

IYSSE holds anti-war demonstrations in front of two major universities in Sri Lanka

Our reporters
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As the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine has entered its second year, the necessity to build an international anti-war movement of workers and young people has become ever more critical. More than at any time in the past 80 years, the world is menaced with the danger of a catastrophic global war.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) has taken the initiative to build such a movement. It is holding meetings and demonstrations around the world to explain the historical roots of the Ukraine war and the socialist perspective required to halt it.

As a part of that campaign, the IYSSE held powerful anti-war demonstrations in front of two prominent universities in Sri Lanka last Tuesday. These were Peradeniya University in Kandy, located in the central province, and Jaffna University in the war-ravaged Northern Province.

IYSSE members campaigned extensively to build the rallies. During the campaign, copies of the WSWs editorial board statement “The NATO-Russia War in Ukraine enters its second year” and the pamphlet “For a Mass Movement of Youth and Students to Stop the War in Ukraine!” were widely distributed among students and workers.

At the rallies, demonstrators raised slogans including: “Stop the nuclear Third World War,” “Redirect the billions of dollars allocated for war to fund education, healthcare, eradicate COVID-19 and to end the global food crisis” and “For a Union of Socialist Republics of Russia and Ukraine under the leadership of the united Russian-Ukrainian working class.”

Both demonstrations were well received by students and the public.

About 15 participated in the IYSSE rally in front of Peradeniya University. In addition to passersby, over 50 workers and youth watched the event. After the

demonstration, IYSSE national convenor Kapila Fernando addressed the gathering in Sinhala. His speech was translated into Tamil by SEP Political Committee member M. Thevarajah.

Refuting the claims of the imperialists and their apologists that the Ukraine conflict is an unprovoked war launched by Russian President Vladimir Putin, Fernando stated: “The US-NATO war in Ukraine is inseparable from the wars waged by American imperialism in the Middle East and Central Asia following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The US has intervened and manipulated Ukrainian politics, most notably in its 2014 intervention to oust a democratically-elected government in Kiev that was leaning towards Russia, and to install a puppet US-NATO regime.”

Fernando explained that the basic contradictions of the capitalist system have created the conditions, both for imperialist war and for major struggles by the working class. Those contradictions are between the world economy and the outmoded capitalist nation-state system, and between the private ownership of society’s resources and a socialised production process involving billions of workers.

He pointed out that US imperialism is preparing a confrontation with China, setting up a provocation using Taiwan as it did with Ukraine. “The Ukraine war is a stepping stone towards a military confrontation with China,” he warned.

Fernando explained how top US officials, including Victoria Nuland, an architect of the 2014 fascist coup in Ukraine visited Sri Lanka in recent months to exert pressure on the Wickremesinghe government. The aim is to align Sri Lanka ever more closely with the US plans for war against China.

Pointing to recent attacks on the democratic right of the IYSSE to campaign at university campuses, Fernando added: “In the universities, the Inter University Students

Federation (IUSF) politically guided by the pseudo-left Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), is seeking to block discussion of these developments and to keep the students and youth in the dark.”

The speaker noted the growing struggles of Sri Lankan workers against the government’s austerity measures, saying: “These class struggles are an organic part of the developing struggles of the working class internationally. These class struggles, in Europe and in the US too, have emerged against social attacks that are being escalated by the war effort. And this development of class struggles internationally provide the very social basis for an anti-war movement.”

He continued: “This social force must be directed against capitalism, the source of war and of the social attacks.” Fernando stressed the necessity of a fight for the political independence of the working class. This required drawing the lessons from last year’s mass movement in Sri Lanka, which ousted the Rajapakse government, but failed to resolve the issues facing working people. Independent action committees would play a key role in breaking the shackles of the unions, Fernando said, but above all, a new socialist perspective was required.

About 30, including five students studying for Advanced Level (university entrance) examinations, joined the rally in front of Jaffna University. Workers and students watched the event. The gathering was addressed by two members of the IYSSE, Dinesh Heymaal in Sinhalese and Diluxan Mahalingam in Tamil. The event drew coverage from Jaffna-based media outlets. The *Kalaikathir* newspaper and the *Samuham* news website both reported the rally.

Heymaal explained the need for a political fight against the Tamil nationalist politics of the student union at Jaffna University and the pseudo-left FSP, which controls the IUSF. “These Tamil nationalists are appealing to the imperialist powers to defend the democratic rights here,” he noted.

“But what have these war criminals done during the last 30 years of neo-colonial wars? From them the Sri Lankan ruling class draws inspiration. Tamil nationalists are lined up behind the anti-China campaign, appealing to India, which has been transformed into a frontline state of the US war drive against China.”

Mahalingam focused his remarks on the growing threat of nuclear war. “In this war, the imperialist powers are openly discussing the use of nuclear weapons. The history of previous imperialist wars shows that they are capable of carrying out that too. A complicit corporate media

keeps an almost total silence about this grave danger that we face,” he said.

IYSSE members talked to students during campaigns and the rallies. Students condemned successive governments in Sri Lanka for serious attacks on their right to education. The students listened attentively to explanations by IYSSE members of how these attacks were connected to the deepening crisis of the world capitalist system.

A group of students from the Faculty of Arts at Peradeniya University declared that it was an urgent need to stop the growing threat of world war.

Among them, Chirakshi, a female student, said: “I am very happy to know that there is such an organization in the world fighting to stop a world war. Young people should be serious about the destruction caused by war. Your explanation that the drive to war is generated by the crisis of the capitalist system and that the same crisis has created the conditions for the world socialist revolution is very important.”

Another student from the political science department said: “An independent political program is vital for the working class to unite their power. That was the problem in last year’s mass struggles in Sri Lanka. After discussing with the IYSSE and SEP, I understand that action committees should be built independent from the trade unions and other fake left parties.”

Ithayakumari, a psychology student of Jaffna University, expressed her solidarity with the rally: “I think this anti-war demonstration is important. We cannot say that what is happening in Ukraine is not relevant to us although it is located far away geographically. Indeed the whole world is closely interconnected economically. We are dependent on other countries for exports and imports. The present economic crisis in Sri Lanka is part of this international development.”



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