

SEP member outlines socialist program to 2,000 striking workers in Sri Lanka

Our reporters
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Socialist Equality Party (SEP) Political Committee member Kapila Fernando addressed a meeting of over 2,000 postal, bank, power, health and divisional administration employees and teachers in Chilaw in northwestern Sri Lanka on Thursday. The event, which followed a demonstration and march in Chilaw, was part of Thursday's one-day general strike. Fernando is a teacher and the convener of the Teachers-Students-Parents Safety Committee.

SEP members and supporters joined the march, chanting slogans such as, "Abolish the executive presidency," "Bring down the government," "Repudiate foreign loans," "Build workers action committees!" and "Fight for workers' and peasants' government." Other demonstrators also began chanting these slogans.

Addressing the crowd, Fernando supported the call for ouster of President Gotabhaya Rajapakse and his government and added: "The Rajapakse government should be replaced, not with another capitalist government, but a workers' and peasants' government dedicated to implementing socialist policies.

"Whether an interim regime, or any other capitalist government, comes to power in a future election, it will have no alternative but impose to huge job cuts, health and education expenditure cuts, increased tax burdens and the privatisation of state-owned enterprises as dictated by the IMF.

"We should therefore not give the opportunity for any future interim government to bide time. The Teacher-Student-Parent Safety Committee's says action committees should be built at every workplace in order to take matters into our own hands. Through these committees the working class should mobilise its political and industrial strength to fight to bring a workers' and peasants' government to power."

Through these action committees, Fernando continued, "workers can fight for nationalisation of the large corporations, the large estates, and the banks, placing them under the democratic control of the working class. The repayment of foreign loans should be refused.

"These policies can only be implemented with the support of the international working class, who, like us, also face serious attacks. All these attacks are the result of a systemic breakdown in the global capitalist system.

"As part of the international working class, we need to defeat the attacks of capitalist governments all over the world and fight to oppose the US-NATO war drive against Russia in Ukraine," he said.

While participants listened attentively to Fernando's address, the area union leadership were hostile to his speech.

Saman Thelesinha, who leads the Puttalam district trade union coordinating committee and is aligned with the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), attempted to shut down the meeting before Fernando spoke. Thelesinha failed to end the event, however, after teachers involved in the march helped Fernando address the crowd.

After the meeting, one teacher told the WSWs: "Everywhere people are speaking politics. They're contemptuous of the ruling and opposition parties and want an alternative. The trade unions shout 'Rajapakse go home' but do not present any program."

Commenting on the desperate conditions facing workers, he explained that he had bought a cooking-gas cylinder the previous day for 4,890 rupees (\$US15), more than double the previous week's price. The unions, he said, had betrayed last year's 100-day strike by teachers by accepting the meagre salary increase

offered by the government.



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