

British Trotskyists condemn pro-government thug attack on Sri Lankan SEP members

Our reporters

13 December 2023

Protest letters are flowing into the relevant Sri Lankan authorities from workers, students, youth and their organisations around world, condemning the brutal attack on two members of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka by pro-government thugs. The letters call for maximum legal action to be taken against the culprits by Sri Lankan legal authorities.

SEP members Dehin Wasantha and Lakshman Fernando were violently attacked by Indika Perera and Suranga Piyawardena, the president and secretary of the Moratuwa university branch of the Podujana Pragathishile Sevaka Sangamaya (PPSS) on November 30. The PPSS is affiliated to the ruling Sri Lankan Podujana Peramuna.

Wasantha and Fernando were campaigning with several other party members at the rear gate of the university for SEP public meetings on the Centenary of Trotskyism addressed by SEP (US) National Secretary Joseph Kishore.

The SEP in Sri Lanka has issued a statement and launched a campaign to mobilise national and international support to oppose this thuggery and to “defend our party’s democratic rights to freely engage in its political activities.”

We are publishing below letters sent by the British SEP’s national secretary and assistant national secretary and one of the party’s local branches.

SEP in Britain:

The Socialist Equality Party in Britain denounces the violent attack on two members of our sister party in Sri Lanka, Dehin Wasantha and Lakshman Fernando, by Indika Perera and Suranga Piyawardena, president and secretary of the Podujana Pragathishili Sevaka Sangamaya (PPSS) branch in Moratuwa University.

The November 30 assault, using wooden clubs, resulted in serious injuries for Wasantha, who suffered two fractured fingers, while Lakshman was badly bruised and was left with a neck injury. The attack could have proved fatal, had Wasantha not thwarted an attempt to hit him on the head.

Every member of the Socialist Equality Party was outraged by this despicable and cowardly act of political thuggery, carried out to prevent a campaign for a meeting marking the centenary of the Trotskyist movement to be addressed by the noted American socialist leader Joseph Kishore. They noted

that the PPSS is affiliated to the ruling Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna.

All members asked me to send a message of concern and solidarity to their comrades Wasantha and Lakshman.

Most of all they insisted that action be taken.

The SEP demands of Attorney General Mr. Sanjay Rajaratnam that Indika Perera and Suranga Piyawardena are brought to trial at the earliest opportunity and subjected to the full force of the law.

We call on Senior Professor N.D. Gunwaedena, Vice Chancellor, University of Moratuwa, to personally condemn this brutal attack, launch an immediate and impartial investigation into the incident, which was filmed, and take swift and appropriate disciplinary action against the perpetrators.

We also demand that the university authorities do everything in their power to uphold the democratic right of the SEP to campaign on campus in safety.

We make clear to you that the SEP will make this appalling incident known throughout the workers’ movement in Britain and report on your own actions taken in response.

Chris Marsden

National Secretary

Socialist Equality Party (UK)

Thomas Scripps, Assistant National Secretary, SEP in UK

Dear Sirs,

I am writing to demand that you take action against the individuals associated with the Peoples Progressive Employees Union (PPSS) who thuggishly assaulted members of the Socialist Equality Party on Thursday November 30. The membership of the SEP in Sri Lanka and their comrades internationally refuse to be intimidated and will not stand for this political violence.

While the reactionary politics of the PPSS may deem such attacks acceptable, they violate basic principles of democratic society which your offices make you responsible before the working class and student body for upholding. Our party has every right to campaign at Moratuwa University and has won considerable support for its positions. An attack on our members not only violates their rights, but the rights of students and workers to free political discussion.

Finally, it is clear that Indika Perera and Suranga

Piyawardena's actions were not an opportunistic attack, but a planned and politically targeted assault, carried out by individuals associated with the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna. An investigation must be carried out to find all those responsible for the preparation of this criminal act.

We await your response.

Thomas Scripps

Assistant National Secretary
Socialist Equality Party (UK)

SEP-UK South Yorkshire branch:

To: Senior Professor N.D. Gunwardena, Vice Chancellor,
University of Moratuwa

To: Attorney General: Mr Sanjay Rajaratnam

We strongly condemn the brutal assault against our Sri Lankan comrades in a premeditated and politically motivated attack by officials of the PPSS union connected to the ruling SLPP government which is in an alliance with the unelected President Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Those responsible for this thuggery, conducted in the cold light of day, must face the full force of the law. Any failure to do so amounts to condoning the violent suppression of freedom of speech and right to assembly establishing a dangerous precedent.

Our comrades were lawfully conducting a campaign at Moratuwa University on November 30 speaking to youth and workers when they were set upon in an unprovoked and savage way. The immediate target was the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) but this is as much directed against all students and workers and their right to politically engage freely without fear for their life and safety.

As a result of the attack comrades Lakshman Fernando and Dehin Wasantha sustained physical injuries which required hospital attention.

We note that the perpetrators of the attack are Indika Perera and Suranga Piyawardena, the President and Secretary of the PPSS union at Moratuwa University. The intention of their criminal enterprise was clear as they shouted, "We will finish you up today. We will not let you come back to the campus again."

The physical harm to our comrades would have been worse had they not acquitted themselves in a brave and disciplined manner and received help from other SEP members who intervened to stop the cowardly thugs.

From the video recorded of the assault on our comrades the PPSS members wielded wooden staves to cause maximum harm and acted as though they could commit such a brazen criminal act with impunity.

The response of the police and magistrates since their arrest does not inspire confidence that that they will be held accountable and face justice. The police have downplayed the extent of the injuries and did not seize the three-wheel taxi the attackers arrived in to follow proper investigations and retrieve evidence. The two have been bailed by the Magistrate and they

remain at large.

Our comrades were leafleting for two meetings held to mark the centenary of the fight waged by Leon Trotsky to defend the program of socialist internationalism against Stalinism, to be addressed by a leading member of our American section. The Sri Lankan section of our world party—the International Committee of the Fourth International—has played an integral and leading part in this fight for the continuity of Trotskyism.

The leaflet stated, "The eruption of imperialist war, including the murderous siege by the Zionist state of Israel against the Palestinians, confronts the international working class and youth with all the unresolved problems of the 20th century. All the burning issues facing workers and the oppressed masses—social inequality, war, the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, state repression and the rise of authoritarianism and fascism—are international problems and require a global and revolutionary solution by the working class."

We believe our comrades in Sri Lanka have been singled out for violent political repression precisely because of their growing stature in the fight for this internationalist perspective. This fight is in opposition to the Wickremesinghe regime and its IMF shock therapy which the union goons in the PPSS defend.

What is now taking place in relation to the violent attack on November 30 against SEP members bares all the hallmarks of an official cover-up. We will work to extend the campaign by our Sri Lankan section calling upon workers, youth and students in Sri Lanka and internationally to defend its democratic rights to engage in political activities.

Your sincerely

South Yorkshire branch
Socialist Equality Party UK

The SEP is urging that protest letters be sent to the following addresses (with copies sent to the SEP's email address: wswscmb@sltnet.lk):

Senior Professor N.D. Gunawardena, Vice Chancellor,
University of Moratuwa

Email: vc@uom.lk or ndg@uom.lk

Attorney General, Mr. Sanjay Rajaratnam

Email: agdurgentmotions@gmail.com



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact