

Opposition grows against pro-government thug attacks on Sri Lankan SEP members

Our reporters

12 February 2024

Workers, youth and academics continue to send statements denouncing the violent attack on members of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka 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, a university non-academic worker for more than two decades, is well-known for his principled struggle for workers' rights and socialism. Fernando is a full-time SEP party worker. They were violently attacked with long wooden clubs causing serious injuries while 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, National Secretary of the SEP (US).

Wasantha suffered two fractured fingers and had to take almost one-month's medical leave because his fingers took a considerable period to mend. Lakshman was badly bruised and left with a neck injury.

When the case on the violent attack was brought before a judge at 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 in court 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 on February 3 and opted for a settlement. Wasantha categorically stated that he was not ready for a settlement. The board then directed both parties to be present at the courts on May 20.

In response to the campaign launched by the SEP and its sister parties of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in defence of Wasantha and Fernando, and the SEP's democratic rights, workers, youth, academics and their organisations around the world have sent protest letters to relevant Sri Lankan authorities condemning the attack and demanding maximum legal action against culprits.

We are publishing below protest letters sent by workers rank-and-file (action) committees in Australia and Sri Lanka, and a health worker in the UK.

Health Workers RFC, Australia:

Dear Sir,

The Health Workers Rank-and-File Committee (Australia) passed a resolution at its last meeting on Wednesday, December 6, 2023, to oppose the recent attack on Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka) members at Moratuwa University.

The Health Workers Rank-and-File Committee (HWRFC), formed

under the guidance of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia), is a group of health workers including doctors, nurses, hospital administration, pathology and aged care workers. We are fighting for the unity of workers throughout the sector and more broadly, to defend their jobs and basic rights under conditions in which the unions have done everything possible to isolate and defuse emerging struggles.

Please see below a copy of our resolution.

This meeting of the Health Workers Rank-and-File Committee (Australia) denounces the vicious assault on Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka) members—Dehin Wasantha and Lakshman Fernando—on 30 November while they were campaigning at the rear of the Moratuwa University for an SEP public meeting to be held in Colombo on 7 December.

Wasantha and Fernando were attacked by two officials from the People's 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 Podujana 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 preplanned 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.

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!

Sincerely,

Julia Thomas

HWRFC Convenor

Alton Plantation Workers Action Committee in Sri Lanka:

Sanjay Rajaratnam,

Attorney General

Dear Sir,

The following resolution for your action was passed in the Alton Plantation Workers Action Committee (APWAC) meeting held on 28.12.2023.

Resolution:

President and Secretary of the Moratuwa University branch of the

Pojujana Pragathishile Sevaka Sangamaya (PPSS), Indika Perera and Suranga Piyawardena respectively, physically attacked two members of the Socialist Equality Party, Dehin Wasantha and Lakshman Fernando on November 30. The Alton Plantation Workers Action Committee strongly condemns this assault, and we consider the attack against SEP members, who are in the forefront of the struggle for workers' rights, as an attack on the basic democratic rights of all workers.

Dehin Wasantha was seriously injured in the attack. He has been working as a non-academic employee at the University of Moratuwa for 25 years. He is a member of the Sri Lanka University Technical Officers Union and has been at the forefront of protecting the rights of workers and students.

When our plantation management illegally fired us, they were among the members of the SEP who are fighting for our basic rights.

We request that legal action be taken against the perpetrators of this attack. The right of all political parties to engage in their politics democratically should be protected.

Thanks you.

Sincerely,

E. Mahendran, Secretary of Alton Workers Action Committee

Northern Province Fishermen Action Committee in Sri Lanka:

Mr. Sanjay Rajaratnam,

Attorney General of Sri Lanka,

Colombo

Senior Professor N.D. Gunawardena,

Vice Chancellor,

University of Moratuwa

Sirs,

Attacks on Socialist Equality Party members

Dehin Wasantha, a long-time member of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and an employee of the University of Moratuwa, and Lakshman Fernando, a full-time employee of the party, were brutally attacked by thugs belonging to the ruling party while they were engaged in an important political campaign of the party near the University of Moratuwa on November 30.

The attack was carried out by Indika Perera and Suranga Piyawardena—the president and the secretary of the Moratuwa University branch of the Podujana Pragathishile Sevaka Sangamaya (PPSS), which is affiliated to the ruling Sri Lankan Podujana Peramuna (SLPP). They attacked two SEP members using wooden poles.

As a result of the attack, they suffered serious injuries and had to be treated at the hospital. Although they were discharged from the hospital the following day, Wasantha had fractured fingers from the attack and his condition was not good enough to report back to his duties at the university and so he was given extended medical leave.

Our Northern Province Fishermen's Action Committee strongly condemns this barbaric attack on SEP members. This attack is a violation of the SEP's democratic right to engage in political work among students and staff in all universities in the country, as well as among workers and farmers.

Therefore, we strongly request you to take maximum legal action against the perpetrators of this attack. Any delay in taking action will encourage them and other such culprits to openly engage in a similar type of thuggery against democratic rights of workers and students.

Thank you,

Rajaratnam Thirugnagnavel

Secretary, Northern Province Fishermen Action Committee

Rasenthiram Sutharsan

President, Northern Province Fishermen Action Committee

Ajitha Gunaratne, a health worker in UK:

Dear Professor N.D. Gunawardena,

I am a nurse working in a major hospital in the UK. It was disturbing to read through the WSWs about the violent assault against two Socialist Equality Party (SEP) members right in front of your doorstep at the University of Moratuwa last Thursday.

This criminal act was carried out by Indika Perera and Suranga Piyawardena, the president and secretary of the Podujana Pragathishile Sevaka Sangamaya (PPSS) union branch at Moratuwa University. These two union thugs premeditated the attack by arming themselves with wooden clubs and hiring a three-wheeler to come to the scene and carry out this grievous attack against Dehin Wasantha and Lakshman Fernando, who were exercising their democratic right to campaign among university employees and students that evening. By that time, Dehin and Lakshman were distributing leaflets and speaking to university employees and students about the upcoming public meetings to be addressed by Joseph Kishore, the national secretary of the SEP (US).

This incident further shows that democratic rights and freedom of expression are in peril under this despised right-wing Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna government.

The two SEP members have sustained serious injuries and had to spend a day in hospitals. Dehin Wasantha, one of your employees and well-known among staff, has fractured two fingers because of this brutal attack.

I condemn this attack in the strongest terms and request you to take action against these two assailants, Perera and Piyawardena, under the full force of the law.

Yours sincerely,

Ajitha Gunaratne

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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