

international

VIEWPOINT

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SRI LANKA

A protest campaign has been launched against the construction of a Voice of America (VOA) shortwave relay station near the village of Iranawila, on the west coast of Sri Lanka. The Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP, Sri Lankan section of the Fourth International) is actively involved.

The \$35 million project would give the VOA a reach of between 1,600 and 2,400 kilometres, extending from East Africa across to Cambodia and Indonesia. Plans include the construction of three 500 kilowatt transmitters and curtain antenna, with the option of going in for a fourth. As part of the government agreement with the VOA, 160 hectares of coastal land have been leased to the VOA for a 20-year period.

When construction work began last year, the local population was denied access to its traditional fishing areas. As a result, 300 families have found themselves cut off from their source of livelihood. 2000 local Catholics were also prevented from carrying out their weekly "Way of the Cross" procession. There are also fears regarding the possible effects of radiation from the installation and possible military and intelligence uses.

The multi-faith people's protest, organised in the Iranawila People's Solidarity Forum, has been spearheaded by radical clergy from the Catholic Church with support from Buddhist, Muslim and Hindu clergy. Several thousand protesters joined in a march on September 18.

Faced with police threats to fire on the march, the day culminated in a mass rally declaring the beginning of "a spiritual journey to root out the VOA menace". In the past, mass mobilisation have defeated plans to erect a huge tourist complex in the area.

Ongoing protest activities have included pickets in front of the US embassy in Colombo. For further information and to send letters of support, write Iranawila People's Solidarity Forum, c/o SEDEC, Kynsy Road, Colombo-7 Sri Lanka. ★

CUBA

ON 1 to 3 October, over 280 labour activists from across Canada and the United States gathered in Toronto, Canada for an historic conference with union leaders from Cuba. Nearly half of the participants came from the US,



where there is no opportunity to meet with Cuban unionists due to travel restrictions imposed by their government.

The conference was sponsored by Worker to Worker Canada-Cuba Labour Solidarity Committee and the US-Cuba Labour Exchange. It was endorsed by an impressive list of unions and labour councils from the Toronto region as well as the New York City local of the Hospital and Health Care Workers union.

Material aid

The meeting endorsed ongoing projects of material aid to Cuba, such as the Pastors for Peace Friendship Caravan, which recently challenged restrictive US government border crossing policies and filled scores of trucks in both the US and Canada with aid destined for Cuba.

In the final plenary session, participants voted unanimously to demand that Washington lift its blockade and remove all bans against trade and commerce with, or travel to Cuba. — **Barry Weisleder** ★

BRITAIN

PATRICK Sikorski, a long-standing Fourth Internationalist and the elected secretary of the rail union's (RMT) London Transport District Council (LTDC), was dismissed from his job as a guard on the London Underground railway following a "verbal altercation" with a local manager.

Sikorski had been carrying out his union duties in defence of fellow guard Ray Stelzner. Stelzner had been dismissed for allegedly causing criminal damage by removing security tags from train seats.

Both men have won full reinstatement. This of course is good news in itself but as the "victory" leaflet from the RMT's LTDC emphasises, "(t)he reinstatements were won through strike action, determined picketing and widespread campaigning."

Convinced that a serious miscarriage of justice had occlude members called on the union for action. The RMT executive responded by ordering a strike ballot of its Central line traincrew.

Sikorski's case was placed before the union lawyers who went to an Industrial Tribunal on the grounds that he had been unfairly dismissed for trade union activities. The tribunal took just minutes to decide in Sikorski's favour. Armed with this decision, a union officer met with management. An offer was made to give Stelzner a job on a lower grade and Sikorski a job on another line. Both men would remain "guilty". Both refused this poisoned chalice.

Following a four to one ballot result a marvellously supported one day strike took place. The RMT decided to spread the strikes and ballot all London Underground members.

In the meantime concern over the sacked guards was growing. A defence campaign quickly found broad support in the labour movement nationally.

The only open support the management enjoyed was from the dustbin grubbers of the rightwing, mass-circulation London Evening Standard who vilified Sikorski in particular. Management were forced into an almost total climb-down. Following final arbitration both men were reinstated back at their East London depot with Stelzner completely cleared of the original charges against him. Sikorski has, unfortunately, had to accept five days suspension. But he is back as a guard and as a union representative — a situation that Underground management are clearly unhappy with given that he has, after many years on the job, established himself as a prominent and respected militant.

As the union's "victory" leaflet concludes: "These people had nothing material to gain. They fought for their rights against management's wrongs. They have reminded us all of the importance of strong, free, independent trade unionism capable of defending rights at the workplace." ★