

Australian workers and youth condemn violent attack on Sri Lankan SEP members

Our reporter
19 December 2023

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka is receiving copies of dozens of protest letters from workers, students, youth, academics and sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) around the world, sent to the Sri Lankan authorities, condemning the brutal attack on two SEP members by pro-government thugs. The letters have demanded the culprits be punished to the maximum extent of the law.

The victims are the SEP members: Dehin Wasantha, a veteran university worker, who is a well-known fighter for workers' rights and socialism; and Lakshman Fernando, a full-time party worker.

The culprits are Indika Perera and Suranga Piyawardena, the president and secretary of the Moratuwa university branch of the Podujana Pragathishile Sevaka Sangamaya (PPSS)—a trade union affiliated to the ruling Sri Lankan Podujana Peramuna party.

On November 30, both 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 Joseph Kishore, National Secretary of the SEP (US).

Perera and Piyawardena assaulted them with wooden clubs, causing serious injuries. The attack could have been fatal if Wasantha had not avoided a heavy blow aimed at his head.

Wasantha suffered two fractured fingers, while Lakshman was badly bruised and was left with a neck injury. Both required medical treatment and were immediately admitted to hospital.

On medical advice, Wasantha consulted an orthopedic surgeon on December 16 for advice on his fractured fingers. The doctor told him to rest since his recovery will be slow. As a result of his injury, Wasantha is unable to use his left arm and has had to take medical leave that could extend into next year.

Fernando will consult a neurosurgeon regarding the potential damage to the nerves in the neck as a result of the assault.

The Moratuwa Magistrate Court will hear the case against Perera and Piyawardena on January 8.

The SEP and its sister parties internationally are campaigning against the assault on Fernando and Wasantha and in defence of the SEP's right to campaign at Moratuwa University and any other places. The attack is not just on the SEP and its members but on the democratic rights of students and workers to freely engage in political discussion.

We are publishing below protest letters sent from Australia:

SEP Melbourne Branch:

To:

Senior Professor N. D. Gunwaedenaa, Vice Chancellor,
University of Moratuwa
Attorney General, Mr. Sanjay Rajaratnam

We draw your urgent attention to the following resolution that was passed unanimously at Socialist Equality Forum: December 7, 2023 in Melbourne (Australia)

This forum called by the Melbourne branch of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) denounces the violent assault on Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka) members—Dehin Wasantha and Lakshman Fernando—on 30 November. The two Socialist Equality Party (SEP) members were attacked while giving out leaflets, campaigning at the rear of the Moratuwa University for an SEP/IYSSE public meeting in Colombo.

Wasantha and Fernando were attacked by two officials from the Peoples Progressive Employees Union branch at the university using long wooden clubs as weapons. Both SEP members were injured in the unprovoked violence.

The brutal assault—carried out on behalf of the Sri Lanka Podujama Peramuna (SLPP), which is part of President Wickremesinghe's right-wing government—is an attack on the SEP's democratic right to freely engage in political activities.

The pre-planned assault is part of an ongoing attack on

democratic rights and freedom of speech underway in Sri Lanka. SLPP goon squads operate in many Sri Lankan workplaces to try and silence opposition among workers to the government's International Monetary Fund-dictated onslaught against jobs, wages, social conditions and basic rights.

It is significant that the attacks took place against SEP members who were campaigning for and encouraging young people to attend public meetings to be addressed by Joe Kishore, the national secretary of the United States (SEP).

The public meetings will explain the century-long fight by the Trotskyist movement to defend and develop Marxism, and its contemporary relevance for the struggle for international socialism. Such a powerful perspective, which has deep roots in the history of the Sri Lanka working class and the United States puts fear into the Sri Lankan ruling elite and their stooges in the Peoples Progressive Employees Union.

We demand that the culprits be punished with the full force of the law and that the SEP's right to campaign freely be upheld. Hands off the SEP! Oppose all government attacks on democratic rights!

IYSSE, Australia:

Dear Senior Professor N.D. Gunwardena and Mr. Sanjay Rajaratnam,

The following resolution has been passed at meetings of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Australia—in Sydney, Newcastle and Melbourne:

This meeting of the IYSSE condemns the attacks by union thugs against Socialist Equality Party (SEP) campaigners at Sri Lanka's Moratuwa University. The serious physical assault was a major attack on democratic rights and could have had deadly consequences, with two SEP members requiring urgent medical treatment as a consequence.

The attack was led by Indika Perera and Suranga Piyawardena, the president and secretary of the Podujana Pragathishili Sevaka Sangamaya (PPSS) or Peoples Progressive Employees Union branch at Moratuwa University. This union is directly controlled by the right-wing Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna, which leads the national government.

This was an attack by union-government thugs against SEP members fighting for a socialist perspective against the Sri Lankan government's brutal IMF-dictated austerity measures and its turn towards ever-greater authoritarianism in response to rising struggles by the working class.

The assault is particularly sinister in the context of decades of repression targeting the Sri Lankan Trotskyists. Members of the SEP and its predecessor organisation have been subjected to major attacks before, including the killing of party members by military and fascistic paramilitary organisations.

The role of the union officials in attacking socialists on behalf of the government is a graphic demonstration of the reactionary character of the trade union bureaucracies everywhere. They are hostile to the interests of the working class, instead functioning as an industrial and political police force of the governments and corporations.

It is notable that the thugs attacked a campaign by the SEP promoting upcoming lectures by SEP US National Secretary Joseph Kishore. That testifies to the fear of the government and its bureaucracy that the internationalist perspective of the Trotskyist movement will attract substantial support amid the genocide in Gaza, a broader eruption of imperialist militarism, and an enormous social and economic crisis of world capitalism.

The IYSSE in Australia fully supports the fight by the SEP for justice, including through the perpetrators of the assault to be held legally accountable for their crime. We will publicise this attack on democratic rights at the Australian universities, among young people and in the working class, as a threat to civil liberties not only in Sri Lanka but internationally.

Regards,

Evrin Yazgin

National Convenor, IYSSE Australia

The SEP is calling on all those who are concerned to defend democratic rights of freedom of expression to register their opposition by sending protest letters to the following addresses of relevant authorities with copies to the SEP (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 WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsWS.org/contact