Sri Lankan SEP condemns police raids on Frontline Socialist Party

Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
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Sri Lankan government of President Ranil Wickremesinghe intensified its witch hunting of anti-government protesters last week with police raids on the head office of the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) in Nugegoda in suburban Colombo.

According to FSP education secretary Pubudu Jayagoda, a team of police, including 10 officers in civilian clothes and one other in uniform, raided the party's office on Friday at about 7.30 am. Party members present opposed any search of the premises and asked for a search warrant. The police did not respond or even identify which police station they were from but forcibly entered the premises, searched party material, ransacked bookshelves and left.

At 8.10 am, a second police team of about 30 uniformed officers arrived at the FSP office. They claimed to be from the nearby Mirihana police station and said they were searching for Wasantha Mudalige, convener of the Inter-University Student Federation (IUSF).

When party members asked for a search warrant, police showed a magistrates' court arrest warrant for Mudalige who was active amongst the anti-government protesters occupying the Galle Face Green. Again, the police ignored the opposition of FSP members, searched the premises and then left.

The police raids are a blatant violation of democratic rights of the FSP and a warning to the Sri Lankan working class as a whole. They are part of an intensifying wave of repression unleashed by President Wickremesinghe's government aimed at crushing all anti-government opposition.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP), notwithstanding its fundamental and well-known political differences with the pseudo-left FSP, opposes and condemns Wickremesinghe's anti-democratic and repressive police raids against this organisation.

On being appointed acting president, Wickremesinghe, a right-wing, pro-US stooge, formally declared a state of emergency on July 17, giving himself the power to deploy the military to arbitrarily arrest and detain people, suppress protests, proscribe organisations, search private property and impose censorship.

His first act after being undemocratically installed as president by the discredited Sri Lanka parliament, was to sanction a violent police-military operation on July 22 to evict anti-government protesters from the Presidential Secretariat. The security forces attacked and injured many protesters and arrested nine. Those arrested were bailed out by a magistrate that evening amid widespread popular outrage.

These attacks have continued with the arrest of about two dozen people, including some of those who led the months of protests at Galle Face Green demanding former President Gotabhaya Rajapakse and his government to resign. After Rajapakse fled the country, demonstrators changed their slogan to "Ranil go home."

The police are now collecting "evidence"—CCTV footage, photos and fingerprints at locations occupied by protesters, including the Presidential Palace, Prime Minister's Official Residence and the Presidential Secretariat—in preparation for mass arrests. Fingerprints have been sent to the international airport to arrest anyone attempting to leave the country. Photos of "suspects" have been published in the media with calls for more information to be given to the police.

Last weekend, the *Sunday Times* quoted an unnamed senior government official, who said that "the government is considering the proscription of any groups, organisations or political parties that engage in acts of violence, use of undemocratic methods to try to seize power or take control of state buildings."

The newspaper also reported that the ministry of public security had "sought legal advice on the possibility of proscribing any organisation or political party that aids or abets such activities."

In order to justify its escalating repression, Wickremesinghe and government members have stepped up their vile slanders against anti-government protesters.

Addressing government MPs and supporters in Kandy on Saturday, Wickremesinghe declared: "We are dealing with

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fascist terrorism at the moment. Under the guise of a protest, many groups of people set fire to houses and vehicles and destroyed or stole state property."

What a filthy insinuation! It is Wickremesinghe and his government, along with the former Rajapakse regime, which have unleashed police-military attacks on protesting workers, youth and the rural poor demanding essentials—food, medicine and fuel—and other basic requirements of life.

As he steps up state repression, Wickremesinghe is attempting to finalise an International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout deal and its associated austerity measures, including wage and pension cuts and mass public sector job destruction.

In an effort to garner political legitimacy for these draconian measures, Wickremesinghe is seeking to establish an all-party government. On Friday, he wrote to all opposition parliamentarians, declaring that "a program needs to be implemented with the participation of all political parties represented in parliament, expert groups, civil society organisations and all related parties to successfully overcome the challenges before us."

Several opposition parties, including the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, have responded favourably. The Tamil National Alliance and Samagi Jana Balavegaya have signalled they are ready to negotiate on the formation of an all-party interim government. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna has called for a snap general election to impose "political stability" and a regime to "revive" the economy.

Irrespective of their tactical differences, these parties all agree on the implementation of the IMF austerity program and the restoration of "political stability"—i.e., the suppression of all mass social opposition to the catastrophic, and worsening, social conditions facing the Sri Lankan masses.

While condemning the police raids on the FSP, the SEP warns that the pseudo-left party has no fundamental differences with the call for all-party interim government and has close ties with the various opposition parties.

Addressing a press conference following the police raids, FSP leader Pubudu Jayagoda declared that no major country or institution had assisted Sri Lanka because the Wickremesinghe government was not "a legitimate government…[and] has no plan" and "is trying to use military power to stay in."

In other words, the FSP is opposed to the Wickremesinghe government but not its regressive economic and social program that will greatly intensify the hardships facing workers and the masses. Its opposition to Wickremesinghe is that it lacks the legitimacy and international standing to implement the austerity program required to get the "assistance" of the IMF and major powers.

FSP fosters the illusion that a capitalist interim government formed with the opposition parties and without the widely detested Wickremesinghe can be pressured for concessions.

No amount of protests or appeals to the Wickremesinghe regime, or any future interim government, will resolve life and death issues facing the working class and rural masses, let alone defend democratic rights.

What is urgently required is the independent mobilisation of the working class rallying the support of the rural poor on a revolutionary socialist program. This is outlined in the SEP's July 20 statement, "For a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses!" Such a congress, it says, is "a revolutionary political alternative to the reactionary capitalist interim government being set up by the discredited parliamentary cronies of Gotabhaya Rajapakse and Ranil Wickremesinghe."

In order to build support for such a congress, we call on workers and rural masses to build their own action committees, independent of all capitalist parties and trade unions, in every workplace, plantation, neighbourhood and rural area to fight for their class interests. Such action committees will provide means to defend the democratic rights of the masses.

At the same time, we say that genuine democratic rights can only be won by fighting for socialist demands, including the nationalisation of banks, major companies and plantations under democratic control of workers, and the seizure of power from the corrupt and venal ruling elites.

The fight for a "Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses" will provide the basis to take forward the struggle for a workers' and peasants' government. The SEP calls upon workers and youth to take up this political battle as part of the broader fight for socialism in South Asia and internationally.

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