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The Socialist Equality Party, Sri Lanka
31.05.2021

SEP (Sri Lanka) to hold online meeting this Sunday on COVID-19 catastrophe in India

The Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka) is holding an online meeting—"The COVID-19 pandemic and the need for a socialist strategy"—this Sunday, May 30, at 6:00 p.m. Indian Standard Time. The meeting will be conducted in English and Tamil.

It will be addressed by leaders of the SEP (Sri Lanka) and the International Committee of the Fourth International, including Joe Kishore, the national secretary of the US SEP.

India has become the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic with the highest daily cases of any country in the world. The virus is raging uncontrolled throughout the country, with terrible consequences for millions of people.



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Izhaar Hussain Shaikh, left, an ambulance driver who works for HelpNow, and others pick up a COVID-19 patient from his home in Mumbai, India May 28, 2020. (AP Photo/Rafiq Maqbool)

According to the official tallies, which grossly understate the number of COVID cases and deaths, in the eight weeks since April 1, total infections have more than doubled, rising from 12.1 million to 27.5 million. Deaths, meanwhile, have increased by more than 90 percent to a total of 318,895 as of yesterday morning.

India's chronically underfunded health care system has been overwhelmed. Shocking media reports show desperately ill people in major cities unable to gain admittance to health care facilities and patients dying from asphyxiation after their hospital ran out of medical oxygen. In rural areas, where public health care facilities are rudimentary, the catastrophe is greater still. The vaccination campaign is in a shambles with little more than 10 percent of the population having received the first shot and just 3.1 percent fully vaccinated.

This massive human tragedy is the responsibility of the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the entire political establishment at the national and state levels. Like his counterparts internationally, Modi has pursued the criminal policy of "opening the economy" that puts the profits of big business over human lives. Even now, as the number of daily infections explodes, the government has refused to impose a national lockdown.

While the wealth of India's billionaires has nearly doubled over the past year, tens of millions of Indians have lost their livelihoods and been condemned to poverty. During the limited lockdowns that have taken place, virtually no support has been provided to those thrown out of work. Moreover, Modi is exploiting the pandemic to ram through a new round of pro-market measures that will further destroy jobs and conditions.

The rapidly deepening social crisis is fueling opposition. Millions of workers joined two one-day strikes last year against the government's pro-market restructuring. Strikes and protests have taken place in many other sectors. Farmers have now been camped on the outskirts of Delhi for six months against the government's pro-agribusiness farm laws.

The trade unions, in particular, those dominated by the two main Stalinist parties—the Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPM, and the Communist Party of India, or CPI—have confined the struggles of workers to futile attempts to pressure the Modi government, as well as appeals to the opposition Congress Party, the other main party of big business.

To defend its most basic rights, including to health care and to life itself, the working class has to break free of the shackles of the trade unions and the Stalinists, which are defenders of capitalism, and establish new independent organisations—rank-and-file committees—through which it can fight to defend its class interests.

This includes the immediate shutdown of all nonessential businesses and in-class education, the provision of full wages to all affected workers, and a vast expansion of the public health system. Such measures inevitably come into conflict with the demands of big business, underscoring the necessity of fighting on the basis of a socialist perspective.

On May Day 2021, the International Committee of the Fourth International called for the formation of an International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees to unify the struggles of workers around the world against the criminal response of the ruling classes internationally to the pandemic.

We encourage all our readers, not only in South Asia but internationally, to support the ICFI's crucial initiative and to attend the online meeting. Deepal Jayasekera, assistant national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka, will be the main speaker.

Date and Time: Sunday, May 30, 6:00 p.m. (Indian Standard Time)

Languages: English and Tamil

Please register to attend the meeting by clicking the following

link: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/4191651001271117581>

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