

Sri Lankan SEP and IYSSE campaign for global anti-war webinar

Our correspondents**1 December 2022**

Members of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) have been campaigning at universities across Sri Lanka to build the international webinar titled “For a mass movement of youth and students to stop the war in Ukraine!” which is being hosted by the IYSSE on December 10. The event will present a socialist program to unite the working class against what is becoming a third world war.

The SEP and IYSSE have spoken with hundreds of students at universities in Colombo, Sri Jayewardenapura, Moratuwa, Peradeniya, Ruhuna and Jaffna, about the role that students and young people must play in this anti-war movement.

Initially, many students expressed a lack of knowledge about the war in Ukraine, its implications, and the role played by different political parties, including the pseudo-left and trade unions, which have helped to keep the masses in the dark about the immense dangers they confront.

After patiently listening and seeking clarification, many agreed to register for the online webinar. The IYSSE sold more than 100 copies of its statement, “A call to youth throughout the world: Build a mass movement to stop the Ukraine war!” which has been translated into Sinhala and Tamil.

Students also bought other party literature and agreed to have further discussions on the perspective of the SEP and the International Committee of the Fourth International, which publishes the *World Socialist Web Site*.

A management student from the University of Sri Jayewardenapura commented that young people faced a very uncertain future due to the war. “No matter how we plan our future, it can all be destroyed by one decision of the world powers to use nuclear weapons,” he said. “There are hardly any reports in the Sri Lankan media about the war in Ukraine, so young people do not have very up-to-date information about it. But the youth should be made aware of this global crisis.”

SEP/IYSSE campaigners explained the root causes of the war and that only the independent revolutionary action of the

working class can stop it. The student replied: “I agree with the argument that the working class should be made independent from all capitalist organisations.”

This included the pseudo-left Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), which collaborates with the bourgeois opposition parties. The student said: “At first, I thought that we should gather as many groups as possible to exert pressure to oust [president Ranil] Wickremesinghe from power. But during this discussion [with you] it became clear to me that instead of such a program to bring another capitalist government to power, the working class needs an independent political program.”

Ranjith, a student of Kelaniya University said that the US had provoked Russia’s war in Ukraine. In order to “get out of the serious economic crisis confronting America, they use military power to occupy countries and rob their resources. To achieve this purpose, the destruction in the Middle East has been carried out for the past 30 years.”

Pointing out how anti-Tamil and anti-Muslim communalism has been used by the ruling class in Sri Lanka to divert opposition to the worsening social crisis, Ranjith said that war serves the same purpose for the US and other capitalist countries.

“This is not just a diplomatic issue,” he said. “Our entire future is at stake in a war waged for the profit interests of capitalists. I express my support to build this anti-war movement, and I will join the meeting on December 10.”

At the University of Peradeniya, Anuja, a first-year agriculture student, said nuclear war is the main danger confronting mankind. “It is the youth who become the victims of war,” he said. “My brother is studying in Russia and he said the youth there are threatened by vast militarisation. The world experienced such things in the First and Second World Wars, we don’t want that situation again.”

He added: “An end to war is what the majority of the world wants. Working people can do it, but it should be organised on an international scale. I look forward to attending the online meeting. It is inspiring to see people

from all over the world addressing one meeting with the courage to end war."

Sachinta, a physical sciences student, said the US thinks everything is possible with their military power, "but making such calculations amid tensions among nuclear-armed powers is catastrophic."

He noted that the two atomic bombs dropped on Japan at the end of World War II caused massive destruction. "As a science student I have learned how powerful nuclear reactions are. The world has not yet seen the weapons that US-led powers have secretly developed, and we cannot imagine the damage they can cause.

"When people hear about the US military spending, they will definitely be surprised. This is money that could be used to end hunger and suffering throughout the world. But as you say, that money is in the hands of the war-mongering rulers. We should develop serious opposition to war, I think this webinar will play a huge role in that."

Roy, a politics student, pointed to the hypocrisy of the US government's propaganda: "The US, which talks the most about human rights, has become the country that violates the most human rights."

He understood that it was no use appealing to the imperialist powers or their organisations like the United Nations to stop the war. "No matter what positions they take in human rights organisations, they will not take steps to stop the war, because they have chosen a destructive path to get out of the crisis of their capitalist economy." He expressed appreciation for the role played by the WSWS in conveying this anti-war message to a mass audience.

Piyumi Hansika, an art student, told campaigners: "We can't expect the imperialist powers to end the war. They are always trying to colonise the world through wars. Decades ago, the US was the world's most economically powerful country. They have nuclear weapons and massive military forces, which they are using to counter their economic decline." The US was waging war against Russia and threatening war with China to get access to their minerals and other natural resources, she said.

Pointing to the impact of the Ukraine war on Sri Lanka and the rest of the world, Piyumi said: "Russia is one of the major countries exporting natural gases, fuel and energy products to multiple countries. The war has caused price hikes for those products, and it has deepened the crisis of the Sri Lankan ruling class."

She continued: "Most people in Sri Lanka don't know about this international situation. The main reason is the silence on world war from the political parties. They are all working to divert the masses from learning the truth about capitalism. They trap workers and students with nationalism.

"Students can't fight against these problems alone, we

need to turn to the masses and build them as a power. Only they can stop the drive towards world war and resolve all problems we are facing."

Thilina, an agriculture student, highlighted the danger posed by the vast number of advanced nuclear weapons held by the imperialist powers, above all the US. "Nuclear war could kill the majority of the human population," he said.

He also addressed the social crisis, saying: "As young people we don't have a future. When we finish at university, we can find a job, but we won't get enough salary. In all countries, people face the danger of war and inequality. So we need to fight against both."

Law student Rahul told IYSSE members: "I think this war is the result of countries' competition to increase their power." The campaigners explained that Russia's invasion of Ukraine was not an isolated incident, but followed numerous provocations by the US and NATO powers. Since 1991 the imperialist powers have been waging war for profit and resources in the Middle East and elsewhere; now this has led to the danger of nuclear world war.

Rahul noted that governments throughout the world were cutting social programs to pay for war. "In Sri Lanka we see that in the budget Wickremesinghe has increased military expenses and decreased allocations to education. We are already experiencing the results of these austerity measures." He explained that student hostels no longer had WiFi or access to mobile internet data.

Commenting on the silence of the FSP and the FSP-led Inter-University Student Federation (IUSF) on the war, Rahul said: "If they talk about war they need to discuss the necessity of overthrowing capitalism. So they are silent on this issue."

He added: "Students need to fight against the capitalist system and nuclear war, but they need political leadership." IYSSE members explained that this was the purpose of their campaign and the December 10 webinar. *Register for the webinar here.*



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