

Sri Lanka: Presidential Secretary calls for spy units throughout public sector

Wije Dias
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President Mahinda Rajapakse's secretary, Lalith Weeratunga, who heads Sri Lanka's civil service, has called for undercover intelligence units to be installed in every public sector workplace to spy on workers under the pretext of curbing corruption and inefficiency.

Officers of the police criminal investigation department would be deployed incognito, giving the government a "mole in every state department," the Presidential Secretary proposed on June 27 in a speech delivered to the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute. Weeratunga expressed confidence that "the intelligence services could play a pivotal role in combating waste, corruption and irregularities in the government sector".

Recalling the use of the National Intelligence Bureau (NIB) by President J.R. Jayewardene's 1978-88 administration to monitor state institutions, Weeratunga said he had recommended a similar set-up to Rajapakse "as part of the government's strategy to tackle corruption". The NIB combined the intelligence units from the army, navy, air force, and police under the control of the military, with its chief reporting directly to the Ministry of Defence.

Combatting corruption is a thin veil for the real aim of the spying project, which is to discipline and intimidate public sector workers while the Rajapakse regime demands deep spending cuts, job losses and speedup. That was spelled out in the June 30 editorial of the government-owned *Daily News*.

The editorial praised Rajapakse for declaring an "all-out war" on waste and irregularities in the public service "now that the main war is over," referring to the military victory over the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil

Eelam (LTTE). While endorsing Weeratunga's call as a "timely move" against corruption and bribery, which had become "virtually institutionalised in the State sector," the editorial declared:

"Such an arrangement could also oversee the performance aspect of government departments to ensure optimum worker output. In fact such an intelligence body could go into the whole gamut of ills affecting the public sector inefficiency. Today state departments and corporations have become synonymous with idleness, lethargy and inefficiency."

The editorial concluded that "raising discipline in the work place is one of the main pluses that could be achieved through such a project ... not to mention the massive slice of funds that will be saved by the State".

This makes clear that the proposal marks a new offensive against the working conditions and basic democratic rights of workers, on top of a wage freeze that has already been imposed. The undercover agents would be tasked with supplying the regime with the names of any workers who oppose the government politically or plan to resist its austerity demands.

The announcement further underscores the meaning of Rajapakse's declaration of an "economic war for nation building" in the wake of the LTTE's defeat. The anti-Tamil war was continued for 26 years as a means of dividing the working people along communal lines. Having militarily crushed the LTTE, the politico-military cabal that surrounds Rajapakse is intensifying the attack on the working class as a whole.

The regime is trying to use the intimidatory political atmosphere of its victory parades organised in partnership

with the Buddhist hierarchy, and the cowardly connivance of the opposition parties, to stifle any resistance to the rule of the Sinhala elite. Behind the official celebrations, the government is stepping up its efforts to pay for the financial crisis created by the war, exacerbated by the global economic slump.

A June 30 editorial in the right-wing *Island* newspaper expressed the concerns of sections of the elite itself about the Rajapakse cabal's increasingly arbitrary methods and fears that they could spark unrest after "having won a bloody war at a tremendous cost".

"State intelligence services, no doubt, are to be commended for their outstanding contribution to the country's victory over terrorism. But, using them to cleanse State institutions may be likened to training multi-barrel rocket launchers on an illicit brewery! The forces that are unleashed in response to a threat must be proportionate to it. Else, the 'solution' ends up being part of the problem."

The editorial voiced apprehension about "the emergence of an outfit like the much dreaded Gestapo" and a "totalitarian state" as in George Orwell's dystopian novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. "This country, we believe, can do without a Big Brother. (We have enough and more Rajapakse Brothers-- Rajapakses to right of us, Rajapakses to left of us, Rajapakses in front of us, Rajapakses behind us and Rajapakses above us!).

The *Island* has been in the forefront of whipping up Sinhala chauvinism and backing Rajapakse's war. Now, with Rajapakse and his cronies rapidly moving to concentrate power in their hands, this section of the elite has become nervous about the prospect of political unrest as well as the loss of their own privileges within the Colombo establishment.

Another *Island* commentary on July 4, written by Tisaranee Gunasekara, pointed out that the government's claim to be fighting corruption lacked credibility following the lack of any legal action against the ministers and senior officials that the Supreme Court had faulted over the sales of the Insurance Corporation and Lanka Marine Services Ltd. Gunasekara said the real aim of the proposed "spy service" was to "keep tabs on less than loyal public servants and to further tighten the control of the First Family [the Rajapakses] over the state".

The spy unit proposal is part of the government's far-reaching assault on basic legal and democratic rights, which has escalated, not abated, since the end of the war. The Rajapakse administration has incarcerated nearly 300,000 Tamil civilians without trial in violation of the constitution, extended its media censorship by reactivating the Press Council and retained extraordinary emergency powers and the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act.

None of the "left" parties or the trade union bureaucracies, not to speak of the parties of the "old left" that are entrenched in the government, have said a word about this latest repressive move. Having all adapted to the anti-Tamil war, in one way or the other, they now are bent on working out their own deals with the post-war government as it seeks to impose the financial burden of the war and the world recession on workers.

The Socialist Equality Party is the only political organisation that consistently opposed the war against the Tamil minority and demanded the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the military from the north and east, while not giving any political concession to the national separatist blind-ally perspective of the LTTE. As the SEP insisted all along, the racist war was aimed against the working people of all communities, Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim.

The Rajapakse regime's latest police-state proposal confirms this analysis and demonstrates how quickly the military victory over the LTTE in the north and east has intensified the offensive against living standards and basic rights. Only the working class, guided by a socialist and internationalist program, independent of all factions of the ruling elite, can confront and defeat these growing threats with the support of the oppressed masses.



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