

Sri Lankan SEP holds meeting in defence of Snowden

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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka and its youth organisation, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), held a public meeting on July 12 in Colombo in defence of Edward Snowden. Because of his exposure of the vast surveillance operations of the US intelligence agencies, notably the National Security Agency (NSA), Snowden is being witch-hunted by the Obama administration.

As part of an international initiative by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the *World Socialist Web Site*, SEP and IYSSE members and supporters campaigned among workers, youth and students at Colombo harbour, the main railway station, residential areas, market places and universities. Hundreds of workers and youth signed a statement demanding an end to the US government's persecution of Snowden.

Workers, youth and housewives attended the public meeting from Colombo and other parts of the country.

Chairing the meeting, SEP Political Committee member Panini Wijesiriwardane outlined reasons that impelled Snowden to expose the US spying operations to the world. The policies of the US political establishment, particularly its wars abroad and attacks on democratic rights at home, changed the consciousness of American people, the speaker explained.

"An entire generation of youth embodied by Snowden has decided that things should be otherwise. The Obama administration clearly recognises this and is trying to punish him in order to warn other young people that if they attempt to criticise its policies, they will face the worst consequences," Wijesiriwardane said.

Kapila Fernando, the IYSSE convener in Sri Lanka, said Snowden's courageous stand showed that a

growing number of American workers and youth understood that the declared aims of the "war on terror"—defeating terrorism and establishing democracy—were fraudulent pretexts for militarism and the building of a police-state apparatus.

"Only the SEP and the WSWs have analysed the situation now unfolding," Fernando said. He explained that during the past 10 years, the US government had spent \$6 trillion on the Iraq war, at an enormous social cost, both in the US and Iraq. The devastation of an entire society in Iraq, which the WSWs has characterised as sociocide, transformed the way people in the US and around the world regard the United States government.

The final speaker, SEP Political Committee member K. Ratnayake, said the meeting was an internationally important event. Articles had been published by the WSWs on Snowden's case on a daily basis because of its significance for the world working class. "Our fight for Snowden's defence is an integral part of the struggle against imperialism and its war drive," he said. "In our campaigns we have seen an interest among workers and youth, keen to understand what actually is taking place."

Ratnayake said that Snowden's revelations had opened a Pandora's box, exposing how the European powers, Australia, India and other countries, and also giant corporations like Microsoft, collaborated in the US National Security Agency surveillance operations. "The NSA premises are like a giant city employing 40,000 people," he commented. "What has been established is the infrastructure for a police-state." In March this year alone, 90 billion pieces of data were collected. "This is a serious attack on democratic rights, violating the US constitution and the Bill of Rights," he said.

Ratnayake quoted from the book, *The American Democracy*, by David North, the chairman of the WSWs International Editorial Board and the SEP in the US, which pointed out that “the very advanced stage of bourgeois democratic decrepitude is inextricably bound up with the metastatic spread of American imperialism.” That analysis, made in 2004, explained how the erosion of fundamental democratic rights was connected to American capitalism’s economic crisis and turn to militarism to offset its decline.

Ratnayake said: “Further colossal changes have taken place since this analysis. US imperialism is increasingly relying on anti-democratic methods of rule. Hence the gangster methods employed against Snowden.” He continued: “A vast social polarisation has taken place in American society, with which democracy is incompatible. On the one side are the financial oligarchy and corporations, and on the other are the working class and lower middle class. Fully 50 percent of national income is controlled by the top 10 percent of the society.”

The speaker examined the role of the ruling elites in India and Sri Lanka, drawing attention to their own development of authoritarian measures. He noted Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s declaration that India saw no need to grant Snowden asylum. The Indian government knew for years that the US was spying on it, Ratnayake said, and also developed its own surveillance operation, the Central Monitoring System, covering millions of telephone and Internet users in the country.

In Sri Lanka, the government’s attacks on democratic rights were relentless. “This is a country where the ruling class waged a 30-year communal war against the Tamil minority and developed police state methods,” Ratnayake observed.

Summing up, the speaker explained that basic democratic rights could be defended only by overthrowing the capitalist system and establishing a socialist society. Ratnayake said the international working class was the only force that could lead that struggle. He urged members of the audience to join the SEP and IYSSE in order to build such a global working class movement.

The meeting unanimously adopted a resolution entitled “Stop the witch-hunt against Edward

Snowden!” Demanding an immediate end to the threat to Snowden, it declared: “The attack on Snowden is bound up with the destruction of other democratic rights. We call on workers, youth and intellectuals to come forward to struggle to defeat those attacks and secure democratic rights. That struggle can only go forward on the basis of a socialist perspective to bring the working class to political power overthrowing crisis-ridden capitalism, the source of war and attacks on democratic rights.”

Ratnasiri Paranavithana, an artist who attended the meeting, told the WSWs: “His [Snowden’s] revelations provide an impulse to those who fight for socialism in this era. It is a particular incident of that kind. Snowden, as well as Julian Assange, has become a target of victimisation because he exposed information on imperialism’s machinations.

“I firmly believe that the world can be made an optimistic place, especially for the younger generation, only through overthrowing capitalism and establishing socialism. Defending Snowden is an immediate necessity.”



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