

# Sri Lankan SEP condemns defence ministry ban on Jaffna meeting

The Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)  
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In an attack on the basic democratic rights of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), the Ministry of Defence illegally directed the management of Weerasingham Hall, in the northern town of Jaffna, to cancel its booking for an SEP public meeting scheduled for last Sunday. The SEP nevertheless proceeded with the meeting outside the hall. (See: “SEP holds meeting in Jaffna despite military threats”)

The SEP and the International Students for Social Equality (ISSE) organised the public meeting to introduce its perspectives document, *The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party*, published recently in book form in Tamil, Sinhala and English. The Jaffna meeting was part of a series of SEP lectures on the document.

This is the second time that the defence ministry has blocked an SEP meeting in Jaffna. Last January, it directed the Weerasingham Hall management not to provide the hall for the SEP public meeting organised as part of its campaign to demand the unconditional release of all political prisoners.

The SEP had booked the hall for last’s Sunday meeting in December. SEP members had campaigned widely for the lecture in Jaffna and other places, pasted up hundreds of posters and posted an advertisement on the Tamil language site of the *World Socialist Web Site*. No official objection was raised to the meeting from any quarter, until the last moment.

Last Saturday morning, a Weerasingham Hall employee informed the SEP that the management had been instructed by a military officer, Major Jayasooriya from the 513th brigade, to cancel the SEP’s hall booking. When SEP general secretary Wije Dias contacted the relevant brigade, the officer-in-charge told him that no such officer existed and that the brigade had nothing to do with the meeting’s

cancellation.

Weerasingham Hall co-operative council president R. Rajaram then informed the SEP that he had received a defence ministry directive. He said two soldiers had come to his office. “They gave me a CDMA [mobile] telephone and asked me to talk to the defence ministry officer. When I phoned, they asked me not to provide the hall for this meeting,” he said.

Rajaram initially agreed, at the SEP’s request, to provide a written explanation to the party. He reneged on Monday however, saying that if the SEP took legal action, he had no evidence to prove that the defence ministry had issued the directive.

The latest attack on the SEP’s democratic rights takes place amid renewed political repression by the security forces in the Northern Province, particularly on the Jaffna Peninsula, and a government campaign whipping up communal fears about a resurgence of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which was defeated in May 2009.

In November, when Jaffna University students sought to commemorate the victims of the island’s protracted civil war, the military raided the university premises and sabotaged the meeting. The next day, as students attempted to hold a protest, the army attacked them. The police and military later detained about 45 youth, including six students, as “LTTE supporters” and consigned them to the Welikanda military camp “for rehabilitation”. Two students have since been released because of widespread popular opposition to their detention without trial.

Though the LTTE was defeated nearly four years ago, the northern and eastern provinces are still under heavy military occupation. In the north, despite the government’s claims of civilian rule, the military dominates the provincial administration. More military

camps and settlements are being established.

Several paramilitary groups in the North operate in collaboration with the security forces to carry out provocations, spying, abductions and other forms of thuggery. Early last year, two Tamil activists from the Frontline Socialist Party were abducted by military intelligence. There are frequent reports about attacks on newspapers and journalists, and discoveries of dead bodies in the Jaffna Peninsula and other parts of the North.

The SEP is being targeted because of the long and principled struggle that it, and its predecessor, the Revolutionary Communist League, have waged against the war, and in defence of the democratic rights of Tamils. It is the only party to demand the unconditional withdrawal of the security forces from the North and East.

In opposition to the LTTE's Tamil separatist politics, the SEP has fought for the unification of the working class—Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim—to establish a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam as part of a Union of Socialist Republics of South Asia.

Because of this intransigent struggle throughout the 26-year civil war, the RCL and SEP faced repression under successive governments. In March 2007, SEP member Nadaraja Wimalaeshwaran, along with a friend, disappeared in Kayts and has not been seen since. All the evidence points to the navy's involvement in this crime.

The LTTE was also hostile to the party's program. In 1998, the LTTE detained four RCL members in Vanni for engaging in political activities, but was forced to free them after an extensive international campaign by the party and the WSWs.

President Mahinda Rajapakse's government is stirring up anti-Tamil communalism with its bogus claims about the revival of the LTTE precisely because it is nervous about the growing hostility of workers and the rural poor to its austerity measures. The ruling elites in Sri Lanka have long exploited communal politics to divide working people and prop up bourgeois rule. Now a new round of attacks on jobs and essential services, including health and education, is being prepared on the instructions of the International Monetary Fund.

The SEP condemns the Rajapakse government's attack on its democratic rights and calls on workers,

youth and poor to defend the party. We call for a rejection of all forms of nationalism and communalism. Democratic rights and living standards can be defended only through the unified and independent mobilisation of the working class at the head of the oppressed masses, in the fight for a workers' and peasants' government to implement socialist policies.



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