

Support grows for SEP (Sri Lanka) defence campaign

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Around 135 people from Sri Lanka, India, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, Norway and Canada have added their names to an online petition demanding Defence Secretary, Major General Kamal Gunaratne, stop the military-police harassment of Socialist Equality Party (SEP) candidates in the northern Jaffna district during this month's general election.

More than 100 workers, fishermen, farmers, students and youth signed the petition at SEP public campaigns in the run-up to the election. Additional letters have been emailed to the defence secretary calling for a halt to the anti-democratic attacks.

The petitions and letter-writing campaign was initiated by the SEP following state harassment of party candidates in the Jaffna district. Military intelligence officers visited the homes of SEP candidates—Rasenthiram Sutharsan in Kayts, Paramu Thirugnanasambanthar at Karainagar and Rajaratnam Rajavel in Jaffna—on May 28, June 16 and 23, respectively.

The officers demanded the candidates provide personal information and attempted to photograph them in violation of their democratic rights. When challenged by the candidates, who pointed out the illegality of their actions, the officers claimed they had been sent by their superiors, indicating that it was organised and authorised by the top layers of the government.

On June 20, SEP General Secretary Wije Dias wrote to the defence secretary, Kamal Gunaratne, opposing the military questioning of SEP candidates. On June 30, the SEP launched a public defence campaign with a statement entitled “Hands off the Sri Lankan Trotskyists.”

The defence secretary and government authorities

ignored the SEP's demands and the provocations continued. On July 1, a group of police intelligence officers, working under the defence ministry, visited the home of another SEP candidate—Rajaratnam Thirugnanavel—in Kiranchi, Poonakary on July 1. A couple of days later they also demanded SEP candidate Rajaratnam Balagowri visit the police station. She refused.

The SEP continues to receive support from workers and youth in Sri Lanka and internationally. We publish below some of the most recent responses.

Adding his name to the online petition, **Malcolm Day** from Bedford in the UK wrote: “I fully agree with the statement made by the SEP in Sri Lanka demanding a stop to this undemocratic harassment of the SEP.” **Hans Steltner** from Lillehammer, Norway said: “I strongly condemn the military harassment of Socialist Equality Party candidates in Jaffna.” **M. Dilaxshan** from Jaffna wrote: “I am signing [the petition] because SEP members all around the world, including in Sri Lanka, are fighting to educate the international working class that this capitalist system is dangerous to the working class and the entire planet.”

More than 60 fishermen, farmers and daily wage workers voiced their anger over the military-police harassment and signed the petition during campaigns conducted by SEP members in Karainagar and Kayts in the Jaffna district. Giving voice to sentiments of many of the signatories, one fisherman said: “I support you and all workers must support this campaign. Everyone has the right to be involved in politics. No one can stop this.”

The following letters were also recently sent to government authorities. **PW**, an acclaimed Sri Lankan film director, wrote: “The Secretary of the Socialist Equality Party, Mr. Wije Dias has disclosed in a press

briefing that Messrs. Rasenthiram Sutharsan, Paramuthirugnana Sampanthar, Rajaratnam Rajavel, candidates of the said party contesting the Jaffna peninsula in the parliamentary elections due to be held on August 5, has been subjected to questioning by the military intelligence without having any legal rights to do so.

“This harassment is intimidation of candidates involved in politics in the North. It goes without saying that such militaristic interventions are inimical to the democratic rights of citizens. Therefore, I request that the right of the candidates of the Socialist Equality Party to contest the elections and engage in politics be assured.” **BK**, a well-known Sri Lankan writer and poet, wrote: “The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is a legitimate, recognised political party. It is a well-known fact that the SEP has been engaged in legitimate politics in Sri Lanka, fighting for its socialist program, for decades.

“The SEP put forward candidates for Colombo, Nuwara Eliya and Jaffna during the last General Election. It has been reported that military intelligence and the police have demanded information on Messrs. Rasenthiram Sutharsan, Paramuthirugnana Sampanthar, and Rajaratnam Rajavel who were SEP candidates for the District of Jaffna.

“Intimidation and harassment of these election candidates is an infringement of their democratic rights. It is a usurpation of their political rights. Attempting to distance Tamil youth from the democratic stream by intimidation through the collection of information on them cannot be condoned. I strongly condemn these actions against SEP members.”

Ignoring these concerns, the Rajapakse government, under bogus claims of fighting “drugs and crime” and alleged “terrorist” activities by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, stepped up military and police searches, patrols and other operations in the northern region during the election.

Having now obtained an overwhelming parliamentary majority, President Gotabhaya Rajapakse’s ruling Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna is making preparations for a presidential dictatorship based on the military.

The SEP has been targeted because of its unrelenting fight in defence of democratic rights and against capitalist repression. It fights to organise the working class and rural masses across all communal

demarcations—Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and others—for the establishment of a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam.

We appeal to workers, youth and all those who uphold civil liberties to support the SEP’s campaign against military harassment, which is part of the broader struggle to defend the democratic rights of all working people.

Your protest letters should be sent to the Secretary of the Ministry of Defence, with copies sent to the Chairman of the Election Commission and the Socialist Equality Party.

The Secretary of the Ministry of Defence

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Chairman of the Election Commission

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To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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