

Remarks to SEP (Sri Lanka) meeting on the pandemic in India

American workers are the natural allies of workers throughout the world

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The following is an edited version of remarks delivered by Socialist Equality Party (US) National Secretary Joseph Kishore to a meeting organized by the SEP (Sri Lanka), “The Covid-19 pandemic and the need for a socialist strategy.” The meeting, directed to workers and youth in Sri Lanka, India and throughout South Asia, was held on May 30.

I am honored to speak to this meeting on behalf of the Socialist Equality Party in the United States.

Titanic and terrible events are now unfolding in India. The level of death and devastation wrought by the pandemic and the criminal response of the BJP government of Narendra Modi is incomprehensible. Workers throughout the world have viewed in horror the images of overflowing crematoriums and a health care system that is collapsing under the impact of an endless stream of new cases.

India is now the epicenter of a disease that has ravaged the entire globe. The worldwide death toll now exceeds 3.5 million, according to official figures that far understate the reality. Here in the United States, more than 600,000 people have died based on official reports, though estimates place the real toll at closer to one million. The death toll in Brazil is approaching half a million; in Mexico more than 220,000; in the UK and Italy, more than 125,000.

As workers throughout the world consider the experiences of the pandemic, the initial shock is giving way to anger, outrage and demands for accountability. How did this happen? Who is responsible? How can the ongoing carnage be stopped?

In the United States, the ruling class is currently engaged in a furious campaign to blame China for the spread of the disease. Discredited and unfounded theories first promoted last year by the Trump administration and the extreme right—that the virus originated in a laboratory in China, and perhaps was even the product of biological engineering—are being legitimized and promoted by the media and the entire political establishment.

There are transparent political motivations behind this campaign. The leaders of all the major capitalist governments are swimming in buckets of blood. Millions of people have died unnecessarily as a result of deliberate decisions taken at the highest levels of the state to reject public health measures that would save lives.

The same indifference, the same criminality of the Modi government in India, is expressed in the response to the pandemic of every major capitalist country.

It is a fact of enormous significance that the United States, the center of world capitalism and the home of Wall Street, has seen the largest number of deaths from the pandemic. Despite its 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.

One principle has governed the response of the ruling class to the pandemic from the beginning: that no action could be taken that undermined the interests of the corporations or threatened the share values on Wall Street.

Government policy, first under Trump and now under Biden, has 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.

In late March of last year, more than a year ago, the US Congress passed the so-called CARES Act, which financed the multi-trillion-dollar bailout of the banks and Wall Street speculators. Once the interests of the oligarchy were secured, the campaign began to insist that the “cure can’t be worse than the disease”—that is, that lives had to be sacrificed for profit.

The Trump administration spearheaded the campaign to remove the limited restraints that had been put in place, but it had the support of both capitalist parties in the US, the Republicans and the Democrats, along with the media and, critically, the trade unions.

The consequences were both predictable and predicted: A massive surge in new cases and deaths.

Similar policies were implemented in all the major capitalist countries. In the UK this past week, a former advisor of Boris Johnson further confirmed that the UK government implemented a policy that it had calculated would lead to the deaths of as many as 800,000 people. In Brazil, the government of Jair Bolsonaro deliberately pursued a policy of allowing the virus to spread without restraint, anticipating that the death toll could reach as high as 1.4 million.

Amidst mass death and social misery, the fortunes of the oligarchy have soared to new heights. The collective wealth of all US billionaires, or just 660 people, rose more than \$1.1 trillion since mid-March of 2020. The British *Financial Times* reported yesterday that the market in superyachts is surging as the “wealthy seek luxury and seclusion” to “escape crowds and the threat of Covid-19.” One could hardly have a more clear and damning indictment of the entire social and economic order.

The International Committee of the Fourth International has defined the pandemic as a “trigger event.” By this we mean an event that accelerates and intensifies the underlying contradictions and tendencies of the capitalist system.

We have seen over the past 15 months the ruling class response to the pandemic. The policy of mass death has coincided with a turn ever more openly to dictatorial forms of rule. At the beginning of this year, a fascistic insurrection was organized by the Trump administration on January 6, with the collaboration of the entire Republican Party, that had as its aim the overthrow of an election and the establishment of a dictatorship. This was not an isolated incident—it expressed something deeply diseased in the social and political system.

Biden and the Democrats are now in power, but the same basic ruling class policy is being pursued. Even though 500 people are dying every day from the coronavirus, Biden has essentially declared the pandemic over. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has, under the administration's direction, even removed regulations on the wearing of masks in public places.

Meanwhile, the Democrats are now spearheading the militarist campaign against China. On Friday, the Biden administration released its budget proposal for the coming year that is centered on a record military budget of \$753 billion—including \$24.7 billion for nuclear weapons modernization. It is estimated that a vaccination program to cover all Indians would cost about \$6.4 billion. American imperialism is spending four times this amount to modernize its weapons of mass destruction.

And as Israel carried out its criminal assault on Gaza this month, it found its most steadfast ally in the US under the leadership of Biden.

The other side of this process is the growth of opposition in the working class. The experience of the past year has not been in vain. It has had a profoundly radicalizing impact on the consciousness of masses of workers and youth throughout the world.

For workers throughout the world, critical questions of program and perspective are raised. Auto workers in India this past week took courageous action to stop production, which is part of a broader movement of workers in India as the pandemic spreads without restraint.

In Chennai, the auto companies have received authorization from the Tamil Nadu state government to continue production, placing the lives of auto workers, their families and the public at large at grave risk. As is the case throughout this global catastrophe, the lives of workers have been subordinated to the profits of the banks.

Workers in India should study the experience in the United States. In March of 2020, autoworkers in the US, along with workers in Canada and in Europe, stopped work on the line and demanded that non-essential production be halted. At this early stage in the pandemic, the spontaneous response of workers forced governments to implement partial lockdowns and other measures that scientists insisted were necessary to stop the spread of the disease.

While workers acted courageously, they lacked the necessary organizational forms and political perspective to transform this outburst of opposition into a movement that could put an end to the source of the problem—the capitalist system. The ruling class regrouped. It passed its bailout and then proceeded with its campaign to force workers back on the job.

The trade unions have played an absolutely critical role in assisting the ruling class in implementing its homicidal policies. Far from organizing opposition among workers, the trade unions have collaborated in keeping businesses and schools open. More than six hundred thousand people have died in the US, and the trade unions have not organized a single struggle of workers aimed at stopping the carnage.

A section of the ruling class, led by Biden, sees in the existing trade unions critical instruments for suppressing working class opposition. Moreover, the development of a government-sponsored and state-controlled “labor movement” is a strategic imperative for American imperialism as it prepares an ever more direct confrontation with China. Last month, Biden announced a “task force” to promote the unions that includes as prominent members both Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and the Treasury Secretary and former Fed Chairman Janet Yellen. That is, two chief representatives of American imperialism and finance capital.

There is, however, a growing movement in the working class to break free from the stranglehold of the unions, which is ignored by the media in this country and throughout the world.

In Virginia, workers at Swedish-owned Volvo Trucks have established a rank-and-file committee to oppose the efforts of the United Auto Workers to sabotage their strike last month and then to impose a contract dictated

by the company. Workers are currently mobilizing to defeat a new contract and beginning to reach out to fellow workers throughout the country to coordinate their struggles.

In the southern state of Alabama, 1,100 miners have been on strike since April and overwhelmingly rejected a contract brought back by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA). Over the past week, the leading officials of the UMWA have resorted to violence and thuggery, specifically targeting the *World Socialist Web Site*, but directed at intimidating opposition among workers to the sellout of their strike.

In the northern US, 1,300 steelworkers have been on strike for two months against Allegheny Technologies. They too have been isolated by the unions, in this case the United Steelworkers, but have repeatedly resisted and rejected ultimatums from the company.

These are only a few of the initial expressions of working class anger and opposition, which have included health care workers, educators, logistics workers and other sections of the working class.

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.

The experiences of the past year will have a lasting impact. The policy of the ruling class in response to the pandemic has produced not only mass death and social misery. It is also the breeding ground for revolution.

It is on the basis of this perspective that the International Committee of the Fourth International has launched the initiative for the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. In our statement announcing the formation of the IWA-RFC, the IC explained that its aim is to create new mechanisms through which the working class can “coordinate its struggles in different factories, industries and countries in opposition to the ruling class and the corporatist unions.”

The IWA-RFC will be “a means through which workers throughout the world can share information and organize a united struggle to demand protection for workers, the shutdown of unsafe facilities and nonessential production, and other emergency measures that are necessary to stop the spread of the virus.”

The development of this alliance must be on a global scale, as it is only through a united movement of all workers throughout the world that the pandemic and all the problems produced by capitalism can be fought.

A counter-offensive of the working class requires, above all, the construction of a revolutionary leadership. And there is no movement outside of the world Trotskyist movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International, that is building this leadership.

The ICFI bases itself on an immense historical tradition. It is a tradition that extends back to the founding of scientific socialism by Marx and Engels, through the Russian Revolution of 1917, through the struggle led by Trotsky against Stalinism.

It is a tradition that has fought implacably for the perspective of international socialist revolution.

I urge all of you participating in this meeting to make the decision to help build the Socialist Equality Party in Sri Lanka and develop a section of the ICFI in India, as an absolutely critical component of the building of the ICFI as the world party of socialist revolution.



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