

Sri Lankan workers and youth speak out against US-led war drive and Russia's invasion of Ukraine

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka are holding an online public meeting titled "Oppose the US - NATO war drive and the Russian intervention in Ukraine" on Sunday, March 20.

The meeting is part of the struggle being waged by the International Committee of the Fourth International and its Socialist Equality Parties, through the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS), to build a working-class anti-war movement based on socialist internationalism.

Workers and youth have responded strongly to SEP and IYSSE campaigns in working-class areas, such as the Katunayake Free Trade Zone and Colombo Harbour, and the universities, with many registering for the online meeting.

A worker from Colombo Harbour Naval Division said: "I believe that the Russian intervention against Ukraine is a result of provocations by America and NATO against Russia. Russia is a capitalist country.

"The capitalist system is in a serious crisis and it is in this situation that the American imperialists have prepared their war strategy against Russia. Their objective is to fragment Russia and loot its enormous resources."

The harbour worker pointed out that world oil and gasoline prices have increased as a result of the war. The continuous devaluation of the Sri Lankan rupee against the US dollar, he said, has pushed up the price of gasoline and other essential goods. Workers cannot make ends meet.

"If the war develops further America will intervene in Asia," he continued. "As the SEP and WSWS point out, an anti-war movement of the international working class has to be built to prevent war."

A young worker from Katunayake FTZ said: "I came to know about the war situation in Ukraine through the media but could not get a clear-cut idea of the situation. The US and Europe are powerful countries in the world and they're involved in the Ukraine war, which will have an impact on us," she said.

Referring to rising prices and shortages of essential items, she added, "Already there is no kerosene. Prices of goods are high."

Ruchira Madhava, logic teacher at a leading school in Colombo, said he would attend the SEP/IYSSE meeting. "As soon as I heard about the Russian invasion of Ukraine, I felt that it would have criminal consequences for humanity," he said.

"As someone who lived in a country with horrific experiences of war, I had a strong feeling that this devastation must be stopped. It's true that Russia started this invasion but simply turning Russia into a monster does not reveal the true roots of this war."

"The US is the culprit with a long record of invading other countries and launching conspiracies there to achieve its own interests. This is what the bourgeois media hide from the reports on the Ukraine crisis," he added.

"We now see many of the capitalist media articles blaming Russia in the name of defending Ukraine. This sort of analysis is helping American imperialism and I'm against it. In fact, the working class does not want a war and I'm confident that the majority of workers support world peace," Madhava said.

The SEP and IYSSE held lively discussions with students at Sri Jayawardenepura University.

Pahan, a science faculty student, asked: "The masses in Sri Lanka face a massive social and economic crisis. What is its relationship with your struggle against war?"

Campaigners explained that government attacks on the living conditions and democratic rights of workers and the oppressed masses and the growing danger of world war were driven by the same underlying global crisis of the capitalist system, which had been intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic.

After listening carefully, he said: "It's clear that an anti-war movement of the international working class can be built as the workers in the advanced capitalist countries face

the same situation. America and the capitalist media say Russia is doing all this but the background to this situation is NATO's work. I feel that their interest is to maximise profit by seizing oil, gas and other resources in Russia."

Pahan added: "Last week I saw that Germany had increased its war spending. After speaking with you, I'm clear that this spending has been obtained by imposing more austerity measures on the masses. Austerity measures will come to Sri Lanka as a result of the war.

"You cannot understand what is really developing, from the media," he continued. "War needs to be stopped as you say. All the imperialist countries are competing to increase their interests and this paves the way for war. I'm ready to join with you and build up an anti-war movement and speak more about this."

Dasun, a humanities student, supported the forthcoming meeting and wanted to know more about the war drive and the pandemic. After the discussion, he was determined to show his solidarity with the Ukraine and Russian working class and his support for a socialist anti-war movement by posing for a photograph with the IYSSE poster.

Piumi Hansika, a political science student at the University of Peradeniya, said: "I oppose the US and NATO dragging the entire world into this catastrophe, ignoring the danger of a nuclear war. Every country has been impacted by the US drive for its interests.

"I really appreciate the analysis of the WSWS on the war situation in Ukraine because it helps me understand what's at stake and how to face it. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has raised the danger of a nuclear third world war but only Russia is being accused of the destruction of the lives and property of thousands of people.

"The main reason for this situation is the long-term strategic plans of US imperialism to secure its world hegemony and its reckless expansion of NATO forces," he said.

D. Tharmikan, an advanced level student at Vavuniya Tamil Maha Vidyalayam in Sri Lanka's war-ravaged north, said: "War is a horrible thing that ordinary people do not like because all people face devastation." He referred to Colombo's almost three-decade communalist war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in the Northern and Eastern provinces, noting that hundreds of thousands were killed in that conflict.

"Of course, we cannot compare the war in this country with the situation developing around the invasion of Ukraine by Russia," he said. "America and the other NATO powers are with Ukraine. If the war develops and they use nuclear weapons, there will be no creature left in the world. War should be stopped."

A post graduate student of Moratuwa University said

that the NATO provocation against Russia was "an operation well-planned." He added: "Not only Russia but the Ukrainian rulers, as well as America which drove the country to war, are responsible for the enormous war destruction now facing the people in Ukraine."

Dhananjani, the deputy principal of a leading school in Colombo, said: "While the devastation faced by mankind from the COVID-19 pandemic has not yet faded away, we are now facing the danger of a terrible war. Both of those catastrophes have emerged from the criminality of the capitalist ruling class.

"The US has consistently pursued plans to dominate the world under pretexts like protecting human rights and defeating terrorism. How many military alliances have been formed under the leadership of the US in Europe, the Middle East and the Indian Ocean region?"

The US-led anti-China alliance, involving Japan, India and Australia under the guise of maritime security in the Indian Ocean, was an "Asian NATO," she said.

"The US has been operating to dominate Russia in the same manner for many years. We are now experiencing its dire consequences in Ukraine. The international working class must put an end to this destructive drive of the imperialist powers. The relevance of the WSWS call for an international anti-war movement is very much confirmed now."

Vimal Ranatunga, a writer, said the world media reportage on the war in Ukraine "upends the view of workers and the oppressed masses in all countries." The same was true in Sri Lanka.

"They say hurrah to America and its catastrophic war plans but America started war operations after the Soviet Union was dissolved in 1991 and in order to build its domination," Ranatunga said.

The US had carried forward its wars, he continued, by demonising people, such as Iraq's Saddam Hussein. Washington had falsely claimed he had weapons of mass destruction, and that it was defending human rights.

"Now they have demonised Putin. This is when more than 10 million people have died of COVID-19 around the world. I fully agree that the only solution to burning issues like war and the pandemic is world socialism."



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