

Sri Lanka: State-owned newspaper publishes death threat against SEP

Wije Dias
8 May 2010

The Sri Lankan government-owned *Daily News*, on its editorial page on April 23, published a highly provocative article against the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) that contained an explicit death threat against the party.

Entitled “Those who are worthy of salutation and those who are not,” the article identified the SEP in general and two prominent members in particular—general secretary Wije Dias and political committee member Nanda Wickremasinghe—as “unpurchasable” opponents of the government who would have to “be eliminated, meaning killed”.

The SEP wrote to the *Daily News* editor on April 30 to condemn the article and the newspaper’s decision to publish it. The newspaper published the letter in truncated form on May 6—the first paragraph registering the party’s protest was eliminated. The SEP has still received no reply. The letter is reproduced below.

In the context of Sri Lankan politics, the threat is not an idle one. Hundreds of people, including parliamentarians and prominent journalists, have been murdered or “disappeared” by pro-government death squads since President Mahinda Rajapakse first took office in 2005.

Rajapakse returned the island to civil war in mid-2006 and ruthlessly waged military operations against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that cost thousands of civilian lives. Having defeated the LTTE militarily last May, the government has retained the police-state apparatus, built up in a quarter century of war, for use against the working class.

Like Greece, Sri Lanka is heavily indebted in large part because of Rajapakse’s huge military spending. Saved from defaulting in mid-last year by an International Monetary Fund (IMF) emergency loan of \$US2.6 billion, the government is under pressure to slash the budget deficit from 9.7 percent of GDP last year to 5 percent in 2011. Over half of last year’s budget was spent on debt servicing and the military, and that spending will not be

reduced this year. As a result, Rajapakse will have to make proportionately deeper cuts to public sector jobs and services or impose large tax increases, or both.

This bitter IMF prescription is already being applied in Greece where we are already seeing a wave of strikes and protests. It will be no different in Sri Lanka. That is why the SEP is being targetted for being “unpurchasable”. What the government and the ruling class fear above all is that the working class will emerge as an independent political force under the banner of socialist internationalism. The SEP, and its forerunner the Revolutionary Communist League, is the only party that has fought intransigently for that perspective.

The writer of the scurrilous *Daily News* article, Malinda Seneviratne, comes from a family that sympathised with the formerly Trotskyist Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP). He grew up amid the political confusion created by the LSSP’s betrayal of socialist internationalism when it joined the bourgeois government of Sirima Bandaranaike in 1964.

As a university student, Seneviratne was involved with the Friends of the People, which combined anti-Tamil racism and environmental issues. The group led by Champika Ranawaka later evolved into the Sinhala extremist party—the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU)—that is currently part of the ruling coalition. Ranawaka was the country’s environment minister and is now power and energy minister and close presidential adviser. While not part of the JHU, Seneviratne is deeply imbued with its chauvinist politics and has found a niche for himself as a journalistic hack for the *Daily News*, which is nothing but a mouthpiece for government propaganda.

Seneviratne’s political history lends a particular viciousness to his writing. He is sufficiently acquainted with the history of the Trotskyist movement to recognise that the SEP, unlike the ex-lefts of the Nava Sama Samaja Party and United Socialist Party, is the only organisation

that fights for revolutionary socialism. His response is drawn straight from the annals of the JHU, which is notorious for its thuggery—those that cannot be bribed or bullied into line must be eliminated.

The threat against the SEP is the sharpest warning to the working class as a whole of the methods that the Rajapakse regime will use to suppress any resistance by working people to its economic agenda. It is no accident that the parliament on Wednesday once again passed the monthly renewal of the state of emergency despite the fact that the war ended a year ago. Rajapakse will use the same draconian measures to wage his new “economic war” for “nation building” as he employed against the LTTE and the island’s Tamil minority.

The SEP urges working people to draw the necessary political lessons. An independent political movement of the working class must be built to lead the rural masses in a counteroffensive against the government’s plans. That can only be done on the basis of a socialist program and the fight for a workers’ and farmers’ government as part of the struggle for socialism internationally. We call on workers and youth to join and build the SEP as the necessary leadership for that struggle.

The SEP sent the following letter to the *Daily News*.

The Editor,
Daily News
Sir:

As general secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, I wish to record my party’s indignant protest over the provocative article published in the April 23 edition of *Daily News* under the headline, “Those who are worthy of salutation and those who are not.”

In what can only be interpreted as an attempt to incite a terrorist act against the Socialist Equality Party and its leadership, the author of this article, Malinda Seneviratne, wrote: “Someone once said that 99 percent of the Opposition can be purchased and that the remaining 1 percent must be eliminated, meaning killed.” Seneviratne then identifies the SEP, and two of its leading members—Wije Dias (myself) and Nanda Wickremasinghe (Podi Wicks)—as among those who belong to the one percent.

In language dripping with malice and cynicism, Seneviratne writes: “I choose to salute Podi Wicks and Wije Dias. They are politically honest. Unpurchasable.”

No one will be fooled by the hypocritical encomium proffered by Seneviratne, who cut his political teeth with

the forerunners of the extreme right wing Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU). This organisation is now a partner of the Rajapakse government. It will be clear to everyone that Seneviratne’s intention is to call the attention of the JHU and other reactionary forces to the activities of the SEP.

The publication of Seneviratne’s article implicates *Daily News*, a government-owned newspaper, in Seneviratne’s provocative designs.

To further incite murderous forces within the state apparatus as well as communal gangs against the SEP, Seneviratne describes our organisation as “Eelamist.” The SEP unequivocally opposed the reactionary war waged by successive Colombo regimes against the Tamil people. But it is well known, within Sri Lanka and internationally, that the SEP opposed the bourgeois separatist program of the LTTE. Our party has fought for the unity of the Sinhala and Tamil people, under the banner of the United Socialist States of Sri Lanka and Eelam.

This remains the perspective of the SEP. Our struggle for socialism and the democratic rights of all working people will not be deterred by threats of any kind—even those promoted in the pages of *Daily News*.

Wije Dias
General Secretary
Socialist Equality Party



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact