to patiently explain to workers that the changed objective local and world situation requires international socialist solutions. This consciousness does not develop amongst workers automatically which is why there is an urgent need to build the revolutionary party and alternative fighting organs such as action committees.

"Objective developments, such as the coronavirus pandemic, will help people understand the realistic nature of the revolutionary program. It is only through the intervention of the party that the political consciousness of the people is raised to the level of the historic tasks they confront. Ultimately it is the working class led by the revolutionary party that realises the revolutionary change required in society," Dias said.



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