

Oppose JVP trade union thuggery against SEP's fight to mobilise Sri Lankan workers against IMF austerity

Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
14 July 2023

In recent months, bureaucrats from trade unions affiliated to the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) in Sri Lanka have been trying to prevent the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) exercising its democratic right to mobilise workers against the International Monetary Fund (IMF) austerity measures being imposed by President Ranil Wickremesinghe's government.

The actions of these trade union bureaucrats are in line with the political program of the communalist JVP, which is bidding for political power, claiming it is the only party capable of saving the Sri Lankan capitalist economy. The JVP unions are attempting to divert rising working-class opposition to the IMF-dictated measures into support for a future government of National People's Power, the JVP's front organisation.

Desperate to block SEP discussions with workers, JVP trade union thugs have threatened its campaigners, used physical violence and snatched away articles and leaflets from party campaigners on numerous occasions.

On Monday, SEP members distributed a leaflet entitled, "Oppose Sri Lankan government's privatisation of state enterprises! Build workers' action committees to fight for jobs and wages!" at Colombo Port's main entrance near Khan Clock Tower. It followed a rally by the port trade union alliance called "Movement against Looting of EPF and ETF [pension funds]."

Suddenly trade union thugs snatched hundreds of leaflets from one campaigner and manhandled another while threatening him with foul language. The SEP, with the support of its contacts at the Colombo Port, has identified one of the thugs as a member of the JVP and its union.

The central organisation in the port union alliance is the All Ceylon Port Workers Union, headed by JVP leader Niroshan Gorakana, and which includes the Independent Port Employees' Union and the Port and Dock Workers' Union. Leaders of these unions silently watched the attack on SEP members, allowing it to proceed.

Later their social media collaborators, in a filthy attempt to tarnish the SEP, posted a video of the incident on YouTube with the caption, "Ranil's [President Wickremesinghe] group sent to sabotage the protest campaign."

The evening news on Sirasa TV, one of Sri Lanka's main television networks, however, reported the Khan Clock Tower incident and featured SEP member S.K. Keerthi explaining the anti-democratic actions of the union thugs.

On June 20, an SEP team was distributing leaflets at the gates of Sri Lanka Telecom in Colombo. Telecom is one of the state enterprises targeted by the government for urgent privatisation. Several JVP trade union officials threatened SEP members, and declared, "[D]on't distribute your leaflets criticising trade union leaders here."

SEP team members challenged the union officials, making clear that they had a democratic right to campaign among the telecom employees. Unable to win support from Telecom employees, the officials retreated.

On February 8, Niroshan Gorakana seized SEP leaflets and physically assaulted one of our team members outside the Fort Railway Station in Colombo. SEP team members were speaking to workers from Colombo Port and the National Water Supplies and Drainage Board following a protest demonstration opposing the government's austerity measures.

Gorakana threatened campaigners saying the SEP leaflets could not be distributed because they contained criticisms of the trade unions. Gorakana, however, had to retreat because he could not mobilise any workers against the SEP members who continued their campaign. Some workers came forward, condemning the JVP union leader's action as anti-democratic.

The SEP leaflet taken by union thugs on Monday was first published on the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) to campaign for a July 6 public meeting to discuss the program needed to fight the Wickremesinghe regime's attacks on social and democratic rights. It explained: "The unions and

the fake left were bitterly opposed to the SEP's campaign for the independent mobilisation of the working class, with the backing of the rural poor, on a socialist program to fight against the government austerity.

“As a result of the treachery of the trade unions, the ruling class, following Rajapakse's ouster (by mass uprising in April–July 2022), was able to install the right-wing Ranil Wickremesinghe, who lacks any significant popular support, as president through an anti-democratic vote in parliament.”

The SEP calls on the working class and youth to condemn the thuggish actions of JVP union bureaucrats and defend our democratic rights.

The union bureaucracy is particularly nervous about the SEP's call for action committees in workplaces and every major economic centre, independent of capitalist parties and the trade unions. They fear this will resonate among workers, whose hostility is rising against the trade unions over their repeated betrayals. Already in several workplaces, including at Colombo Port, some workers have responded to the SEP and formed action committees.

While the trade unions, including those affiliated to the JVP, have called protests in response to the rising working-class opposition to Colombo's attacks, these events are tightly restricted, isolated and always involve futile appeals to the government and management.

The JVP-affiliated trade unions, for example, recently wrote to the Central Bank governor appealing for a discussion about pension fund cuts. The governor is centrally involved in implementing the brutal austerity measures of the government and international capital.

The JVP is thoroughly hostile to the SEP, and its predecessor the Revolutionary Communist League, because they have consistently exposed its reactionary politics.

JVP leader Anura Kumara Disanayake, who publicly declared that going to the IMF was “inevitable,” is concerned that Wickremesinghe will not be able to impose the austerity measures. Like the Samagi Jana Balawegaya, the main parliamentary opposition party, the JVP fears that the discredited Wickremesinghe regime will not be able to contain the mass opposition that poses a threat to bourgeois rule.

The JVP emerged in late 1960s based on a toxic mixture of Maoism, Castroism and Sinhala patriotism. When its radical pretenses were undermined by the development of global capitalism and the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union, the JVP, like other nationalist organisations globally, transformed itself into a party of the bourgeois establishment.

The JVP, moreover, was an ardent supporter of Colombo's bloody 26-year anti-Tamil communal war which began in 1983 against the separatist Liberation Tigers of

Tamil Eelam. Between 1987 and 1990 in the anti-Indian chauvinist campaign, the JVP gunmen killed three SEP/RCL members because our party fought for the unity of the working class across ethnic lines on the basis of international socialist policies.

Over the past three decades the JVP has aligned itself with one or another capitalist party. In 2004, it joined President Chandrika Kumaratunga's government, accepting four ministerial positions. During the 2015 presidential elections, the JVP—along with Wickremesinghe's United National Party—backed the installation of Maithripala Sirisena as president who shifted foreign policy sharply towards US imperialism.

The SEP urges workers to organise independent action committees in their workplaces, factories, plantations and neighborhoods to fight the government's austerity measures. There is no room for the trade union bureaucrats and capitalist politicians in these action committees.

The SEP calls for the building of a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses and based on action committee delegates that will facilitate a political fight for a workers' and peasants' government based on international socialist program.

By chaining workers to Sri Lankan capitalism, the JVP and the trade unions have created the political conditions for Wickremesinghe and his government to step up its ruthless social attacks on the working class and the poor. The SEP is the only party that advances a revolutionary alternative to this big business program. We urge workers and youth to join this party and take up this fight.



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