

# Hands off the SEP! Defend SEP members in Jaffna!

The Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)  
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The Sri Lankan Ministry of Defence (MoD) prevented the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) from holding a public meeting in Jaffna last Sunday as part of the SEP's campaign to demand the unconditional release of all political prisoners. The MoD directed the management of Weerasingham Hall, on the day before the meeting, to deny the venue to the SEP.

The SEP condemns this serious assault on its democratic right to conduct political work in Jaffna, and appeals to workers, youth and intellectuals to oppose the government's blatant acts of political censorship and repression, which are a threat to the democratic rights of all working people.

The MoD-instigated ban came after military personnel confronted two SEP members, Rasendiran Sudarshan and Muthulingam Muruganathan, last Thursday while they were pasting posters for the planned meeting. After being detained and illegally questioned by military intelligence, they were physically attacked by a person associated with the military (see: "Sri Lankan army instigates violence against Jaffna SEP members").

SEP had booked and paid for Weerasingham Hall on January 5 without any objection being raised. By law, no permission was needed from the police or any other authority to hold an indoor meeting.

Yet on Saturday, R. Rajaram, the president of the district cooperative council that controls the hall, told SEP members that the MoD had instructed the council not to allow the meeting. He added that the MoD and the Presidential Task Force for the Northern Province had ordered the council not to hire the hall to

opposition parties and groups supporting "separatism."

In a further sign that a witch hunt is being prepared against the SEP, the party has obtained evidence that the military is gathering information about SEP members in Jaffna. Military intelligence and associated paramilitary groups are blamed for the abduction and disappearance of hundreds of people during the government's protracted communal war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). In recent months, this campaign has been revived in the north.

These developments indicate that the decision to block the SEP meeting was taken by the highest level of the government. The Northern Province is under de-facto military rule. Its governor is a former northern commander of the armed forces, appointed by President Mahinda Rajapakse. The governor and current northern commander participate in major meetings of the province's "civil administration."

The SEP rejects the insinuation that the party supports "separatism." The party has consistently campaigned against the perspective of the defeated LTTE and other groups for a capitalist state of Eelam in the island's north and east. While understanding that Tamil separatism had its genesis in decades of anti-Tamil discrimination promoted by successive Colombo governments, the SEP has insisted that the democratic rights of the Tamil minority can be defended only as part of the struggle by the working class for socialism.

The SEP and its forerunner, the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, have a long record of opposing communal

discrimination against the Tamil minority, as well as the war that was launched in the north and east in 1983. As part of this struggle to unify Sinhala- and Tamil-speaking workers, the SEP demands the unconditional withdrawal of Sri Lankan military forces from the north and east.

SEP vigorously fights for the unity of the Sinhala and Tamil working class to establish a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam. This struggle is based on the program of world socialist revolution. The SEP's campaign for the unconditional release of all political prisoners, most of whom are Tamil youth, is part of the fight to defend the democratic rights of the working people as a whole.

The Rajapakse government is well aware of the SEP's struggle for socialist internationalism. The SEP fielded its general secretary, Wije Dias, as the party's presidential candidate in the 2005 and 2010 elections, exposing the right-wing policies of Rajapakse and the other bourgeois contenders.

Because of this principled struggle, the SEP-RCL has been witch-hunted by successive governments during the 26-year war, and also faced attacks by the LTTE for opposing its separatist cause. In 1998, the LTTE detained four SEP members, including Sudarshan, who was targeted by the military last Thursday. The LTTE released the four after a vigorous international campaign launched by the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Nearly three years have passed since the end of the war. Neither "liberation" nor "peace" has arrived in the north and east, or the south, as promised by the Rajapakse government. In the north and east, the population faces an entrenched military occupation as the government prepares to turn the region into a cheap labour platform for Sri Lankan and international investors.

Amid developing popular unrest against the repressive conditions, the government has become increasingly nervous. In the north and east, it is aware that the Tamil capitalist parties, such as the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), are widely discredited among the masses. In the south, workers, farmers and youth

are resisting the government's imposition of IMF-dictated austerity measures.

At a meeting early this month, Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse declared that while there could be an LTTE resurgence, "the more realistic potential threat to our national security is the possibility that certain groups may strive to create instability... having seen political change accomplished in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt and Libya through uprising."

The government's fear is that the unfolding international struggles will reverberate in Sri Lanka. It confronts an economic quagmire because of the impact of the deepening world economic crisis. Increasingly unable to maintain any democratic pretence, it is turning to the police-state methods developed during the war, with its de facto military rule in the north as a testing ground.

President Rajapakse, the defence secretary and other government leaders are provoking anti-Tamil communalism in a desperate attempt to block unified struggles by the Sinhala and Tamil working class. Their mantra is that "LTTE terrorism" is reviving and "national security" is threatened. During the past few months, the military has stepped up its intimidation of any opposition groups campaigning for the release of political prisoners and an inquiry into disappeared persons.

The SEP does not take lightly the attack on its democratic rights. It will take the fight to defend its rights to the working people with the help of its international co-thinkers. We appeal for support for our campaign to defend our basic political rights, as part of the broader struggle to defend the democratic rights of the working class and oppressed.



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