

Sri Lankan workers oppose pro-government thug attack on SEP members

Our reporters
5 January 2024

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) continues to receive copies of letters from workers, youths and their organisations around the world condemning the violent attack on two members of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka by pro-government thugs. Dehin Wasantha is a veteran university worker, who is a well-known fighter for workers' rights and socialism, and Lakshman Fernando is a full-time SEP party worker.

These letters, which have been sent to the Sri Lankan attorney general and the vice chancellor of the University of Moratuwa, have demanded maximum legal action against those accused of the thuggery.

Fernando and Wasantha were physically assaulted at the University of Moratuwa on November 30 by Indika Perera and Suranga Piyawardena—the president and secretary of the Moratuwa university branch of Podujana Pragathishili Sevaka Sangamaya (PPSS). The PPSS is a trade union affiliated to the ruling Sri Lankan Podujana Peramuna party.

The two SEP members were campaigning with other party members near the rear gate of the university for SEP public meetings on the Centenary of Trotskyism to be addressed by Joseph Kishore, national secretary of the SEP (US). They were attacked with long wooden clubs causing serious injuries.

Wasantha suffered two fractured fingers and took an extended one-month medical leave because his fingers took a considerable period to mend. Lakshman was badly bruised and left with a neck injury. Wasantha reported back to his work at the university on January 2.

The Moratuwa Magistrate Court is due to hear the case against Perera and Piyawardena on January 8. The Moratuwa university administration has not yet started an inquiry against the culprits.

Wasantha has sent an open letter to university non-academic employees union in Sri Lanka about the pro-government attack on him and Fernando. His letter explains that the brutal assault was an attack, not just on his basic democratic rights but the working class as a whole, and urges the union to condemn it.

The open letter says: "It is my legitimate right to hold political views I choose and for that matter, all my non-academic colleagues have this democratic right. I am a socialist and have fought to defend the interests of the working class and poor. No one can deny and suppress my democratic rights."

It continues: "In attacking us, the trade union leaders show their contempt and hatred towards the independent mobilisation of the working class. They consider it a crime for workers to speak for themselves. Their anti-democratic methods and violence only show their political bankruptcy. They know that the majority of workers do not accept their pro-capitalist policies and fear that these workers and

young people would rally behind the socialist program that I fight for."

Wasantha concludes his letter: "And also my dear fellow non-academic employees, the common experience of all of us with these trade union bureaucracies, particularly their role in not allowing any democratic discussion within unions on what actions and program we have to take to defend our basic rights, strongly underscores the need for organising ourselves independent from these bureaucracies. Drawing the necessary conclusions from that, I urge you to form your own independent action committees at your workplace, to take the matters into your own hands."

We are publishing below letters sent from Sri Lanka condemning the attack on the two SEP members.

Migrant Workers' Action Committee:

To: Attorney General: Mr Sanjay Rajaratnam

President and Secretary of University of Moratuwa Podujana Pragathishili Sevaka Sangamaya branch assaulting members of the Socialist Equality Party

The Migrant Workers' Action Committee, which met on Sunday 23/12/2023, unanimously endorsed the following statement against the above attack. I am sending you that statement.

We the Migrant Workers' Action Committee strongly condemn beatings and physical injuries inflicted on Dehin Wasantha and Lakshman Fernando, members of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), on November 30, 2023 by Indika Perera and Suranga Piyawardena—the president and secretary of the Moratuwa university branch of Podujana Pragathishili Sevaka Sangamaya (PPSS).

Two thugs, Indika Perera and Suranga Piyawardena, created a provocation against the two SEP members near the rear gate of Moratuwa University around 6:00 p.m., and chased them in a three-wheeler taxi and beat them with poles. Dehin Wasantha's palm was fractured, and Lakshman Fernando's head, neck and back were injured.

Dehin [Wasantha] and Fernando were attacked by the thugs when they were distributing leaflets in connection with a meeting organised by the SEP. The leaflets included a call to attend the meeting held by the SEP on the occasion of the centenary of the world Trotskyist movement.

The SEP campaigners pointed out to students and workers that the Trotskyist perspective has been substantiated by the intensifying world war tension and the attacks by the capitalist ruling classes on the social and democratic rights that the international working class had enjoyed in the past, and that war and social counter-revolutionary attacks can only be defeated by Trotskyist program.

Dehin Wasantha, who was assaulted, is a non-academic worker of

Moratuwa University, while Lakshman Fernando is a SEP full-time worker. Both have gained popularity among workers and the oppressed masses by their long engagement in SEP politics.

As part of the SEP work, they constantly fight to expose to the workers, the pro-capitalist role played by the trade union bureaucrats, including the role by Podujana Pragathishili Sevaka Sangamaya, to build workers' action committees as the independent organisational forms of the workers, and to unite and organise these committees on an international socialist program. This cowardly act by the union bureaucracy is a desperate but deliberate attempt to prevent their political intervention among the workers.

This thuggish action by the union bureaucracy is completely in line with the brutal state repression launched by the Ranil Wickremesinghe-Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna government to crush the growing series of workers' struggles against the International Monetary Fund's brutal austerity program.

We consider this not just an attack on the SEP but a vicious attack on the democratic rights of the entire working class, including us, [raising the need] to build their own independent political movement. The Migrant Workers' Action Committee, representing the expatriate workers who form part of the international working class that produces the entire wealth of human society, strongly urges you to [do your duty and] take all possible... wise and legal actions against these thugs.

Yours faithfully,

President

Sohan Thisera

Migrant Workers Action Committee

Mano Fernando, a writer:

To: The Vice Chancellor

University of Moratuwa

Sir,

Our Strong Opposition to the Brutal Mob Attack Committed Against Dehin Wasantha and Lakshman Fernando by the Trade Union Leaders of the University of Moratuwa

Messrs. Indika Perera and Suranga Piyawardena, who hold the positions as the President and Secretary respectively of Podujana Pragathishili Sevaka Sangamaya of your University had brutally attacked Messrs. Dehin Wasantha and Lakshman Fernando in a place adjacent to the premises of the University of Moratuwa in the evening of 30 November 2023.

Dehin Wasantha has been in employment as a non-academic staff in the university for over twenty-five years, and is a member of the Socialist Equality Party while Lakshman Fernando is a full-time member of the said party. I wish to express my strongest condemnation of this cruel and vicious assault.

The reason for their attack had been that they were distributing leaflets to university students and residents of the area on the public meetings on the Centenary of Trotskyism, including on the Israeli government's genocidal war against the Palestinians, addressed by American Socialist Equality Party National Secretary Joseph Kishore and scheduled to be delivered at the Colombo New Town Hall.

How can it be a criminal offence for the people of the country to become aware of Trotskyism, and the terrible Palestinian-Israeli war and the threat of third world war that has raised crucial questions about the future of mankind today?

Therefore, I would like to remind you that it is also your responsibility to take immediate actions against the two criminal trade

union leaders Indika Perera and Suranga Piyawardena.

Mano Fernando

Writer

Hemal Pradeep Kumar, a teacher:

I am Hemal Pradeep Kumara, a teacher in mathematics in Bandarawela Puhunagala Sinhala school and a supporter and reader of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

I am well aware that the Socialist Equality Party is a party that has been doing political work in the international working class independently and democratically for a long time.

Dehin Wasantha, who works as a non-academic employee of Moratuwa University, and Lakshman Fernando, an activist of the Socialist Equality Party, were attacked on their way home after distributing a leaflet on a road near Moratuwa University. I strongly condemn the inhumane and potentially fatal attack with sticks by Indika Perera and Suranga Piyawardena—the president and secretary of the Moratuwa university branch of Podujana Pragathishili Sevaka Sangamaya (PPSS).

I know very well that Dehin Wasantha has been working as a non-academic worker for a long time and that he is a fighter for the workers' rights. It is clear that this attack has taken place under circumstances where his political work cannot be tolerated. This attack did not only happen to those two or that party, but we should consider it was an attack on the entire workers and oppressed people.

The entire working class and the masses should protest against this gangster politics. In my opinion, justice should be done to them [victims] by the law.

I am well aware that the only party fighting to build a world anti-war movement by presenting a large number of documents analyzing the war on Palestine by Israel and the war on Russia through Ukraine is this party.

I request on behalf of the entire working class that their right to do politics and to hold political views of their choice be not violated.

Yours,

Hemal Pradeep Kumar

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The SEP is calling on all those who are concerned to defend the democratic right 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 WWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsWS.org/contact