

Sri Lankan SEP thanks those who supported its defence campaign

The Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
1 September 2020

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka has decided to conclude the defence campaign it conducted over the past two months to demand the military end its harassment of the party's Northern District candidates in the August 5 general elections. The SEP Political Committee thanks all those, nationally and internationally, who supported this important campaign.

On June 30, the SEP issued the following statement, "Hands off the Sri Lankan Trotskyists: SEP demands military stops harassing its election candidates in Jaffna" and appealed for urgent support to expose and thwart the military's actions.

In response readers and supporters of the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS)—workers, youth, intellectuals, artists—sent dozens of letters to the defence secretary, retired Major General, Kamal Gunaratne demanding the military stop its harassment SEP members. About 250 people from countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, Norway and Canada signed an SEP online petition. In Sri Lanka, port, railway and irrigation workers, as well as fishermen, farmers, students and youth, also signed petitions.

The campaign was launched after military intelligence officers visited SEP candidates Rasenthiram Sutharsan in Kayts, Paramu Thirugnanasambanthar at Karainagar and Rajaratnam Rajavel in Jaffna, on May 28, June 16 and 23, respectively. Claiming that they had been sent by their superiors, the officers demanded the personal information of the SEP candidates. They even attempted to photograph Rajavel.

On July 1, police intelligence officers visited the home of another SEP candidate, Rajaratnam Thirugnanavel in Kiranchi, Poonakary, to gather information. A few days later, police ordered Rajaratnam Balagowri to visit their police station.

On June 20, SEP General Secretary Wije Dias wrote to defence secretary Kamal Gunaratne condemning these

anti-democratic actions and demanding answers to the following questions: who instigated and authorised the questioning of SEP members, and what is the purpose of the military collecting these personal details. Defence Secretary Gunaratne maintained a stony silence, indicating the government's support for the political witch hunt.

In response to the SEP's campaign, but without naming the party, the Sri Lankan Army commander Shavendra Silva told the press in early July that Tamil politicians and candidates "have been making false allegations against the soldiers without any evidence."

Silva made this unsubstantiated claim, ignoring the detailed information that had been provided by SEP General Secretary Dias and in the party statement. At the same time, Silva issued a veiled threat against all election candidates in the North, declaring, "Tamil politicians must act responsibly."

In response to Dias's letter, which was copied to the chairman of the Election Commission, two officers from its Jaffna bureau visited SEP candidates Thirugnanasambanthar, Rajavel and Sutharsan and recorded their statements. There has been no indication, however, that the election office took up the matter with the military.

On the surface, it appears that military intelligence has not continued its actions. But the SEP is well aware of how the military acts to suppress the democratic rights of the masses and their organisations. The working class must be on guard.

The SEP was singled out for this state harassment because of its ongoing campaign for the withdrawal of the military from the North and East and the party's determined struggle to unite Sinhala-Tamil-Muslim workers for a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam as a part of the broader struggle for socialism in South Asia and internationally.

The SEP, and its forerunner the Revolutionary Communist League, were alone in consistently opposing the separatist program of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), while unswervingly opposing Colombo's brutal communalist war. The war against the LTTE ended in May 2009 with the killing of tens of thousands of Tamil civilians and other war crimes.

The SEP defence campaign against the military harassment of our candidates was part of its broader struggle to defend the democratic rights of all working people. Our intervention via the WSWs was to make workers, youth and all those who cherish democratic rights aware of the dangerous political situation developing in Sri Lanka and internationally.

Fearful of the growing resistance of the working class to the escalating government attacks on social and democratic rights, now being accelerated amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the ruling classes everywhere are turning towards dictatorial and fascistic forms of rule.

After consolidating its rule with a large parliamentary majority in the August 5 general elections, President Gotabhaya Rajapakse's government is pushing for constitutional amendments to increase his executive powers and is militarising his administration. The opposition parties—the United National Party, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, Samagi Jana Balavegaya and the Tamil National Alliance—have not opposed these moves.

Against this backdrop, workers and youth must seriously study the SEP's August 25 statement in which we said:

“The Socialist Equality Party warns workers and youth that they face real dangers as the Rajapakse government prepares an all-out offensive against the social and democratic rights of working people. It will not hesitate to use brute force and police-state measures to crush any opposition. The working class must prepare to fight against this danger with its own independent class strategy.”



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