

Sri Lankan port workers support striking Canadian dockworkers

Colombo Port Workers Action Committee
13 July 2023

We are publishing below a statement issued by the Colombo Port Workers Action Committee yesterday (July 13) in support of Canadian dockworkers.

From July 1 Canadian dockworkers at 30 British Columbia ports, including major ports such as Vancouver and Prince Rupert, have been engaged in a courageous strike with an unwavering determination. The function of all those ports has been paralyzed as a result showing the workers' power in struggle.

The struggle of our Canadian class brothers immensely encourages us, as Sri Lankan port workers. The Colombo Port Workers Action Committee (CPWAC) supports the Canadian dockworkers' strike and appeals to other sections of workers in Sri Lanka to come forward and express their solidarity with it.

The CPWAC condemns the combined conspiracy of the administrations of Justin Trudeau in Canada and Joe Biden in the US, together with the BC Maritime Employers Association break the strike action. The leadership of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union is centrally involved in this reactionary effort.

In Sri Lanka, the entire working class, including port employees, are facing similar attacks under the savage austerity measures being implemented by the President Ranil Wickremesinghe government. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has dictated these measures, providing a bailout loan of \$US3 billion.

The government has decided to restructure 430 state enterprises including the Sri Lanka Port Authority. This will severely affect the jobs, wages and working conditions of hundreds of thousands of workers. Colombo port workers' opposition is developing against these attacks.

In the past four decades, the workforce at the Colombo Port has been reduced from 24,000 to 9,000.

Recently, as the Pay-As-You-Earn tax has been increased, and after various deductions, we receive a monthly income that is insufficient to cope with the rising cost of living. Under another austerity measure recently imposed by the government, we will also lose a considerable portion of our pension fund.

There are several trade unions in our harbour, many controlled by bourgeois parties such as the ruling Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna, the Samagi Jana Balawegaya and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna. These unions have formed an alliance in the name of fighting to defend our rights. Instead, they only call limited protest actions, including strikes, when employees' opposition develops but then finally betray them. This is our repeated experience. Trade unions and their bureaucracies do not represent our interests. Their role is now helping the government to implement the IMF policies, including privatisation.

We understood it was necessary to form a workers action committee (rank and file committee) to fight for the genuine interests of workers. That is why we established the CPWAC and are fighting to win support among other brothers and sisters in the port.

We also understand the need for a unified international struggle of port and dockworkers to defend our rights. Solidarity among us must be built, not only in words but in action. The CPWAC once again appeals to other port and dockworkers in Sri Lanka and internationally to support and defend the Canadian dockworkers' struggle:

- * Boycott Canadian Container Shipping
- * Boycott the loading and unloading of Canadian ships
- * Build an alliance of action committees—rank-and-file committees—of port and dock workers independent of the union bureaucracy throughout the world

Send letters in any language of your choice expressing your full support for the strike by Canadian dockworkers to the address below.

Victory for the striking Canadian dockworkers in British Columbia!

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To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact