

Sri Lanka: Central Bank union demands retraction of threats against SEP

Our correspondent
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The executive committee of the Central Bank Employees Union (CBEU) in Sri Lanka passed a resolution on November 12 demanding that the leadership of the Sri Lanka Central Bank Employees Union (SLCBEU) withdraw its threat against CBEU president K.B. Mavikumbura and treasurer M.W. Piyaratna. Mavikumbura is a long-time member of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and Piyaratna is a close SEP sympathiser.

After the CBEU annual general meeting in September passed a motion opposing the government's return to civil war, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)-aligned SLCBEU issued a leaflet denouncing the call for the withdrawal of troops from the North and East of the island and branding Mavikumbura and Piyaratna as "Sinhala Tigers". In the language of Sinhala chauvinist supporters of the war, the label "Sinhala Tigers"—that is, supporters of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)—is equivalent to "traitor".

The JVP has supported the renewed war to the hilt. Its criticism of President Mahinda Rajapakse is that his government has failed to openly declare war on the LTTE, dispense with the so-called international peace process and seek to crush the LTTE militarily. In the trade unions, the JVP's supporters, while posturing as defenders of workers' rights and conditions, call for sacrifice for the war effort and have sought to witch-hunt opponents of the communal conflict.

The CBEU executive rejected the SLCBEU's slander that Mavikumbura was a "Sinhala Tiger", pointing out that he, as a long-standing SEP member, was "well known for his principled opposition to LTTE separatism as well as JVP chauvinism". The resolution warned that declaring Mavikumbura and Piyaratna to be "Sinhala Tigers" carried the threat of physical

violence. "Death squads are carrying out abductions and disappearances with impunity and the detention of persons without charges is taking place throughout the island," it noted.

"The threat coming from the SLCBEU is not a ruse. In the 1988-1989 terror-period, the JVP unleashed death squads and killed hundreds of political opponents, trade unionists, workers and youth including three members of the Revolutionary Communist League [the SEP's forerunner], which opposed and did not join the JVP's communal protests at the time. A group of JVP gunmen was sent to trace Mavikumbura to subject him to a similar fate. The JVP goons visited the site where he was building his house but failed to find him," it continued.

As the resolution stated, the SLCBEU's real objection to the original CBEU motion was to "the truth contained in it—that without opposing the war working people cannot defend even their most basic living standards and rights. The SLCBEU and the JVP fully support the war and demand workers sacrifice for it." It explained that the SLCBEU's allegation that the call for the withdrawal of troops was to help the LTTE was a lie. "On the contrary, this is a call to unite Sinhala and Tamil speaking people against the government and the LTTE on the basis of socialist policies," it stated.

The CBEU executive demanded that the SLCBEU retract its slanderous allegations against Mavikumbura and Piyaratna and issued a broad appeal to workers. "This threat against CBEU leaders is a warning to all those who fight to defend the living conditions and democratic rights of the masses. The campaign against it must be taken as a part of a broader struggle to defend these rights. We request all those organisations, workers, youth and intellectuals who value the

democratic rights to issue statements condemning and demanding the retraction of SLCBEU slanders against the CBEU leaders,” it stated.

All 12 members of the CBEU executive committee present on November 12 voted for the resolution. Three of the five absent members later signed the resolution to express their support. Other Central Bank employees have condemned the provocative role of the SLCBEU and expressed their sympathy for the SEP’s statement circulated as a leaflet in the workplace.

One employee told the WSWS: “I warned Mavikumbura about the threat in this JVP leaflet as soon as I saw it. The JVP trade union leaders have done a policeman’s work. In another leaflet, they have quoted resolutions presented by Mavikumbura and Piyaratna to previous annual general meetings. They have quoted only the parts of that resolution that demands withdrawal of troops from the northeast. Anyone who reads the resolutions would see that this is part of a campaign to unite Sinhala and Tamil workers.

“The Central Bank is located in a high security zone. When Mavikumbura and Piyaratna are branded as ‘Sinhala Tigers’ then the danger is enormous.

“We know that Mavikumbura fights for principle. A few months back an anonymous petition was sent to the Central Bank administration complaining that JVP union president Sarath Ekanayake was conducting politics during his overtime. A copy of this petition was sent to Mavikumbura also. He showed the petition to Ekanayake and said he opposed any witch-hunt. He told the committee members too.

“The JVP is now praising the military and supports it fully. One would wonder why this organisation which was crushed by the military in 1988-1989 killing even its leader, Rohana Wijeweera, is now supporting the military. Their support is based on Sinhala chauvinism. This organisation has no faith in the working class even though it tries to pretend to be a workers’ organisation.

Another Central Bank employee opposed the SLCBEU statement against Mavikumbura and Piyaratna. “They [the JVP] fully support the war and campaign for it. The JVP opposes the demands against war because such demands go against their aim.”

“I agree that the demand for the withdrawal of Sri Lankan armies from the northeast has been advanced to unite workers against the Sinhala and Tamil capitalist class. The military and police suppress Tamil masses

there. Here also they do the same thing. Nothing can be done without uniting these workers. The JVPers call themselves Marxists, but they are not.”

The employee had once supported the JVP, but now regards their policies as hostile to the working class. He was also hostile to the SLCBEU’s opposition to politics in the workplace. “I do not agree with the idea of ‘no politics’ in the unions and in workplaces and that it is enough to talk about our [immediate] problems. Workers have to discuss international questions, problems in the country and about the government.”

He explained that the government wanted the war because it was in a political crisis. “The government deals blows against workers’ rights and wants to divert the attention of people [with the war].”



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