

Sri Lankan SEP holds important meeting on COVID-19 catastrophe in India

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka held an online meeting on May 30 entitled “The COVID-19 pandemic and the need for a socialist strategy.”

The weeks-long campaign for the event, promoted through the *World Socialist Web Site* and social media, was attended by about 200 people, nearly half of them from India, as well as SEP members and supporters in Sri Lanka and from other sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

Underscoring its international character, the event was addressed by speakers from the Sri Lankan SEP and as well as the US, Canadian and French sections of the ICFI. Speeches were delivered in English, Tamil and Sinhala.

SEP (Sri Lanka) Political Committee member Saman Gunadasa, who chaired the meeting, said: “The pandemic is rooted in biology. However, it is not primarily a medical or health disaster. Rather, it is a social catastrophe and social crime. It is a man-made human tragedy, or more precisely one of the greatest political crimes of global capitalism in the 21st century.”

Gunadasa briefly explained how India’s Modi government, like its counterparts around the world, allowed the pandemic to spread by keeping the economy open in order to defend the profit interests of the country’s billionaires.

The predictable social catastrophe, he said, was radicalising Indian workers who are opposed to the actions of the government and corporations.

“These struggles must be unified with those of workers around the world and animated by a socialist perspective, so that the working class can remove control of the response to the pandemic from the capitalist ruling elites and implement a science-based strategy that prioritises saving lives over capitalist profits,” he said.

Gunadasa read greetings from the ICFI supporters’ group in India and restated the ongoing commitment of the ICFI and all its sections to fighting for the immediate release of the 12 imprisoned Maruti-Suzuki workers, jailed for life on March 2017 on frame-up charges following a company-

government witch hunt. These workers were persecuted because they dared to defend the jobs and conditions of Maruti-Suzuki car assembly workers at the Manesar plant in northern India.

SEP (Sri Lanka) Assistant National Secretary Deepal Jayasekera, who spoke in Sinhala with English and Tamil subtitles, provided a comprehensive overview of the COVID-19 disaster in India.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s decision to allow businesses to remain open while denying financial and social support to workers led to the death of millions, he said. Even with the current dangerous surge in COVID-19 infections, Modi “adamantly opposes a national lockdown to control the disease.”

Jayasekera elaborated the socialist demands that workers need to take up against the murderous “herd immunity” policies of the Modi government and the Indian ruling elite. This involved the fight for lockdowns and the closure of all non-essential services with full wages for all workers, including those in the informal sector, migrant workers, the self-employed, poor farmers and fishermen. Full COVID-19 protection should be available for all workers in essential services, free vaccines for all, and massive financial allocations provided to upgrade the health care system, he said.

“The only social force capable of leading the fight for such a program is the international working class, which is not bound to any nation-state and private property... We call upon the Indian working class to join with its class brothers in South Asia and internationally for a united movement against world capitalism and for international socialism.”

Speaking from Montreal, SEP (Canada) National Secretary Keith Jones, who is a member of the WSWs International Editorial Board, told the meeting, “India’s purported capitalist rise—so celebrated in the media in the West—has produced a malignant society that exemplifies and embodies the dysfunction, brutality, and criminality of 21st century capitalism. The current crisis has laid bare what three decades of India’s so-called new economic policy has

wrought.

“Thirty years ago, in July 1991, the Indian bourgeoisie repudiated its post-independence state-led development project—a nationalist strategy based on import substitution that it cynically labeled socialism—and initiated India’s full integration into the US-led world capitalist order.”

Jones reviewed the treacherous political role of Indian Stalinists, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM and the Communist Party of India (CPI).

“For the past 30 years, the CPM and CPI have lionised the Congress, the historic party of the Indian bourgeoisie, and a host of right-wing regional chauvinist and casteist parties, as secular and democratic bulwarks against the BJP, whom the working class must support in order to defeat the Hindu supremacist right,” he said.

US SEP National Secretary Joe Kishore explained how the reactionary policies pursued by the Trump administration—on COVID-19 and the preparations for war against China—were being continued under President Biden.

“Despite its [the US] vast wealth and its control of the most advanced technologies, the pandemic has exposed a social and political system that is incapable of meeting the needs of the vast majority of the population.”

The criminal policies of America’s ruling elite, Kishore continued, have been “directed not at saving lives and eradicating the pandemic, but at perpetuating the stock market boom and furthering the geostrategic interests of American imperialism...”

“Workers in India and throughout the world must be made aware of these important developments. The United States is not just American imperialism, which is threatening war against China and which acts as a bulwark of support for reaction in every country—including the critical support from both the Trump and Biden administrations for the right-wing government of Narendra Modi. There is also the American working class, the natural allies of workers throughout the world.”

SEP (Sri Lanka) Political Committee member M. Devarajah highlighted the rising wave of opposition by workers and the oppressed masses in India and in other South Asian countries to the murderous policy of “herd immunity” and attacks on democratic rights, and outlined the reactionary role played by the unions.

“Workers are facing the common threat of capitalism, now in its death agony, and need to unite internationally. To do this, workers must reject every form of communalism and nationalism that is being whipped up by the capitalist classes and their governments to divide and paralyse the working class,” he said.

Speaking from Paris, V. Gnana, Assistant National Secretary of the SEP (France), pointed out that more than

one million people had died from COVID-19 in Europe because governments there refused to implement the public health measures being demanded by doctors and scientists. He also reviewed the decades-long struggle carried out by the SEP in Sri Lanka “for Trotskyism and to unite the workers across all lines of race, religion, language and caste in a struggle for socialism.”

The final speaker, SEP (Sri Lanka) General Secretary Wije Dias, who is a member of the WSWS International Editorial Board, said that the online meeting marked “a new stage” in the struggle to build an Indian section of the ICFI.

He quoted Leon Trotsky’s open letter to Indian workers on the eve of WWII: “Complete independence from the bourgeoisie is indispensable to the proletariat, above all in order to exert influence on the peasantry, the predominant mass of India’s population. Only the proletariat is capable of advancing a bold, revolutionary agrarian program, of rousing and rallying tens of millions of peasants and leading them in struggle against the native oppressors and imperialism.”

Dias told the meeting that Trotsky’s Theory of Permanent Revolution was being carried forward by the ICFI today and in struggle against “the false promises of the Indian bourgeoisie and the naked treachery of the Stalinist communist parties and their pseudo-left hangers on.”

He briefly reviewed the revisionist policies of Pabloism—its adaptation to the post-WWII settlement, bourgeois nationalism and the liquidation of Trotskyism in India—and the ICFI’s struggle for the revolutionary continuity of Trotskyism in Sri Lanka and the region.

The fight by the SEP in Sri Lanka to build the Trotskyist movement in India, Dias said, was enormously strengthened by the founding of the *World Socialist Web Site* in 1998. “Through the WSWS, the ICFI’s struggle to build the world party of socialist revolution was brought to the instant notice of working people and the youth of every continent,” he said.



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