

Reinstate victimised Michelin workers in Sri Lanka! Mobilise working-class support to defend Michelin employees' struggle!

Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
2 June 2025

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP-Sri Lanka) calls on workers in Sri Lanka and internationally to demand the immediate and unconditional reinstatement of three sacked Michelin tyre factory workers in Midigama, in southern Sri Lanka.

These workers have been dismissed as part of management's attempts to suppress a campaign by Michelin Midigama employees who have been fighting since May 23 to defend their jobs and wages against the restructuring attacks of the international French-based corporation.

The factory, which employs over 1,500 workers, has been sold to the Indian-based CEAT company with the transaction to be completed this month.

The three victimised workers are Sampath Karunasena, Chirangivi Senevirathne and Priyanga Dimuthu Kumara. They were suspended three days ago by the company who told them that they would be charged followed by an inquiry. The company summarily sacked them, however, without any investigation.

This is a blatant violation of existing labour laws in Sri Lanka and an attack on their fundamental democratic rights. The three workers have also been summoned by Weligama police, following management claims that they entered the factory without permission.

The company has also labeled the legitimate industrial action of Michelin Midigama workers, who have been on strike since Friday afternoon to defend the victimised workers and all their jobs, as "illegal."

In a June 1 message, management accused workers of "damaging" the company's "institutional reputation by giving false information to the media," and warned against any forcible entering of the institution. It also blamed workers for "severe financial losses" due to their "lack of cooperation... to continue production."

Attempting to sabotage workers' industrial action, management shut down its operations at the Midigama factory from the June 1 night shift until the June 3 nightshift.

Michelin employees began campaigning over their jobs, wages and working conditions on May 23, after learning that the factory had been sold to the Indian-owned CEAT corporation.

When workers sent representatives to the Labour Commissioner's office in Colombo on May 26, they were told that the Inter-Company Employees Union (ICEU) had signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Michelin and CEAT. The Labour Commissioner said each worker would be paid 200,000 rupees (\$US650) compensation when the transaction was finalised.

Michelin and the ICEU, which is affiliated with the ruling Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), have told workers nothing about the corporate transaction or the contents of their MOU. The secret deal was organised behind the backs of ICEU members and in blatant violation of their legitimate rights. The ICEU is led by Wasantha Samarasinghe, who also is the trade minister of the JVP/National People's Power government.

Michelin workers have rejected the ICEU's agreement and advanced the following demands: (1) three million rupees compensation for every terminated Michelin worker; (2) no break in the continuity of their service and other conditions when the Michelin-CEAT transaction occurs; (3) if these conditions cannot be fulfilled, then Michelin workers should be allowed voluntary retirement, in line with the Michelin Corporation's compensation scheme.

When these legitimate demands were vetoed by the ICEU leadership, declaring that they had already made an agreement with Michelin and CEAT, workers decided to

continue their industrial action.

The JVP/NPP government is actively trying to break the ongoing strike. Apart from using the JVP-affiliated ICEU as its instrument, Mahinda Jayasinghe, Sri Lanka's deputy labour minister, has tried to appease workers. He told the media on May 29 that nothing would happen to workers when the Michelin-CEAT transaction is complete. The government's policy, he cynically declared, is to "defend investors as well as employees."

The JVP/NPP government is closely and nervously monitoring the situation. It has no concern for the jobs and legitimate rights of Michelin workers but is desperately trying to maintain and attract international investors, by providing them with lavish concessions.

Above all, the JVP/NPP regime is acutely worried about the independent militant stand taken by Michelin employees, and their defiance of the ICEU and other trade union bureaucracies. It is concerned that the Michelin workers' action will encourage other workers seeking a way to fight the government's International Monetary Fund-dictated austerity measures and further attacks on the working class.

The Michelin Corporation's sale of its Midigama factory is part of its worldwide restructuring to boost profits amid a deepening global crisis. The giant transnational company has cited "high operating expenses" and "intensifying competition from low-cost Asian manufacturers" as the driving forces behind its restructuring.

In early May, it phased out truck-tyre production at plants in Poland and China, declaring this necessary to better align manufacturing capacity with "targeted markets."

Michelin Group has also announced a wave of factory closures, citing "market realignments," "overcapacity," and "soaring production costs." Last November, it revealed plans to shut two of its factories in western France—Cholet and Vannes—impacting on approximately 1,250 workers.

Michelin workers in Sri Lanka now find themselves confronted with the same issues, particularly the questions of job security, now facing millions of their class brothers and sisters internationally.

Pro-government and pro-company unions like the ICEU, along with the unions dominating the garment sector, are deliberately hiding the harsh reality facing workers in these industries. This is to undermine workers' ability to defend their jobs, wages and the hard-won gains of past struggles.

The SEP warns that the jobs and working conditions of millions of public and private sector workers in Sri Lanka are no more secure than those of the Michelin employees. The government has already made clear that it plans to eliminate over half a million public sector jobs through the restructuring of more than 400 state institutions.

The Midigama workers have formed their action committee to take the forward the struggle to defend their rights. Michelin workers need to turn to workers in public and private sectors across Sri Lanka to rally their support and to urge them to form similar action committees for a unified struggle in defence of the jobs and basic rights.

The SEP calls for Michelin and other workers to align themselves with the fight to build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees to unifying their struggles internationally against government and big-business attacks.

Sri Lankan Michelin workers have issued a statement appealing for support from their international brothers and sisters. The defence of victimised Midigama workers is part of the broader struggle to defend the jobs, wages, working conditions and democratic rights of the working class internationally as a whole.

The SEP urge workers, students and young people to send letters to the Michelin Company and issuing statements with the following demands:

- Reinstate sacked three Michelin workers immediately! Withdraw police complaints against all employees!
- Give written assurances to all workers at Midigama that their jobs, wages, working conditions are protected without breaking their service!

Please send letters and statement to the following address with copies to the Socialist Equality Party.

Michelin Lanka Private Limited,
No. 218, Minuwangoda Road, Regent Courts, Ekala, Ja-Ela, Sri Lanka.

SEP email address: wswscmb@sltnet.lk



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact