Sri Lankan free trade zone and harbour workers denounce Google censorship

By our correspondents
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Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) members won strong support from Katunayake Free Trade Zone workers, residents of the Blumenthal harbour quarters and students in Colombo for the *World Socialist Web Site* petition against Google's Internet censorship.

SEP and IYSSE campaign teams have distributed the WSWS statement, "An open letter to Google: Stop the censorship of the Internet! Stop the political blacklisting of the World Socialist Web Site," throughout the city.

In April, Google introduced new search algorithms and protocols that restrict or block access to socialist, anti-war and progressive websites. The anti-democratic measure has seriously impacted on the WSWS, the most widely-read socialist Internet publication, limiting access from the Google search engine to the site's news articles, politics analysis and essays on history and culture.

The SEP frequently campaigns at the harbour quarter s in Bloemanthal, an important working-class district in Colombo. Successive governments have targeted the area to sell the land to foreign investors. Under former President Mahinda Rajapakse hundreds of poor families were forcibly evicted. The government claimed they were unauthorised residents. The current government now wants to demolish the harbour workers' homes.

Ajith, a harbour worker, said he would sign the WSWS petition: "You are making society aware of the major threats that face people around the world and if someone tries to stop this by force then it's completely wrong. Everyone's right of free speech must be defended. It's very shocking that we're living in a society where such a basic right is being violated."

Mohammad, another harbour worker, said: "The fight against terrorism, particularly against the Islamic militias, is the pretext used by the US to justify its war in the Middle East. But the US is completely responsible for creating these terrorist groups. The reason I'll sign this petition is because the WSWS directly criticises the US over this."

Wipula, a company driver, referred to danger of war and said: "Those who initiate wars call them 'humanitarian missions' but they use very dangerous weapons and poor people are brutally killed. The oppressed masses are always the ones who suffer. I agree with your point that the Sri Lankan government is serving the interests of US imperialism. I'm against that and I stand with the oppressed people."

Rafeek told campaigners he reads the WSWS. "I'm in a hurry at the moment but I've visited your site. I know about the campaign, so let me sign the petition."

A housewife from harbour quarters said: "Apart from the capitalist rulers, no one wants war. Ordinary people always want to live peacefully, so we all need to get together to stop war. Big businessmen collaborate with the capitalist political parties to initiate war. Google is also involved and that shows in its attempts to block anti-war reporting. They only want the people to hear what they recommend."

Katunayake Free Trade Zone is the country's oldest and largest free trade zone. It currently employs about 40,000 workers, who face excessive workloads, lack of incentives and unsafe work practices. The number of permanent jobs in the trade zone has been progressively reduced over the past decade, replaced by contract labour. Exploitation has increased to maximise the profits of foreign and local investors.

While many FTZ workers who spoke with SEP campaigners did not have email addresses and could

not sign the petition, they expressed their support for the WSWS campaign.

Asanka and Janaka, both 26, are from the Smart Shirt Company.

Janaka said: "I signed the previous WSWS petition to free the Maruti Suzuki workers in India. They have been subjected to life imprisonment because they fought against the unfair labour hire system. Workers need to change this system. We oppose exploitation and inequality, and we oppose world war and the Google censorship against the WSWS."

Asanka explained that they worked one week on the day shift, followed by a week on the night shift. "We can earn around 38,000 rupees [$US248 per month] but we are like machines in the factory. We want a decent life but can't get it under the present system."

Dilanka, a thread production worker, said he wanted to sign the WSWS petition. "In order to make the world a decent place and without the fear of a world war, we need to establish socialism. We don't need a world war."

Liyanarathne, an FTZ driver, joined the discussion saying, "I used to support the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna [JVP] and later the factions that broke away from it. But we learnt nothing from them. They had nothing of benefit for workers like us.

"I've been reading the WSWS articles that your members have distributed here and I'm aware of the war situation led by the US and the other imperialist powers. The blocking of the WSWS is a violation of our right to true and crucial information. I think Google has been observing the increasing WSWS readership and fear an upsurge in the working-class movement."

Kanishka, a supermarket worker from Ratnapura, 80 km from Colombo, said: "We cannot build up a workers' movement by keeping capitalist relations as they are. We must challenge and overthrow them. The Google censorship is such an unfair regulation. I strongly oppose it and encourage my fellow workers to sign the petition and will introduce the WSWS to them."

Dileepa, a student at the University of Sri Jayawardenepura, signed the petition and said: "Nuclear world war is the major threat and must be definitely stopped. People will unite and build an anti-war movement when they've been seriously convinced about this threat. But if the WSWS, the only

media that provides a real awareness of the war preparations, is censored like this, people will have no way of reaching that awareness.

"People must stand up and defend the WSWS and I urge everyone who believes that the world must be protected to come forward and defend the WSWS."

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

http://www.wsws.org