

Students, workers and fishermen in northern Sri Lanka defend Snowden

Our correspondents
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Students, intellectuals, workers and fishermen in Sri Lanka's northern province have responded enthusiastically to the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) campaign in defence of National Security Agency (NSA) whistleblower Edward Snowden.

Snowden has been charged with espionage by the US government, which is demanding his extradition to the United States. His life is in danger because Washington is determined to silence him. Condemned by the Obama administration for exposing the NSA's massive illegal spying program on people in the US and around the world, Snowden has been trapped in the transit area of the Moscow Sheremetyevo Airport for more than a month.

The media in northern Sri Lanka, including the Tamil language press, maintain a silence on the persecution of Snowden. But SEP members and supporters have distributed thousands of leaflets in Jaffna calling on workers and youth to come forward to defend him.

As a part of the campaign, SEP members spoke to students, teachers and workers at Jaffna University, many of whom signed a statement condemning the witch hunt against Snowden. The response indicated a growing interest among workers and youths in international political issues, despite the efforts of the local political establishment to confine them to nationalistic and communal politics.

Under successive Sri Lankan governments, the northern province was ravaged by three decades of brutal communal war that ended in 2009 with the defeat of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Together with the LTTE, Tamil bourgeois politicians responded to the Sinhala supremacism of their Colombo counterparts by promoting Tamil communalism.

SEP members came across people who had never

heard of Snowden and his plight. However after an explanation, they did not hesitate to convey their appreciation for his courageous actions and sign the statement to defend him.

A university student said: "When I heard about Snowden I thought he had done an anti-national activity and he was a traitor. But after speaking with you, I realised that Obama is the person who is acting illegally. When we think that US is not only spying on Americans but on people all over the world, it seems that we have no privacy at all. It seems to me that US government operates in an anti-democratic manner on a daily basis."

A university employee said he supported the SEP campaign "because the SEP raises its voice against injustice all over the world." He added: "This injustice is taking place every corner of the world. I wonder why the Tamil organisations are expecting a solution from this type of anti-democratic government to the Tamil people's problems." He was referring to the fact that Tamil parties appeal to the US and other major powers for support.

One lecturer commented: "There are so many incidents taking place particularly against the Tamil people. Why are you campaigning over something that took place somewhere else?" But after SEP members explained that the working class was an international class and had to fight against the violation of democratic rights around the world, the lecturer signed the statement.

A third year arts faculty student said: "Julian Assange also did the same thing. The US government is secretly monitoring the personal matters of the world's population in an ugly and indecent manner. Not only that, its murderous intention toward Snowden for the exposure [of the spying] should be condemned."

A female student said: “This anti-democratic act of the US should be condemned. We all are extending our support to your campaign to defend Snowden.”

A non-academic university employee referred to his experience of trade union betrayals of previous wages struggles. “Snowden is a person who should be defended. But to defend him this struggle should continue without abandoning it half way, as happened with our trade union struggles. This struggle should not be isolated and all should support it. That is the only way to defend Snowden.”

Another student commented said Snowden had done the correct thing. “He provided valuable information for people around the world. But is he not a traitor to his own government?”

She changed her mind, however, after SEP members pointed out that the US government was acting against the US constitution in secretly monitoring and spying on the American people.

At Thampaatti village in Kayts, a group of young fishermen expressed their agreement with the campaign after reading the SEP leaflet. They said: “We completely agree in opposing the anti-democratic activities of tapping the communications of people by the US.”

A retired teacher from Puliyanhoodal village exclaimed: “How much worse can the anti-democratic activities of the US get?” He wanted to know whether the Obama administration would take any notice of the SEP campaign. But after SEP members explained that the party’s campaign was aimed at uniting the working class to defend democratic rights, not pleading to Obama, he signed the statement.

A building worker, who had been “rehabilitated” in a government detention camp after being incarcerated as a LTTE suspect, said: “Snowden’s brave exposure of the anti-democratic activities of the US should be welcomed.”



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