

# Sri Lankan SEP demands an end to the illegal state harassment of its election candidates in the North

Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)  
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Over the past two weeks, Sri Lankan police officers have illegally visited and questioned one of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) candidates running for northern Jaffna district in the November 14 parliamentary elections.

The harassment began on October 12, one day after election nominations closed, when two police officers in civilian clothes visited the home of SEP Jaffna district candidate Rasarathinam Thirugnanavel. They arrived at about 5 p.m. and demanded to know his whereabouts. When his mother said he was not there, the police went to a relative's home nearby where they obtained Thirugnanavel's telephone number.

Police officers, claiming to be from the Veravil sub police station and the Jayapuram police station, called Thirugnanavel the following day. They ordered him to provide them with a photograph and answer various questions, including why he was not at his home address, the names and details of other SEP candidates, and whether he was a member of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Police also quoted some names from the SEP's candidate list for Jaffna district and asked about their whereabouts.

Thirugnanavel told the police that all the necessary information about the SEP's candidates had been submitted to the Election Commission and firmly refused to provide any other details to the police. He also said he had never been a member of the LTTE.

When Thirugnanavel refused to provide a photograph, pointing out that there was no such legal requirement for election candidates, the police said that they were directed by senior officers to get a photo. The police also said that they already had photographs of the other candidates, and were asking because his photo was missing.

This provocative and unlawful activity continued with a police officer calling Thirugnanavel on October 14, 22 and 23 to repeatedly demand that he hand over a photograph.

When Thirugnana Sampanthar, leader of the SEP's

candidate slate for Jaffna district called the police on October 24 to protest this persecution of a fellow candidate, the police tried to downplay the issue, stating that they had obtained the required information from the village officer.

The ongoing harassment of the SEP candidate raises several issues. Why are the police collecting the names, photos and whereabouts of SEP candidates? And if they are acting on an order from the top, as they claim, who issued these orders? Have they come from the Ministry of Public Security and/or the Dissanayake administration?

Another alarming fact is the police claim that they have collected all the candidates' photos and details and are only concerned about getting a photograph of Thirugnanavel. None of our candidates has presented photographs of themselves to the police, so how have the police obtained these images? Does this mean that the police are maintaining continuous surveillance of our comrades, collecting their details in preparation for future repressive measures?

The police collection of personal details, including photographs, is completely illegal and is a blatant attempt to intimidate our party members in Jaffna in preparation for a broader attack on the basic democratic rights of the SEP and its members. Asking our comrade whether he was a member of the LTTE is a particularly sinister and threatening move.

The Sri Lankan police, the military and their respective intelligence services are fully aware of the principled political record of the SEP, and its predecessor, the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), in the struggle for the unity of the working class, across all communal lines—Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim—on a socialist program.

The SEP/RCL has consistently opposed successive Colombo governments' anti-Tamil racialist war, as well as the LTTE's separatist program and all the Tamil bourgeois parties including the former Tamil National Alliance, the Ilangai Tamil Arasu Katchchi, the Tamil National People's Front and a host of other nationalist groups. This is well known across the country, including in the North.

The determined struggle waged by the SEP/RCL over many decades has seen the party persecuted by successive governments, the military and police, and the LTTE.

In August 1998, the LTTE detained Rasenthiram Sutharsan, Thirugnana Sampanthar, Rajaratnam Rajavel and Kasinathan Naguleswaran because of the party's struggle for the unity of the working class against Colombo's racist war and the LTTE's separatist program. They were released only after an international campaign waged by the International Committee of the Fourth International and the SEP through the *World Socialist Web Site*.

On the evening of August 7, 2006, SEP supporter Sivapragasam Mariyadas was shot dead by an unknown gunman outside the door of his home. All the evidence pointed to the involvement of the military, police and an allied paramilitary group.

In March 2007, SEP member Nadarajah Wimalaswaran and his friend Sivanathan Mathivathanan were "disappeared" on the causeway between Punguduthivu and Velanai in Kayts during the civil war. All evidence points to the involvement of the Sri Lankan navy in their disappearance. The SEP continues to demand that the government and the military release all the information about what happened to Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan.

A few months before the last parliamentary election in August 2020, Sri Lankan army intelligence officers visited and questioned three prominent members of the SEP contesting the election for the northern Jaffna district. The SEP and WSWS launched an international campaign against this direct violation of the SEP's democratic rights, and demanded the protection of our comrades living in the island's war-ravaged north.

The state and its police have no right to demand photographs and additional details about our comrades, or for that matter any other candidate, because the required details were already provided to the Election Commission.

Furthermore, the SEP rejects the blatant lie that police are engaged in routine work. Sri Lankan police play a major role in maintaining the military occupation of the North and the East of the country since the bloody military defeat of the LTTE in 2009. The state harassment of Tamils, particularly the youth, has been the order of the day under successive Colombo governments.

Vijitha Herath, the public security minister in the newly-elected Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)/National People's Power (NPP) government, has called for the police to establish law and order and not be subject to "political interference." His declaration is under conditions where brutal laws, such as Prevention of Terrorism Act, are constantly used to harass Sri Lankan workers, students and youth, particularly against the Tamil population in the North

and the East.

During a recent meeting of Sri Lanka's National Security Council, the police commandant of the Special Task Force (STF) called on President Dissanayake, who chaired the meeting, to remove all the fundamental rights lawsuits and arrest orders against police officers involved in operations against the criminal underworld. It was a direct request for a blank cheque for the police to use violence in any operation against those deemed to be criminals. There are currently 17 fundamental rights cases against STF officers.

Dissanayake, who is commander-in-chief of the Sri Lankan Armed Forces, responded by instructing the attorney general to "immediately intervene to address these allegations against such members [of the police]."

This directive, and other measures aimed at further expanding police-state methods, is the background to this month's harassment of SEP candidates in Jaffna and is a warning to the entire working class.

The SEP/RCL has a courageous and honorable history of opposing Sinhala chauvinism and the promotion of Tamil nationalism and separatism by the LTTE and other bourgeois Tamil formations. It has an unbroken record of fighting for the unity of all workers on a socialist program. This is expressed in our struggle for a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka-Eelam, as part of a broader fight for a Union of Socialist Republics in South Asia and internationally.

The SEP is writing to the Election Commission and the secretary of Public Security Ministry to demand an immediate end to the state's illegal harassment of the party's election candidates in the North. This is a vicious assault on the democratic rights of the entire working class.



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