

Sri Lanka: Condemn the EPDP attack on SEP members in Jaffna

The Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
20 March 2010

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) condemns the physical attack and threats by thugs of the Eelam People Democratic Party (EPDP) against SEP members at Vaddukoddai in Jaffna, northern Sri Lanka, on March 19.

Six EPDP thugs confronted K. Chitrakumar and two other SEP members at Tottiyadi junction in the Vaddukoddai area at about 2.45 p.m. yesterday. Chitrakumar is a member of the SEP's slate of candidates for the Jaffna district in the April 8 parliamentary election.

Two of the thugs have been identified. The gang leader threatened SEP members, declaring: "This is the area of Minister Douglas Devananda [the EPDP leader]. You rascals can't be allowed to do [election] work here. I have a pistol with me. I could shoot you if I want."

The thugs then pushed Chitrakumar's head against a wall, pushed and shoved the two other SEP comrades and left. No-one was badly hurt.

The SEP members have lodged a complaint with the Vaddukoddai police, and the SEP has made formal complaints to the election commissioner and the inspector general of police. Reluctantly the police recorded the complaint and said they would conduct an inquiry into the incident this morning.

The threats must be taken seriously, given the record of the EPDP, a Tamil political party that is part of President Mahinda Rajapakse's coalition government, and which supported Colombo's war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). It

is currently campaigning under the banner of the ruling United Peoples Freedom Alliance (UPFA) in the parliamentary elections.

The EPDP has a paramilitary wing that works closely with the government's armed forces in Jaffna, particularly in Kayts and other islands off the Jaffna peninsula. It is notorious for violent attacks and threats against political opponents and for intimidating local people with impunity.

The EPDP has become increasingly desperate due to the fact that it is discredited among the Tamil masses because of its support for the government, the racialist war and for the continuing military harassment and repression in the North and East. The party is forcing people to attend its meetings, where it cynically urges them to vote for the UPFA, with false promises of jobs, facilities and services.

The EPDP regards the SEP's political work in Jaffna and the neighbouring islands with deep hostility. The SEP has a slate of candidates in the Jaffna district, as well as in the capital Colombo, Galle in the southern province and Nuwara Eliya in the central plantation area. It is winning a significant response from fishermen, farmers, workers and youth in Jaffna for its socialist perspective to unite Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim workers around their common class interests.

The EPDP has also been harassing other parties in the Jaffna district. On Thursday, EPDP operatives on Kayts Island drove round in vehicles, obstructing opposition United National Party (UNP) campaigners. They regularly roam around unchallenged by the security forces, particularly in the islands off the Jaffna

peninsula. The EPDP also has a motorcycle gang to intimidate people in Jaffna town.

The activities of the EPDP in the North are just part of a broader campaign of intimidation and thuggery by the Rajapakse government against any political opposition. In the aftermath of the January 26 presidential election, the police and military carried out a wave of arrests against supporters of opposition candidate Sarath Fonseka. The retired general was himself detained on February 8 on the basis of unsubstantiated allegations that he was plotting a coup against Rajapakse. Pro-government thugs have been involved in attacks on opposition supporters and trade unionists in a number of workplaces.

Two days after the presidential election, EPDP thugs went on a rampage in a number of villages on Kayts Island, threatening and physically attacking villagers. People were denounced for not supporting President Rajapakse, and voting instead for Fonseka, or the SEP presidential candidate, Wije Dias. In that election, 74 percent of voters in Northern Province did not cast a ballot because of their opposition to both Rajapakse and Fonseka. The EPDP was only able to obtain a very small vote for Rajapakse.

The SEP has a long history of opposing the war and demanding the unconditional withdrawal of Sri Lankan military forces from the north and east. The party has also exposed the role of the EPDP in collaborating with the military and the Colombo government.

As a result, the EPDP and the military have carried out several attacks on SEP members in Jaffna. In 2000, EPDP thugs threatened SEP members in Kayts with physical assault after they waged a campaign against the navy's restrictions on fishing. The EPDP called a meeting to instruct fishermen to follow the navy's regulations, but people did not turn up. Angered by this failure, EPDP thugs physically dragged one SEP member to a meeting and shot at another as he fled.

On the night of March 22, 2007, SEP member Nadarajah Wimalaswaran and his friend Sivanathan Mathivathanan disappeared at Velanai on Kayts Island while returning from nearby Punguduthivu Island.

Evidence collected by the SEP pointed to the involvement of the navy and associated paramilitaries. Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan are among hundreds of people who have disappeared or been murdered over the past four years by pro-government death squads operating in collusion with the military. Despite protests in Sri Lanka and internationally, no serious investigations into these cases have been carried out.

The latest attack on SEP members comes as Rajapakse is preparing to intensify the government's assault on the living standards and democratic rights of working people. Once the general election is over, it will begin implementing the drastic austerity measures demanded by the International Monetary Fund. The use of thuggery and violence against the SEP and other political opponents is a sharp warning to the working class as a whole of the methods it will use to impose this economic agenda.

We call on working people to condemn the EPDP attack and to defend the democratic rights of the SEP to conduct its political activities. We invite workers and youth to attend our election meeting tomorrow, Sunday March 21, at the Co-operative Hall in Jaffna town where our candidates will explain and discuss the SEP's socialist alternative.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact