

Leading SEP member addresses Sri Lankan Michelin factory workers struggling to defend their jobs

Our reporters
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Yesterday morning, Aruna Nishantha Malalagama, a leading member of the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka), was invited by Michelin factory workers at Midigama to address them. They are in a struggle to defend jobs, after the Michelin transnational corporation sold its factory to the Indian CEAT company.

On Monday, workers had learned of a secret deal between the Inter-Company Employees Union (ICEU) and Michelin management. Under the agreement, struck without workers' knowledge, the union has reportedly agreed to a flat-rate termination payment for all employees of just \$US650 (around 200,000 rupees).

Although yesterday was a day off, around 2,000 workers and supporters from the area gathered at the factory to protest. They all warmly received Malalagama's speech, which he delivered with a megaphone. We publish his remarks below.

I am Aruna Nishantha Malalagama, from the Socialist Equality Party. My party and I stand together in this strong struggle that you are leading to defend jobs and other rights.

I accept the demands that you comrades have made as very reasonable demands.

Because of a deal between Michelin and CEAT, you are in this struggle. You comrades have been betrayed by the trade union through fraudulent means. I strongly condemn this action taken by the union.

The closure of this factory of yours is a result of the global economic crisis. Last week, we saw that the Next garment factory in the Katunayake Free Trade Zone was shut down overnight.

The Michelin factory's operation here is intertwined with the lives of the rural people in the area. Therefore, you comrades have a serious responsibility to protect your jobs as well as a means of living for people in the area.

We have seen the same experience of betrayals by trade union leaders everywhere. Every time a factory closes or any other problem comes up, the trade union leaders join forces with the employers to betray the struggles of the workers.

That is the experience we have seen inside the Koggala Free Trade Zone and other closed factories.

You comrades should take the fight into your own hands. To that end, I suggest that you form your own workers' action committee, rather than relying on trade unions.

This Michelin factory is a transnational corporation. It employs hundreds of thousands of workers in many factories in many countries around the world. You comrades should unite with those workers. For that, we must appeal to those class brothers and sisters to support our struggle and we should support them.

We must also call for the support of workers, both in the public and private sectors, who are facing such difficult conditions within Sri Lanka.

The Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* are working together with you comrades to build this international unity.

My warmest greetings to your struggle. Thank you.

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