

Sri Lanka: Military continues intimidation of SEP in Jaffna

Our correspondent
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In a further sign that the government and military are stepping up their efforts to intimidate the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), two naval officers visited the house of a party member last weekend to demand he provide his details. The incident appears to be part of broader efforts by the military to gather information about the SEP.

This campaign of intimidation started after the Ministry of Defence (MoD) prevented an SEP public meeting, scheduled to be held on January 29 at Weerasingham Hall in Jaffna. The SEP had organised the meeting as a part of its campaign for unconditional release of all political prisoners held by the government of President Mahinda Rajapakse.

Three days before the meeting was banned, the military detained and questioned two SEP members in Jaffna who were pasting meeting posters. The interrogation was illegal and a breach of the party's basic democratic rights. The same soldiers later organised a physical attack on the SEP members.

Rasendiran Sudarshan was one of the SEP members questioned. Two navy officers came to his house on the island of Kayts on February 4 to obtain further information about him, his family and the SEP. They took down the national identity card numbers of Sudarshan and his wife, then demanded the names of his children and their schools.

When Sudarshan asked why they were collecting these details, the officers said their superiors wanted the information. Their actions in assuming police powers are illegal. It again demonstrates that Jaffna remains under de-facto military occupation and rule.

There is nothing innocent about this questioning. Over

the past five years, pro-government death squads have been responsible for hundreds of "disappearances" and murders. All the evidence points to the collusion, if not active involvement, of the military, particularly its various intelligence agencies.

In March 2007, SEP member Nadarajah Wimaleshwaran and his friend Sivanathan Mathivathanan disappeared in Velanai. They were last seen approaching a navy checkpoint.

There is evidence that the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) is assisting the military in its information gathering. In asking about the names of the SEP's Jaffna organiser and other members, the two navy officers said the EPDP had told them that Sudarshan was the party's organiser on Kayts.

The EPDP, a partner in the ruling coalition government, has a paramilitary wing that works closely with the security forces. EPDP leader Douglas Devananda is a cabinet minister.

The EPDP has a long history of hostility to the SEP. In March 2000, a local EPDP leader physically threatened Sudarshan and told him to stop his political work. During the 2010 presidential election campaign, three SEP members, including K. Chitrakumar, were set upon by EPDP thugs.

The threats against the SEP come as President Mahinda Rajapakse's government prepares to make further inroads into the living standards of working people by implementing the austerity measures demanded by the International Monetary Fund. The campaign of intimidation against the SEP is a harbinger of broader attacks on the democratic rights of the working class as it

seeks to defend its interests.

SEP members are campaigning in workplaces, universities and working class areas to explain the political significance of the government's actions. The SEP fights on the basis of a socialist perspective for the unity of Sinhala and Tamil workers in defence of democratic rights and their common class interests.

The SEP is holding a public meeting in Colombo to explain these issues. We urge working people and youth to attend our meeting on February 13, at the Public Library Hall Auditorium in Colombo at 4 p.m.

The following statement of the Central Bank Employees Union in Sri Lanka was issued by its president, M.W. Piyaratne, and secretary, P. Premasiri.

We condemn the blocking of the Socialist Equality Party public meeting in Jaffna by the intervention of the ministry of defence. Also we condemn the illegal detention of two SEP members, their questioning by army soldiers and the later attack on them. This is an attack on the democratic rights of the SEP.

The defence ministry banned the SEP meeting which was to be held at Weerasingham Hall in Jaffna. Army personnel attacked SEP members while they were pasting posters for planned meeting.

We also came to know that in order to block the venue for the meeting, the defence ministry falsely accused the SEP of supporting "separatism." Our union is familiar with the politics of the SEP. Several of its members have been in the leadership of this union and have carried out a political struggle for about four decades.

Under their leadership and guidance, our union has boldly defended the rights of workers, youth, rural poor and oppressed Tamils. The SEP took the initiative to defend the rights of Central Bank employees unhesitatingly. Our union opposed the war, the military occupation of the north and east, and the detention of political prisoners because of the intervention of SEP members.

We recall that the SEP (then named the Revolutionary

Communist League) launched a campaign in this country and internationally, including in Australia, to defend workers, the poor and political opponents from the state repression of the United National Party government and fascistic attacks by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna during 1988-1989.

We know that the SEP is completely opposed to the separatism of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The SEP vehemently opposed the LTTE's terrorist attacks on workers and the poor, including the bombing of the Central Bank in 1996.

Sri Lankan governments provoked anti-Tamil racism to divide the working class. Similarly, the LTTE used its separatist project to deepen the communal division among workers. The SEP is fighting to unite Sinhala and Tamil people on a socialist basis and for a workers' and peasants' government.

The government is attacking the democratic rights of the SEP while preparing to impose more economic burdens on workers and poor people. The government will use the repressive methods developed during the war to suppress the struggles of working people that will inevitably erupt against the imposition of these burdens.

Workers, youth and other oppressed people must politically prepare to defend their democratic rights. Opposing the attacks on the SEP is part of this preparation.

We demand hands off the democratic rights of the SEP and an end to the military's threats against SEP members. We fully support the campaign to defend the SEP and its members.



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