

Growing support for striking Michelin workers in Sri Lanka

Our correspondent
10 June 2025

The struggle waged by Michelin tyre factory workers in Midigama, southern Sri Lanka, for job security and against the company witch hunt is winning strong support from workers across the island. Independent workers' action committees have passed resolutions and individual workers have sent letters to Michelin management, voicing their concern over potential job losses.

Midigama workers recently discovered that the Inter Company Employees Union (ICEU), which is aligned with the ruling Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), entered into a secret agreement with Michelin and CEAT, regarding the latter's takeover of the company. A flat-rate compensation of 200,000 rupees (\$US650) is being offered to each worker, regardless of their tenure. The deal sparked widespread anger among employees, who are now demanding 3 million rupees in compensation and a continuation of seniority, wages and all existing working conditions under the new CEAT ownership.

Michelin management has rejected these demands. With backing of the ICEU and the Labour Department, it has also labeled strike action by Midigama workers, which began on May 30, as "illegal." The management summarily suspended one worker—Sampath Karunasena—and sacked two others—Chirangivi Senevirathne, and Priyanga Dimuthu Kumara—without any formal investigations.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) of Sri Lanka has been actively involved in the struggle, advocating for the formation of independent workers' action committees and offering political support. Hundreds of Michelin workers have responded positively to this initiative.

On June 2, Michelin workers issued an international appeal through the *World Socialist Web Site*, calling on workers worldwide and particularly Michelin workers globally to support their action. The SEP released a statement urging workers, students, and young people to support the Michelin workers struggle.

Port Workers Action Committee (PWAC), which is active at Sri Lanka's main port in Colombo, has issued a statement voicing its strong solidarity with the Michelin workers and called for all their demands to be met.

Identifying the attacks on Michelin workers as part of the global assault on workers, it said: "Corporate giants like Michelin, driven solely by the pursuit of profit, continue to lay off workers regardless of the essential nature or value of their jobs. In their relentless search for the cheapest global labour markets, these capitalist owners shift investments across borders to maximise returns. This is the stark reality behind the wave of job cuts taking place across the world."

The statement referred to similar attacks on port workers: "The Port Authority, a state-owned enterprise that employed about 24,500 permanent workers in 1978, currently employs only 8,000 permanent workers, all the rest are contract workers. In addition, some parts of the port have been bought by local and foreign investors and turned into profit centres..."

"The privatisation process initiated at the port is just the beginning, with plans underway to implement similar measures across 400 additional public sector enterprises, following directives from the International Monetary Fund."

The statement concluded: "We appeal to workers in both private companies like Michelin and across the global public sector—to unite and organise around the International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committee (IWA-RFC) to defend their jobs and fundamental rights."

The **Health Action Committee** (HAC), which is active among health workers in Sri Lanka, including doctors and nurses, passed a resolution supporting the Michelin workers.

"The grievances raised by the Michelin workers—unsafe working conditions, withheld bonuses, arbitrary shift

changes, and ongoing management intimidation—are not isolated cases but part of a global attack on the social and democratic rights of the working class under capitalism. As healthcare workers, we face similar challenges, including chronic understaffing, overwhelming workloads, and repression when we speak out. The struggle of the Michelin workers is, in essence, our struggle too,” the resolution said.

Criticising the reactionary role played by the trade union bureaucracy, the HAC resolution stated: “The collusion between ICEU, controlled by the ruling JVP/NPP, the Labour Department, and the multinational corporation in declaring the Michelin workers’ struggle ‘illegal’ only confirms the anti-working-class character of President Dissanayake’s government.”

The resolution concluded: “The struggle at Michelin must not be abandoned. There is an urgent need to establish independent rank-and-file committees in every workplace to bring together workers across all sectors—including health, education, plantations, industry, and public services—to launch a unified class struggle.”

The **Velanai Fishermen Action Committee** (VFAC), which involves fishermen in the war-affected northern Jaffna Peninsula, passed a strong resolution declaring its solidarity with the striking Michelin workers.

The committee acknowledged the hardships endured by working people across the country, emphasising their commitment to the common struggle against the capitalist profit system and government policies that place corporate interests above the livelihoods of the working class and poor. The statement is significant because it challenges the decades-long role played by trade unions in fostering communal divisions between Tamil and Sinhala workers.

Signatories of the VFAC resolution drew similarities between difficulties faced by workers in the South and the North, noting: “We, the fishermen, stand in solidarity with the Michelin workers because we too have faced similar problems under the established political parties and successive governments.

“We continue to endure severe economic hardship due to the ongoing fuel crisis, which has made deep-sea fishing nearly impossible, while skyrocketing prices of essential goods have pushed our families into extreme poverty and malnutrition. At the same time, we have suffered brutal repression at the hands of the Sri Lankan navy, with little to no response from Tamil political parties or fishermen societies. Your struggle is our struggle, and we fully support your fight for justice and

dignity.”

In a further show of support, the **Railway Workers’ Action Committee** (Sri Lanka) passed a resolution backing the struggle of the Michelin workers. Two Sri Lanka Railway Department employees—**Janaka Kollonne** and **Suranga Wijenayake**—issued separate statements voicing their solidarity with the striking Michelin workers.

Hemantha Welihena, a teacher from a private School in Gampaha sent a statement backing all the demands of the Michelin workers.

Dehin Wasantha, a non-academic worker in University of Moratuwa, demanded the immediate reinstatement of the sacked and suspended Michelin workers.

“It is a grave miscalculation to believe that the intimidation tactics deployed with the backing of the police and the Inter-Company Employees Union (ICEU) will instill fear in the workers. All charges leveled against the protesting workers must be immediately and unconditionally withdrawn,” he wrote.

The SEP urges workers, students and young people to send letters to the Michelin Company and to issue support statements with the following demands:

- Reinstatement the three sacked 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 statements 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 WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact