

Sri Lankan port workers and Jaffna university students denounce Israel's Gaza genocide

Our correspondents
15 November 2023

Members of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) have found considerable opposition to Israel's genocidal onslaught against Gaza during campaigns among Sri Lankan workers and youth.

The SEP and IYSSE have over the past week spoken about the genocide with port workers and their families at harbour accommodation facilities in Bloumendhal, a Colombo suburb, as well as students at Jaffna University in the island's north.

Campaigners distributed hundreds of copies of Sinhala and Tamil versions of a WSWS Editorial Board statement calling for unified action by the international working class against Israel's brutal military assault.

SEP and IYSSE members were building support for three public meetings titled "Stop Israel's genocidal war against Palestinians in Gaza!" The first meeting, which was held yesterday in Jaffna, will be followed by meetings at the Hall De Galle Auditorium in Galle at 3 p.m. on November 19 and Colombo's Public Library Auditorium at 4 p.m. on November 21.

One middle-aged dock worker in Colombo told the SEP: "The Israeli military is killing children, old people, patients, it is a genocide. They want to eliminate the people of Gaza and we must condemn it. They're bombing hospitals, schools and religious premises."

He referred to various international organisations claiming to defend human rights and said, "The United Nations (UN) is just looking on. It's on the side of powerful nations with countries like the US, France and Germany backing Israel." The worker condemned India for abstaining at the recent UN General Assembly vote on a ceasefire in Gaza.

"India is getting spoils from Israel and the US," he said, and warned that Washington's mobilisation of nuclear submarines and warships in the Middle East was a dangerous escalation of the conflict. "Iran has declared that they too have weapons, which means that this conflict could develop towards a third world war."

A harbour gantry crane system worker condemned Israel and the US for "the indiscriminate killing and genocide" and added, "This region, which was owned by them [the Palestinians], was acquired by force by Israel. The Israelis were allowed to stay but later Palestinians were chased away and so it was natural that the Palestinian people would get angry... There's a lot of oil in this area and so the US wants a country like Israel to suppress other Islamic countries in the region."

He noted that port workers in Barcelona, Spain had stopped loading and unloading weapons to Israel and said he supported the SEP's call for the international working class to stop the production and delivery of military materiel to Israel.

A young Muslim woman with two children angrily said: "The war must stop. If the children die then the next generation is lost, irrespective of whoever wins. Religion and ethnicity have nothing to do with this war. I can't watch the news when they show such brutalities being carried out against children. Some children are dying while being treated. These are horrific scenes."

Following a brief discussion about the campaign being waged by the SEP and its international sister sections for a global movement of workers and youth against war, she replied: "Yes, this sort of political party must come forward. A genuine workers' party must come, not a party that changes its policies when it comes to power."

A worker from the port's computer division said: "I saw thousands of people on TV marching in London against the genocide in Gaza. But my question is 'will this change these events?' The world is dominated by the imperialist powers whose only interest is profit."

He went on to condemn Asian governments for their complicity with the major powers. The Sri Lankan ruling class and other governments, he said, are terrified by the popular uprising in Palestine and its international impact. The worker noted that the port trade unions are not talking about the Gaza war.

"We must oppose this genocide, however, and the protests must go on... In the past, we were told that the Palestinian people or Hamas were terrorists but now through social media we can see who is really committing genocide."

S. Thiruchelvam, a Jaffna University political science student and regular WSWS reader, said: "I oppose this war. We can see the destruction and its horrific consequences with our very own eyes. The US is behind the war in Gaza and against Russia in Ukraine. The US is trying to restore its global hegemony."

"The Tamil nationalist parties, who have close ties with the US and India, have chosen not to speak on the Gaza war because they don't want to lose their relationship with these governments or expose the bankruptcy of their perspective of appealing to these war criminals. It is a well-known fact that Sri Lankan President Wickremesinghe is a US puppet, so there is no reason to be amazed about his government lining up behind Israel."

Thiruchelvam condemned the various governments that brand Muslims as terrorists and said this was just like the Sri Lankan government and its previous branding of Tamils as terrorists.

T. Riswan, a law student at Jaffna University, said: "It's the usual practice of governments all over the world to term anyone who fights for their rights a 'terrorist.' When the Palestinians resisted Israel's long suppression, almost all countries rallied behind Israel's onslaught, denouncing the upsurge as terrorism. Even little kids are so-called terrorists, according to the leaders of these governments."

Riswan denounced Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant's reference to Palestinians as "human animals" and condemned threats made by Israel's heritage minister to use nuclear weapons against Gaza.

"We have seen the consequences of nuclear weapons in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan (during WWII). The nuclear fallout is not going to be confined to the tiny Gaza Strip," he said.

"As you have pointed out, the call made by the Palestinian trade unions and support from workers in other countries to stop sending military equipment to Israel has proven to be the most effective and practical way of fighting the genocide in Gaza."

R. Kirujaliny, a Jaffna University student from Batticaloa, denounced Israel's illegal attacks on Gaza and referred to the Sri Lankan government's racialist war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

"If they [the Tamil nationalist parties and the university student union] cannot oppose this war without any reservation and firmly, they are men without conscience and are hypocrites. Such people cannot fight for the democratic rights of Tamils. We must definitely come out against this war, because we know the pain of war," he said.

Supun, a Jaffna University science graduate, said: "This war cannot be explained in ethno-religious terms. It is obviously an imperialist war. The US was very swift to respond by sending its airstrike carriers to the Mediterranean. Considering the US record in Afghanistan and Iraq it is clear that they are using the situation in Gaza as an occasion to go to war with Iran. For that, innocent Palestinians are having to pay with their lives. I oppose this war."



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact