

Sri Lankan workers and students call for eradication of COVID-19

Our correspondents
19 October 2021

After one and a half years of the pandemic, the world's people are suffering a daily toll of nearly half a million COVID-19 cases and almost 6,000 deaths. The actual numbers of infections and deaths are known to be much higher than the official statistics, but even according to the under-estimated government data, nearly 5 million people have died from the virus.

By placing profit above lives, the capitalist ruling classes around the world have allowed the pandemic to reach catastrophic levels. The virus is now ravaging children in shocking numbers, fuelled by the reopening of schools, with unknown long-term consequences for an entire generation.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees are holding an online global webinar this Sunday, October 24, with the participation of distinguished scientists and epidemiologists, to explain the case for the eradication of COVID-19.

This event is a significant part of the work of the International Committee of the Fourth International in building a global movement, led by the working class, to protect lives and end the pandemic.

The Sri Lankan government of President Gotabhaya Rajapakse is prematurely fully reopening the country, including schools this week, while refusing to improve the country's health system to deal with a new wave of COVID-19 that could erupt as a result.

Facing these conditions, Sri Lankan workers, including professionals from different fields, and students who are going to attend Sunday's webinar, discussed its importance with the WSWs.

Dr. Missaka Hettairachchi, a consulting environmental engineer, said: "The governments worldwide are in an effort to push the COVID-19 pandemic into the background and bring economic activities to full throttle, at the expense of health and

human lives. Public funding cuts, using the pandemic as an excuse, have made the health services in countries worldwide worse off than ever before.

"Months of economic hardship, isolation, psychological stress and lack of nutrition have significantly increased the disease vulnerability of poorer populations globally. This makes the risks of future outbreaks of COVID-19 and other highly infectious diseases far greater.

"It is now obvious that vaccination alone will not eradicate the dangers of the pandemic. This risk can be eradicated only with a truly integrated approach, engaging a multitude of effective methods, with global coordination and the fullest participation of the masses.

"I welcome the WSWs initiative to organise a meeting on 'How to end the pandemic' at this critical juncture, on October 24 and encourage my colleagues in the scientific community to do so also."

Mahesh Ekanayake, an educator from the Teachers-Students-Parents Safety Committee, commented: "The ruling class has concealed the scientific reality that the pandemic can be ended. As genuine scientists explain, it could have been eradicated within two weeks if necessary measures had been taken [at the very beginning]. So why didn't it happen? Because the capitalist ruling class is not ready to sacrifice its profits for it.

"Instead, they are calling for the removal of further health measures. Opening schools is one such criminal act. Alarming numbers of students in countries like the UK and US have already died from COVID-19. We, as teachers, fear such a situation will be created in Sri Lanka after tomorrow's school reopening.

"True scientific awareness is essential for the working class to fight this reaction. I see the importance of this webinar on October 24 in that context."

Prasanth, a doctor and member of the Health Workers Action Committee, said: "Although many doctors and specialists around the world have declared that the

pandemic can be eradicated and explained the steps to be taken for it, the capitalist media has blocked them. The Sri Lankan government even summoned doctors who revealed such scientific ideas to the [police] Criminal Investigation Department and conducted investigations against them.

“It is in this context that only the WSWs has discussed the possibility of eradicating the pandemic with specialists and shared their scientific knowledge with the working class. This has attracted great concern among health workers, as well as other sections of the working class in Sri Lanka. The working class is now realising that the virus originated naturally but spread because of the deliberate measures taken by capitalist governments around the world to protect capitalist profits over human lives.

“The Sri Lankan government has followed the same policy and it has resulted in the loss of thousands of people, including more than 50 children and dozens of health workers. A significant number of children are suffering from multi-system inflammatory syndrome. At present, about 150 such children have been treated at the Lady Ridgeway Children’s Hospital in Colombo and 78 have been admitted to the Intensive Care Unit.

“I also urge all doctors and health experts to promote the genuine scientific knowledge and support the program of eradicating the pandemic by establishing safety committees around the world. I recognise that the event next Sunday will provide scientific as well as political guidance for such a fight.”

Jayaratne, a worker from Colombo port, commented: “The government policy to live with the pandemic is being implemented in every workplace in Sri Lanka. PCR testing at the port has been fully stopped, and infection is considered normal. Workers must remain on the job until their symptoms worsen. Sick leave is granted only if a person is diagnosed with an infection, at their own expense.

“The working class has a burning need for a policy to eradicate the pandemic. The spread of the pandemic in developed countries has clearly proven that no section of the capitalist class is going to take any measures to save lives.

“The trade unions at the port, as in every other sector, have not spoken about protecting workers from the pandemic. That is why workers need to intervene independently for their own protection. I am committed to the Socialist Equality Party’s efforts to establish a rank-and-file committee in the ports. I am making every effort

to involve my co-workers in this webinar and build a basis for that.”

Priyashan, a first-year student at the University of Colombo, said: “We have lost in-person learning for a whole academic year and we would love to go back to university and study. But we do not want to put the lives of ourselves and our family members in danger.

“The government has announced that it would start universities under a bio-bubble system. But as students, we are not sure that the government will allocate funds for such things. University students have not been properly vaccinated yet.

“On the other hand, the main thing is, the only sustainable solution is to eradicate the pandemic. How many bogus health measures have been taken by the government? But what happened was that the pandemic spread rapidly.

“I had an idea before that proper health policies were being implemented in countries like New Zealand and Australia. But now it is clear to me that there are no such exceptions in the bourgeois ruling class, as the governments in those countries have also abandoned the Zero COVID policy.”

Sanduni, a student at the University of Kelaniya, said: “The ruling class is responsible for all the lives lost in this pandemic. If governments continue to promote the ‘new normal,’ more people will die. All the scientific achievements that can be used to eradicate the pandemic are being used today for profit. That’s why this pandemic has been dragging on for two years. We must oppose this. No one can force us to live in the pandemic.

“I hope the webinar on October 24 will be widely attended. In the fight against the capitalist policy in the pandemic, the working class must decisively understand the scientific truth.”



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