

SEP condemns police intimidation of WSWs reporter in Sri Lanka

Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
3 August 2026

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka condemns the attempt by Kays police to threaten *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) reporter Dinesh Heymaal with arrest following his coverage of a fishermen's protest and subsequent media event at Kurikattuwan Jetty, 31 kilometres from Jaffna, on July 29.

The police withdrew their threat to arrest Heymaal only after the WSWs editorial board in Colombo was informed of their actions. The incident is a serious attack on freedom of expression and the democratic rights of journalists, and exposes the methods employed by the police to intimidate those who challenge capitalist politicians and union bureaucrats.

The protest was organised by the Fisheries Cooperatives in the islands near Jaffna Peninsula against incursions by large Indian bottom-trawlers that had damaged the nets of around 200 fishermen in the area. The organisers demanded punitive state action against Indian fishermen, calling for them to be arrested and even shot. No demands were raised concerning the soaring cost of fuel, the IMF austerity measures imposed by the Dissanayake government, the rising price of nets and equipment, and the destruction of fishers' livelihoods amid the global capitalist crisis.

This selectivity is not accidental. It reflects the class interests of those who organised the protest. The leadership of the Fisheries Cooperatives is not composed of impoverished small-scale fishermen, but wealthy individuals with close ties to Tamil nationalist politicians.

Heymaal covered the protest from the beginning. Afterwards, while he was having tea at a nearby restaurant, two uniformed police officers accompanied by two plainclothesmen approached him. Heymaal had earlier observed the plainclothesmen monitoring the

protest and press briefing. The police had apparently noted his motorbike and followed him after he left.

The police threats against Heymaal were directly connected to an incident at the media event following the protest.

During the press conference, Heymaal challenged Tamil National People's Front (TNPF) leader Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam over his call for the Sri Lankan Navy to take drastic actions against Indian trawlers. Heymaal pointed out that such a demand ran counter to the aspirations of people in the North and East for the withdrawal of the military from the region and an end to militarisation.

In response to another question from the WSWs reporter, Ponnambalam defended the Sri Lankan government's implementation of harsh austerity measures demanded by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), falsely claiming that they had benefited the people.

Heymaal also attempted to question Annalingam Annarasa, chairman of the Federation of Jaffna District Fisheries Cooperatives Union. A media person who appeared annoyed by Heymaal's questioning of Ponnambalam attempted to stop him, declaring that "only those invited media persons" could intervene. The individual, wearing a badge identifying him as belonging to "Wadamarachchi Media House," demanded that Heymaal produce a media identity card.

When this person became aggressive towards the WSWs journalist, Heymaal told him that his conduct amounted to "policing journalists on behalf of the police." Fishermen's Cooperative Federation leaders told Heymaal to allow "the media that they invited" to conduct the briefing.

Heymaal firmly rejected the attempt to silence him. He made clear that he was a WSWs reporter and had

the right to carry out his journalistic duties without interference. The attempt to exclude him exposed the organisers' nationalist and pro-capitalist position and their inability to answer questions raised from the standpoint of the interests of the working class.

When the police officers subsequently threatened Heymaal with arrest, one referred to his remarks during the press briefing. Using abusive language, the officer shouted: "We saw you, bugger, talking big there [at the press briefing]."

The officers demanded to see Heymaal's media identification card, although they had no legitimate authority to interfere in his work as a journalist. They also recorded details from his national identity card.

There is no doubt that the police were emboldened by the provocative attempts of the media personnel to prevent Heymaal from asking questions. The police were clearly attempting to intimidate a journalist because he had challenged political figures and raised uncomfortable questions.

The SEP takes this threat against our comrade seriously. Police harassment and intimidation of journalists is continuing and intensifying under the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/National People's Power (JVP/NPP) government.

In the war-ravaged North and East, the military maintains a pervasive presence 17 years after the end of the bloody communal war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. Police and military surveillance of the population has long been a feature of daily life in these provinces.

The police monitoring of the Kurikattuwan Jetty protest, where ordinary fishermen spoke openly about their worsening living conditions, and the officers' subsequent intimidation of a WSWs reporter, are part of a broader effort by the state to restrict political discussion and suppress opposition.

As the government confronts mounting social opposition to its IMF austerity program, it is responding not by addressing the demands of workers and the rural poor but by strengthening surveillance, intimidation, and the machinery of repression.

The country's state of emergency has been repeatedly extended, granting the president sweeping powers to deploy the military, restrict gatherings and detain people without normal judicial procedures. The government is also preparing a new "anti-terror" law

that retains the essential features of the anti-democratic Prevention of Terrorism Act and has used Essential Services Orders to outlaw strikes in several sectors.

The threats against the WSWs must be understood in this broader political context. For more than half a century, the SEP and its predecessor, the Revolutionary Communist League, have fought for the independent interests of the working class, against all attacks on democratic rights and all forms of nationalism and communalism. That struggle has been carried out in the Sinhala- and Tamil-language newspapers, *Kamkaru Mawatha* and *Tholilalar Pathai*, and today on the WSWs.

The SEP will not be intimidated by police threats or attempts to suppress socialist journalism. We call on workers, youth, and all defenders of democratic rights to oppose every effort to silence the WSWs and other independent journalists.

Governments globally are increasingly resorting to authoritarian methods and are inflaming communal and nationalist divisions to uphold capitalist rule, which is plunging broad layers of the population into poverty. The defence of freedom of expression and freedom of the press is therefore inseparable from the struggle for the socialist reorganisation of society.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact