

Sri Lankan SEP anti-war campaign receives support among workers

By our reporters
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Members and supporters of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) have campaigned during the past several days for anti-war meetings being held by the party at Gampaha and Hatton.

The teams have distributed thousands of copies of the International Committee of the Fourth International's resolution, "Socialism and the Fight Against Imperialist War," and an appeal to attend the meetings, which are to be held on Sunday, October 12.

Workers, youth and housewives listened carefully when campaign teams explained that the deepening world capitalist crisis was fuelling the war drive by the US and other imperialist powers. Many said they were hearing about the danger of a new world war for the first time. The Sri Lankan political establishment and media keep people in the dark, saying that the world situation is not affecting the country.

Workers also pointed to the impact of the global economic stagnation on living standards in Sri Lanka. President Mahinda Rajapakse's government, along with major local and international companies, is waging a sustained attack on jobs, wages, price subsidies and essential social services.

Hatton

Hatton, in the island's central hills district, is surrounded by tea plantations. Most workers are Tamil speaking and subjected to exploitative working conditions.

Menaka from the Panmure estate said: "I am hearing about this situation developing toward a world war for the first time. Now we are living in very difficult conditions. We have to oppose such a war." She added: "In Sri Lanka how many people were killed during the war!" Tens of thousands of people were killed in the protracted communal war by successive Colombo

governments against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Menaka referred to the fact that basic rights won by plantation workers in previous struggles were being scrapped by estate companies, which only cared about increased production and profits. Earlier, pregnant mothers could get leave to go to the clinic or feed their children, but now that had stopped.

Explaining her attitude to the trade unions, Menaka commented: "I am a member of the Up-Country Peoples Front [UPF]. But these unions are useless. They are not fighting for our rights now."

Farook, a shop worker from Ginigathena, near Hatton, said: "You are correct about the threat of a world war, but how can this war involving America be stopped? It is a very powerful country. They have advanced technology and powerful weapons."

The SEP campaigners explained that war can be stopped only by mobilising the international working class, including the powerful American working class. They said the imperialist powers, such as America, were being driven toward war by the deepening capitalist breakdown. Workers in every country must fight for world socialist revolution. Farook was keen to hear about the SEP in the US.

Tamil teacher at a school near Hatton said he believed the US is in a war drive because of the economic crisis facing that country. "It is using military power to dominate countries in Middle East to secure oil resources, and in other countries to gain important resources. Earlier, the US provided arms to the groups in ISIS [Islamic State in Iraq and Syria]. Now it is branding this organisation as terrorist to use it as a pretext for a war in Syria to topple the government there.

"America supported the Sri Lankan governments

during the war [against the LTTE]. Now it is using human rights violation to pressurise the Rajapakse government. The US is not interested in the human rights of people. I think the American government is trying to bring countries into its fold against China. Sri Lanka is situated in an important place in the Indian Ocean. China's oil supplies goes through this ocean. It is true to say any of these conflicts can develop into a world war."

The Tamil teacher commented: "We are increasingly unable to live under the capitalist system. The government is spending less and less on education. Prices of essentials go up. But even if an [opposition] UNP government comes to power, the same policies will be implemented. I agree that workers need a program to fight against the danger of a world war."

Gampaha

At Gampaha, near Colombo, the SEP and IYSSE campaigned in the Biyagama free trade zone, where tens of thousands of workers are employed.

A woman explained: "I have to travel to Colombo to work. It is a sweatshop. Twelve women work in the congested room. We start at 7 a.m. and go on till 5.30 p.m. with a half hour for lunch. We are provided with a bun and tea in the afternoon, but not lunch.

"We have no time to watch television. What you have explained here [about the dangers of a world war] is very important. It is these capitalists who want to conquer the world.

"It is good to hear that a world party is working to unite all workers internationally. You reminded us about [the US atomic bombs dropped on] Hiroshima and Nagasaki. All working people must unite against war."

Her husband, Gunadasa, is a rubber factory worker in Biyagama. He recalled some of the developments during World War II, including the US dropping of atomic bombs on Japan. He explained: "The situation we face is not the same as those of our fathers and grandfathers. They went on strike and won a lot of rights. They had good compensation and wage increases with the increased cost of living. Now any pay increase is connected to productivity."

Leela from Kandy stays in a lodge with her husband, while their child lives in Kandy. She has to work from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. and earns only 20,000 rupees (\$US153) a month. She said the food provided by the

factory was not edible, and the factories provided no insurance against industrial accidents.

Leela said she appreciated the SEP/IYSSE campaign against war, saying: "I came to understand that the working class has to struggle internationally against war and super exploitation."

Padama Suranjani, a garment worker, said: "I realise we must fight for socialism, that is the only way to stop a war. We do all this toil to start a family and bring up our children. I see the need for the steps you suggest."

Her companion Fatima added: "What you say makes sense. I am afraid to think of the future facing our young people. This is something that we are all aware of. They will have to toil even more than us under this system."

Rizwan, a young man, commented: "The US says that it is fighting for democracy against the repression by [President] Assad in Syria. But the US is upholding the most reactionary feudal regime in Saudi Arabia. They are now bombing indiscriminately, claiming they are attacking ISIS. They are saying all that to deceive the US working people, whose children they want to sacrifice for the interests of the rich. It is gladdening to hear that there is broad opposition among the US working class to the war drive [of the Obama government]. It is very encouraging to us."

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