

Sri Lankan SEP calls on all workers to reject deduction of two days' wages for war

By SEP of Sri Lanka
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The Socialist Equality Party of Sri Lanka calls on all workers to reject the May 23 call by President Chandrika Kumaratunga to contribute two days' wages per month for prosecution of the war against the Tamil minority in the north and east of the country.

Although couched in the form of an appeal, the demand for money is being made under conditions of emergency rule in which the government has severely curtailed democratic rights, including the right to strike and freedom of the press.

The SEP is the only political party in Sri Lanka to call on workers in every workplace to oppose deductions from their wage packets for this barbaric war. The war, which was initiated against the oppressed Tamil nationality by the United National Party (UNP) regime in 1983 and is now being prosecuted with even greater intensity by the Peoples Alliance (PA) regime, is not a war of the workers and the poor.

This is why from the very outset the SEP has demanded that not a man nor a rupee should be given to the war and has insisted that workers and the poor must fight for its immediate cessation by withdrawing all Sri Lankan troops from the north and east of the island.

The three long established working class parties, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), the Communist Party of Sri Lanka (CPSL) and the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), are partners of the PA regime and back its war efforts and emergency rule to the hilt. A statement issued by the Stalinist CPSL said: "The immediate task is to contain the offensive of the LTTE [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam] in the Jaffna peninsula and drive back its combatant units, mobilising the resources both human and material at the command of the government."

The Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), founded in the late 1970s by a breakaway faction of the LSSP to try and entrap those sections of workers who had grown to detest the coalition politics of its parent party, has not opened its

mouth on the issue of wage deductions for the war.

The NSSP's silent approval of the government measure is in line with the joint front it has established with the Sinhala chauvinist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). The JVP has declared that its policy is "not to give Eelam at any cost and will not allow LTTE any new victories".

This statement, issued in the aftermath of the recent debacles suffered by the Sri Lankan military, was aimed at boosting the warmongers. The JVP's differences with the PA regime are that the government is not prosecuting the war with sufficient determination. In other words, on this basis, if the NSSP-JVP front does have a policy on war contributions it is that the government is not demanding enough from workers.

The pacifist-sounding call by the front for an end to the war is aimed at confusing and disorienting the masses. Under the conditions where the UNP and PA are increasingly exposed and discredited, the real aim of the NSSP-JVP alliance is to convince the ruling class that a new bourgeois front, in which they are included, will be in a better position to control mass resentment against the war and maintain capitalist rule. This is why the NSSP-JVP alliance fails to raise any concrete demands either for the withdrawal of Sri Lankan troops from the north and east or for the ending of finances for the war.

This is in contrast to the growing hostility of workers, the poor and sections of the middle class to the increasing burdens imposed on them by the war and to the curtailment of democratic rights, including draconian press censorship.

A statement issued by the Central Bank Employees Union declared: "We thoroughly denounce the measures taken by the PA government to intensify the war against the oppressed Tamils and to suppress the democratic rights of Sinhala-Tamil workers and oppressed masses by putting the whole country on a war footing.

"Moreover, we thoroughly denounce the nauseating role

of all political parties, trade unions and other organisations that support this reactionary policy of the government.

“We announce to the working class in Sri Lanka and internationally, and all organisations and individuals who cherish democratic rights, as follows:

“This war is not a war of Sinhala and Tamil speaking masses in Sri Lanka. It is a war of the Sinhala chauvinist ruling class against the oppressed Tamil nation.

“Therefore not a single person, not a single rupee or any equipment to this war!”

When the management of the Petroleum Corporation of Sri Lanka, which employs over 20,000 workers, attempted to deduct seven days' wages from the workers for the defence fund, even exceeding the rate proposed by the PA regime, one of the trade unions in the Corporation, the All Ceylon Oil Workers Union, issued a letter opposing the deduction.

“We are informed by a circular signed by the Chairman and two other directors that it is proposed to deduct a week's wages from the workers due to the national emergency situation. We can not agree to this in any way and request you not to deduct money from the members of our union and also not to force them directly or indirectly to contribute to this collection,” the letter declared.

All the workers at the engineering section of the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation have also refused to give their consent to the deduction of two days' wages.

Such actions are symptomatic of the growing hostility towards the war and a vindication of the correctness of the position taken by the Socialist Equality Party: that the working class must demand an immediate end to the war with the withdrawal of the Sri Lankan troops from the north and east of the country.



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