30th April, 2019

We oppose new repressive laws and demands immediate compensation for the affected people

The brutal and devastating attacks on 03 Roman Catholic churches in Batticaloa, Katuwapitiya Negambo and Kotahena Colombo and 03 super luxury hotels in Colombo on 21 April (2019) Easter Sunday shocked the whole world and us in trade unions. Some of our own members and their relatives too lost their lives or have been injured in the chain explosions carried out by a terror group "National Tawheed Jama'at (NJT)" State intelligence agencies now declare as responsible. Sri Lanka Council of IndustriALL Global Union extends its deepest condolences to all who have suffered loss in this terror attack. We wish to join with family members and relatives of over 250 innocent men, women and children and over 500 injured to share their grief and sorrow.

We firmly believe this whole tragedy could have been averted if relevant State agencies had in fact taken appropriate action on information that was available to them and on specific information that was provided by Indian authorities over 02 weeks before the tragedy. There had been apparent lethargy, negligence and irresponsibility in the functioning of State agencies. Seriously divided and politically departing partners in the present government too added to the "security lapse" with no leadership and clear authority over running of the State.

We as trade unions are concerned about the evolving political situation that now calls for more stringent laws and harsher punishments at the expense of hard won democratic rights of the People. Emergency rule was declared with severe restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of association and also with unquestionable powers for arrests and long term detentions. While we accept security forces should have powers to arrest suspects, legally detain and interrogate them, we firmly believe the government has a responsibility and a duty to ensure fundamental rights of the People in establishing stability and normalcy in society. We also believe this government has a responsibility to rid society of the fear psychosis that is being cultivated with racist and religious insinuations, especially against the Muslim people.

We as trade unions are deeply concerned about new laws the government wants to hurriedly push through. Prime Minister now calls for immediate replacement of the "Prevention of Terrorism Act" with a far more drastic "Counter Terrorism Act" on the argument that these "terrorist" organisations cannot be proscribed and dealt with under present law, despite they been already proscribed under emergency regulations. There is also a "one in all" single Labour Law that is being prepared for the benefit of employer investors. There is apparently a political consensus now among all political parties, in making such laws applicable to "discipline" society as State agencies want to ensure "national security", as argued now.
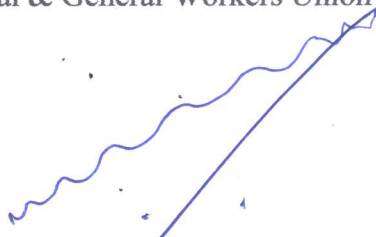
The need to curb worker rights have been a long term effort by successive governments in further liberalising the open market economy. It had been achieved to a certain degree with FTZs and de-activating labour administration over the past few years. This terror attack, despite different narratives in understanding its politics, have provided this government a new political context that most have come forward to compromise with curbing democratic rights. That includes workers' rights too.

On behalf of "IndustriALL" affiliates in Sri Lanka;

- Sri Lanka Nidahas Sewaka Sangamaya (SLNSS)
- Free Trade Zone & General Services Employees Union (FTZ Union)
- National Union of Seafarers Sri Lanka (NUSS)
- United Federation of Labour (UFL)
- Ceylon Mercantile Industrial & General Workers Union (CMU)

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