

Sri Lankan SEP campaigns for defence of Edward Snowden

Our correspondent
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Workers and youth in Sri Lanka have responded with great interest to the campaign launched by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and its youth organisation, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), in defence of the US intelligence whistleblower Edward Snowden.

The former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor is being persecuted by the Obama administration for his exposure of the NSA's massive electronic surveillance spy operation against the people of America and the world. Snowden remains trapped in a Moscow airport transit area, denied political asylum as a result of Washington's bullying and intimidation of other countries.

The campaign in Sri Lanka is part of the initiative taken by the International Committee of the Fourth International and the *World Socialist Web Site* to defend Snowden. The SEP and the IYSSE have called a public meeting on July 12 in the Colombo Library Auditorium and issued a statement demanding an end to the Obama administration's witchhunt for workers and youth to sign.

SEP and IYSSE members spoke to workers, youth and students at Colombo harbour, railway station, residential areas and universities this week. Hundreds signed the statement and several bought tickets for the meeting. Campaigners also distributed a WSWs statement, "Defend Edward Snowden," as a leaflet in Sinhala and Tamil languages.

The SEP statement declared: "Edward Snowden is a direct target of a massive witch-hunt by the Obama administration, the US political establishment and the capitalist media. Snowden has become the target of this persecution because he took the courageous step of revealing the secret and illegal surveillance operations of the US National Security Agency directed at millions of people in the United States and around the world... we

denounce the vicious actions of the Obama administration and the American imperialism it represents, and demand the witch-hunt be stopped immediately."

Malsha, a Sri Jayawardenepura University student, commented: "Because Obama is black, I thought he would address the grievances of ordinary Americans. In fact, he mainly promised a 'change of course' during his first presidential campaign in 2008. In Sri Lanka, I expected that President Mahinda Rajapakse would address our issues after the end of the civil war [against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam]. That did not happen. Obama has shattered our hopes. Rajapakse also did the same. Yes, Snowden should be defended, irrespective of his nationality."

Reflecting the confusion created by misleading Sri Lankan media reports, Nivanthi, another Sri Jayawardenepura University student, believed that Russia was going to grant asylum to Snowden. Campaigners explained that the Russian President Vladimir Putin had asked Snowden to stop revealing US spying secrets if he were to be granted asylum.

"If Snowden did not reveal those secrets, he could well have remained in America," Nivanthi responded sarcastically. "So what use is Russian political asylum?" A SEP member explained that far as democratic rights are concerned, the ruling classes around the world are unanimous in suppressing them.

Another student initially asked: "Why are you campaigning for Snowden? I think he has done his job incorrectly. Does he not deserve it [punishment]?"

WSWS correspondents explained why Snowden came out against the US establishment. At first, he genuinely believed that the so-called war on terror was aimed at defeating terrorism and establishing democracy, but later became disillusioned because of the American military's conduct in Afghanistan and Iraq. The student then expressed sympathy for the defence campaign.

In front of the Colombo harbour gate, nearly a hundred workers and youth signed the statement and engaged in discussion. Many had not heard about Snowden. Even though they were hurrying to catch overcrowded busses and trains, they waited to sign the statement after being told that Snowden was threatened by the Obama government. One young man promised to attend the public meeting, noting that no one else was campaigning for Snowden's defence in Sri Lanka.

A worker told the WWS: "I know this person [Snowden] is being hunted by the American government. The airplane flying the Bolivian president was forced to land last week because of suspicion that Snowden was traveling inside. This is not good. America is trying to subjugate the whole world. That is why they are spying."

One young man asked: "What is the significance of signing a statement for an American citizen in Sri Lanka?" SEP members explained that the events unfolding over Snowden's revelations were of an international scope. His revelations showed the real nature of American capitalism and the Obama administration, and what they were doing against the US and international working class and oppressed masses. After the discussion, the young man signed the statement.

The Sri Lankan media has published extremely limited and distorted articles about Snowden and the Obama administration's wrath toward him. As a result, most workers and youth know little or nothing about him. What is striking about the response to the SEP-IYSSE campaign, however, is the growing interest in international issues, particularly the increasingly repressive activities of US imperialism, among working people and students.

We urge workers, youth and intellectuals to attend the public meeting organised by the SEP and IYSSE this Friday July 12 at the Public Library Auditorium in central Colombo at 4 pm.



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