

An exchange over the nature of the JHU in Sri Lanka

7 June 2005

The following is an exchange over the article “Obscure Sri Lankan group claims responsibility for Tamil journalist’s murder” posted on the WSWs on May 25.

To the editor,

I am somewhat surprised by the slipshod journalism demonstrated in this news report. While I am no fan of the extreme nationalism espoused by the JHU, it is grossly unfair, inaccurate and irresponsible to claim that they have been involved in any form of communal violence and murder as your so-called “correspondent” claims when he/she states: “.... the JVP and JHU both have a record of communal violence and murder”. This is a slanderous statement; the kind which usually results in libel action! Your correspondent also translates the name JHU (Jathika Hela Urumaya) as “Pure Sinhala National Heritage”, this again is completely inaccurate. JHU translates to “National Sri Lankan Heritage”; there is no “Pure Sinhala” anywhere in the name!

Please ensure that your correspondents maintain a high standard of professionalism and are not swayed by vested interests!

MW

Dear MW,

In contrast to much of the press, particularly in Colombo, the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) takes the question of accurate reporting very seriously.

In your email to the WSWs, your only objection to our latest report on the cold-blooded murder of well-known Tamil journalist Dharmaratnam Sivaram is our characterisation of the record of the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU). While you say that you are “no fan of the extreme nationalism espoused by the JHU”, you make no comment on the impact of their communal politics, their provocative actions, or indeed on the crime itself.

Quite frankly, the JHU’s statement following Sivaram’s murder is chilling. It declared that “the death of the editor of the *Tamilnet* web site is the best example of the future fate of extremists who oppose the peace in the country”—a comment that openly encourages further communal killings. Yet you do not appear to find this objectionable.

The JHU statement is of a piece with its other activities. JHU was formed just prior to last year’s general elections by Sihala Urumaya (SU), and a section of the Jathika Sangha Sammelanaya (JSS) or National Bikkhu Congress. Its program calls for a state built on Buddhist principles and asserts “national right of the Sinhala nation” above others. On this basis, it has vehemently opposed peace talks or any, even limited, concessions to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and is currently engaged, with other chauvinist organisations such as the JVP, in a vicious communal campaign against the establishment of a joint body with the LTTE to dispense aid to tsunami victims.

To deal with the particular objection you raise, it is not grossly unfair or inaccurate to refer to the record of communal violence of the JHU and its predecessors or its responsibility in creating the political climate where outrages such as the Sivaram’s murder can take place. To cite just a few examples:

* In September and October 2003, the JSS and SU organised provocative protests in the Eastern Province to inspect Buddhist ruins and demand the removal of the LTTE’s military camps at Manirasakulam. The UNF government was compelled to send security forces to block the second march that aimed to confront the LTTE directly, threatening to trigger a violent clash and broader communal violence.

* In 2003 the two organisations unleashed a campaign to demand that the government impose an anti-democratic law banning so-called unethical

religious conversions by Christian groups. This was heightened after the death of the monk Gangodawila Soma during his visit to Russia in December 2003. Without a shred of evidence, the SU and JSS claimed that the monk's death was the product of a conspiracy by Christian fundamentalists.

In the midst of this campaign, more than 100 churches in Colombo, its suburbs and other areas were attacked. A number of previously unknown groups suddenly emerged to claim responsibility. One of them was the Therapuththabhaya Brigade which now claims to have murdered Sivaram. The SU, of course, denied any involvement when media reports indicated that its members had been involved. But it cannot deny the fact that its campaign encouraged these violent attacks.

* On October 29, 2003, a Sinhala chauvinist mob egged on by the SU attacked a cultural festival involving Sinhala and Tamil artists at the New Town Hall in Colombo. Several of the participants were injured. Although the SU denied any involvement, its deputy secretary Nishantha Warnasinghe and leading JSS member Hadigalle Wimalasara were part of the mob.

* Not surprisingly, the same methods continued after the SU and JSS fused to become the JHU. The JHU was directly responsible for the provocative protest outside the musical festival organised for Bollywood star Sharuk Khan on December 11 that ended when a bomb was thrown into the audience killing two people and injuring many more.

The JHU launched a campaign on December 2 demanding that the event be cancelled on the spurious grounds that it coincided with the anniversary of the death of Gangodawila Soma. A front organisation, Soma Himi Chinthana Padanama, organised a fast by a group of Buddhist monks two days before the festival and a protest at the event itself. Police arrested a number of protesters who attempted to storm the concert. In the wake of this clash, the bomb was tossed into the crowd. The JHU disclaimed responsibility but it had created the political conditions for the attack.

No one has been charged or convicted with this or any of the previous crimes, which, given the chauvinist attitudes rampant among the police force, is hardly a shock. No JHU member or leader has been charged or convicted of murder, which is why for the sake of strict accuracy we have deleted "and murder" from the

phrase "the JVP and JHU both have a record of violence and murder". In the case of the JVP, that organisation was directly involved in the murder of scores of its political opponents in the late 1980s. And it remains quite possible that Sivaram's murderers have a connection to either the JVP or JHU.

As for your quibble about our translation of the JHU's name, the use of the word "Hela" carries a definite communal connotation signifying the JHU to be a pure Sinhala organisation. You translate Jathika Hela Urumaya as National Sri Lankan Heritage and others use National Sinhala Heritage. We have sought to give its exact meaning. We can of course debate the finer nuances of Sinhalese but it does nothing to alter the political arguments contained in the article.

In case you are inclined to simply dismiss the above points as "pro-LTTE", let me point out that the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party in Sri Lanka has a long record of opposing the LTTE and its nationalist program. As genuine socialists, we are hostile to all forms of nationalism and chauvinism and advocate the unity of working people, regardless of religion, ethnicity, or language, to fight for their independent class interests. This sets us apart from every other political party and tendency in Sri Lanka and their communal politics that poison every aspect of life in Sri Lanka and have led to one disaster after another for the working class.

Yours sincerely,

K. Ratnayake,

World Socialist Web Site



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact