

Protest letters against pro-government thug attack on Sri Lankan SEP members

Our reporters
16 January 2024

Protest letters continue flowing from workers, youth 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. Those assaulted were Dehin Wasantha, a veteran university worker and well-known fighter for workers' rights and socialism, and Lakshman Fernando, a full-time SEP party worker.

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 the 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 addressed by Joseph Kishore, the national secretary of the SEP (US). They were attacked with long wooden clubs, causing serious injuries.

Wasantha suffered two fractured fingers and had to go on medical leave for nearly a month, as his fingers took a considerable period to mend. Lakshman was badly bruised and left with a neck injury.

When the case on the attack was brought before a judge at the Magistrate's Court in Moratuwa on January 8, the magistrate ordered that the case be referred to a mandatory Mediation Board. The case will be recalled at the court on May 20. The Mediation Board will take the case on January 20.

The SEP and its sister parties of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) have launched a campaign in defence of Fernando and Wasantha, and the SEP's democratic right to conduct political campaigns. We are publishing here some of the protest letters that we have received.

Nick Barrickman, SEP member in the US:

To whom it concerns,

I am writing to denounce in the strongest terms possible the attack carried out on Socialist Equality Party members

Dehin Wasantha and Lakshman Fernando.

The Technical Officers' Union thugs were allowed bail despite having a clearly premeditated plan to corner and assault SEP members who were doing nothing more than exercising their rights to promote their views. In addition, the taxi driver who assisted their attack was not detained.

Such brutality is the hallmark of gangsters, who as such belong behind bars. It is doubly troublesome that they are connected to the island's governing party, which launched attacks on students involved in protesting its policies. It is a clear sign that Sri Lanka is tipping into a state of authoritarian dictatorship. You must oppose it.

Sincerely,

Nick Barrickman

Socialist Equality Party member in the United States

Douglas Lyons

To whom it may concern,

I'm writing this email in protest against the violent attacks on two Socialist Equality Party members, Dehin Wasantha and Lakshman Fernando, in Sri Lanka. Two PPSS bureaucrats, Indika Perera and Suranga Piyawardena, who have the backing of SLPP, attempted to disrupt the democratic right of the SEP to campaign for a public meeting.

Our international party will not be cowed by this cowardly act to silence the growing support among workers, youth, and the masses throughout Sri Lanka and Asia for the program and perspective of the SEP.

These two PPSS thugs should be criminally charged to the fullest extent of the law. An investigation should be launched to criminally indict any and all co-conspirators. And measures should be taken to allow freedom of speech and assembly for all, free from violent intimidation, attacks and all other forms to silence opposing ideas.

Sincerely,

Douglas Lyons

Hans Steltner from Norway:

To: Attorney General, Mr. Sanjay Rajaratnam

I denounce the violent attack on two members of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) on last Thursday evening by ruling party thugs.

Hans Steltner
Norway, Lillehammer

Jayasakthi from India:

I strongly condemn the violent attack on the members of the SEP in Sri Lanka while campaigning for the upcoming lectures by the SEP Secretary from US. They are fearing the development of the SEP in Sri Lanka to organize workers to lead for the socialist revolution.

With warm regards,
Jayasakthi

Bhuvana

Hello:

I would like to join the SEP in denouncing the attack by union thugs on our members and supporters for carrying out legitimate tasks of the party.

Shame on them! Courage is what our members showed, while the thugs, true to their character, showed cowardice. We wish them a speedy recovery, and we support their courageous work. Our response must be to urgently raise the consciousness of the working class so we can fight and usher in a socialist society sooner.

BT

William Mertz, SEP in the US

Attorney General Mr. Sanjay Rajaratnam,

On December 7th, two members of the Socialist Equality Party, Mr Dehin Wasantha and Lakshman Fernando, were attacked by trade union goons at the Moratuwa university campus while handing out leaflets, engaging in the exercise of their democratic right of free speech.

The international working class denounces these Nazi tactics in the fullest of terms and demands the perpetrators of this crime be prosecuted to the maximum extent allowed by law.

The revolutionary movement of the working class will not be deterred by fascist thugs armed with clubs supported by compliant and corrupt police. This incident is indicative of the actions of a government mired in corruption.

William Mertz
Socialist Equality Party USA

Dmitri Church

Dear comrades Dehin Wasantha and Lakshman Fernando,

The outrageous attacks on your persons by the PPSS thugs reveals both the strength of our movement to unify the working class behind a socialist program and the utter bankruptcy of the trade union thugs that are fighting to shackle workers in every corner of the globe. Their cowardly attack exposes more deeply their complete alienation and

hostility to the needs of the working masses. Nonetheless, that you should have to pay a physical price to demonstrate this is unconscionable. I believe I do not speak alone when I say that your courage inspires us all to fight harder for our cause.

Fraternally,
Dmitri Church

Kristina Betinis, Chicago, US

Dear Sirs:

The targeted political attack at the Moratuwa campus by the leaders of the PPSS, Indika Perera and Suranga Piyawardena, on SEP members Dehin Wasantha and Laskhman Fernando is a crime against the rights of working people everywhere.

Did leading figures in the SLPP have knowledge of plans to attack and intimidate the SEP members? This crime deserves to be thoroughly investigated and prosecuted.

Sincerely,
Kristina Betinis

Chicago, Illinois, United States

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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