US IYSSE opposes pro-government thug attacks on Sri Lankan SEP members

Our reporters
5 February 2024

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka continues to receive copies of protest letters sent by workers, youth, academics and their organisations around the world condemning the violent attack on two SEP members by pro-government thugs.

Dehin Wasantha and Lakshman Fernando 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), which is affiliated to the ruling Sri Lankan Podujana Peramuna.

Wasantha has been a university non-academic worker for more than two decades and is a well-known fighter for workers' rights and socialism. Fernando is a full-time SEP party worker. They were campaigning with other party members near the back gate of the university for the SEP public meetings on the Centenary of Trotskyism 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 was forced to take almost one month's medical leave because his fingers took a long time to heal. Lakshman was badly bruised and left with a neck injury.

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

As Perera and Piyawardena were not present when the Mediation Board took the case on January 20, the board decided to reconvene the case on February 3. They were present at the board's hearing last week and opted for a settlement. Wasantha categorically stated that he was not ready to accept a settlement and so the board directed both parties to be present at the courts on May 20.

Scores of letters from around the world have been sent to Sri Lankan authorities in response to the campaign launched by the SEP and its sister parties of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). The letters call for the defence of Wasantha and Fernando and SEP's democratic rights and demand maximum legal action against those who carried out the thug attack.

We are publishing here two protest letters sent by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in the US. The first one was sent late last year.

The IYSSE in the US:

To Attorney General, Mr. Sanjay Rajaratnam and Professor N.D. Gunwaedena, Vice Chancellor, University of Moratuwa

The IYSSE in the US condemns in the sharpest terms the attack by Indika Perera and Suranga Piyawardena, who play a leading role in the Peoples Progressive Employees Union (PPSS), against members of the Socialist Equality Party in Sri Lanka. We are in full solidarity with the demand by the SEP in Sri Lanka that these right-wing union thugs—who have close ties to the ruling Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) party—be punished with the full extent of the law. We also hope for the speedy recovery of all our comrades.

The assault and extreme leniency by police towards the assailants are clearly politically motivated. They are aimed at suppressing and intimidating not only our comrades, but the entire working class under conditions of an extraordinary crisis of the Sri Lankan ruling class. The union thugs are part of goon squads which also operate in many workplaces to intimidate opposition among workers.

Our comrades were attacked as they distributed leaflets promoting an upcoming meeting on the centenary of Trotskyism with SEP (US) national secretary Joseph Kishore near the Moratuwa University campus. The meeting connected the history and principles of Trotskyism to the fight against the eruption of imperialist violence around the globe, from the NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine to Israel's genocide in Gaza. The crisis-ridden SLPP government is fully backing the imperialist-funded genocide of the Palestinian people, while imposing savage austerity measures on the working population of Sri Lanka.

The past two years have seen the emergence of mass social struggles on the island. In 2022, the SLPP regime of Gotabaya Rajapakse was ousted by a massive uprising of millions of workers, peasants and youth. The SEP (Sri Lanka) has been the only tendency that has upheld the complete independence of the working class from the SLPP and all other factions of the bourgeoisie.

When the SEP (Sri Lanka) was invited to talks to reach "all-party agreements," our comrades rejected the invitation and denounced the talks as an attempt to save capitalism in Sri Lanka. This principled decision was based on the lessons of the 1964 Great Betrayal of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) which, having capitulated to Pabloism, entered the bourgeois government of Sirimavo Bandaranaike. The LSSP's actions, which were falsely associated with Trotskyism, disoriented the Sri Lankan

© World Socialist Web Site

working class and oppressed masses and laid the groundwork for the suppression of Sri Lanka's Tamil population and the decades-long Sri Lankan Civil War.

The International Committee of the Fourth International and its Sri Lankan section have developed their work over more than half a century, based on the lessons of this historic betrayal and fought for the unity of the Tamil, Sinhala and international working class. As a result, the Trotskyist movement enjoys significant support and authority among the masses on that basis. In 2018, when David North, the chairperson of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party (US), spoke in Sri Lanka on the 80th anniversary of the Fourth International, his lectures were very well attended by both Tamil and Sinhala workers, and he was interviewed on Radio Sri Lanka.

The attempts of the PPSS and SLPP to intimidate our comrades, workers and young people with cowardly acts of violence will fail. The past few months have seen the emergence of a mass movement by millions of workers and young people against the genocide in Gaza. The great historical questions of the 20th century—fascism, imperialist barbarism, and social inequality—are again posed in the sharpest terms and the revolutionary and internationalist principles that the Trotskyist movement has fought for over the past century will find a powerful hearing among in the working class, youth and oppressed masses in Sri Lanka, throughout Asia and the world.

We call upon workers and youth: If you are in the US, join the campaign to defend the SEP in Sri Lanka by sending messages to oppose the attacks to Attorney General, Mr. Sanjay Rajaratnam (agdurgentmotions@gmail.com) and Senior Professor N.D. Gunwaedena, Vice Chancellor, University of Moratuwa (vc@uom.lk or ndg@uom.lk) with cc to the SEP in Sri Lanka (wswscmb@sltnet.lk).

If you are in Sri Lanka, make plans to attend the meetings with Joseph Kishore and fight to build the SEP and IYSSE in Sri Lanka.

Sincerely,

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality in the United States

IYSSE branch in Austin, Texas

To the authorities whom it may concern:

On Thursday November 30, two members of the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka), Dehin Wasantha and Lakshman Fernando, were violently attacked at Moratuwa University while campaigning for a meeting on the centenary of the founding of the Trotskyist movement. The perpetrators were Indika Perera and Suranga Piyawardena, the president and secretary, respectively, of the Podujana Pragathishili Sevaka Sangamaya (PPSS) or People's Progressive Employees Union branch in Moratuwa University. The attack landed both of the members in the hospital, with Wasantha seriously injured.

As the President of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality branch in Austin, Texas USA, I am writing today to express my deepest opposition to the wanton attack on the physical persons of our members and on the democratic right of students and young people to participate in democratic discourse. Anything short of the application of the full force of the law against the perpetrators sets a dangerous precedent which would embolden the thuggish elements behind the attack. Students and young people around the world should and do agree on this point.

The Trotskyist movement in particular is no stranger to such provocations, including by the self-same individuals who assaulted our members in this incident. This is but another expression of the lack of a solution to the crisis of capitalist society that the trade unions and the political forces that they represent have to offer the masses. The logic of their violence is dictatorship.

In the United States and other Western countries, protests against the genocide in Gaza are being slandered as antisemitic and as terroristic, in many cases being illegalized. Meanwhile, the trade unions have failed to mount a strike to halt weapons shipments to Israel, let alone staunch the flow of money to the Zionist state. The attack on our members is a concurrent manifestation of a global trend towards dictatorship which we will steadfastly oppose.

The Austin International Youth and Students for Social Equality calls for the most stringent punishment permitted by law against the assailants. It denounces the attack on its comrades and demands that their physical safety be ensured in the future. The maxim of "an injustice to anyone anywhere is an injustice to everyone everywhere" very much applies here. This is a question of the democratic rights of workers and youth around the world. The renewed rampage of imperialism across the globe has bound together ever more closely the struggle for democratic rights and against exploitation in each and every country. For this reason, the attack is of the utmost importance to students in the US and other countries. We demand that our fundamental rights be upheld.

Cordially,

Josh Andrews

* * * *

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

© World Socialist Web Site