

Condemn the police attack on School Development Officers in Sri Lanka! Release four teachers arrested by the police!

**Statement of the Collective of Workers Action Committees (Sri Lanka)
8 December 2024**

(This statement was issued on Saturday by the CWAC)

The Collective of Workers Action Committees (CWAC) in Sri Lanka vehemently condemns the brutal police attack on protesting School Development Officers (SDO) on December 2.

The CWAC urges the working class to demand the release of four teachers (SDOs) engaged in this protest and arrested by police on spurious accusations.

The CWAC is an alliance of action committees active among educators and workers in railways, ports, tea plantations and garment and migrant employees. We are fighting to defend the living and social conditions and democratic rights of workers from government and employer attacks. The CWAC struggles to unite workers in a common fight, independent of the pro-capitalist union bureaucracies.

The repressive actions of the police, deployed by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)-led National People's Power (NPP) government, are an attack on the fundamental democratic right of the working class to take action to defend their jobs, wages and working conditions.

Although successive governments have designated these workers as SDOs, they have in fact been engaged to teach in state schools during the past four years. They are being exploited by the state and paid lower salaries than those in the state teacher service.

SDO teachers have repeatedly engaged in strikes and protests, separately and jointly with other workers in recent years, to demand that they be absorbed into the teacher service and provided with the same rights.

On December 2, SDOs protested outside the education ministry in Isurupaya, located at Pelawatte, to push for their demands. The demonstration was called by the Combine of School Development Officers Association (CSDOA). JVP/NPP leaders had promised to resolve the SDOs issues after coming to power, but like scores of similar promises made to other sections of the working class this was to hoodwink them and secure their votes.

Instead of listening to the SDOs' demands, the government deployed hundreds of police armed with water-cannon and

orders to suppress their campaign. Police attacked the protesters, kicking and punching them. They then seized four teachers and hauled them before a magistrate court in Kaduwela.

Those arrested are L.P.S. Abewickrema, H.Y.L. Perera, K.M.G. Koswaththa and H. W. Arachchige. After producing them before Kaduwela Magistrate's Court, they were refused bail and remanded until December 10.

What is their crime? That they dared to demand their legitimate rights and be absorbed into the teaching service. The police have accused them of participating in an unlawful assembly, obstructing traffic and injuring police. If convicted of these charges, the four teachers could be sentenced to jail terms of up to three years and fined.

We declare: these four arrested teachers are the first victims of the class war being prepared against the working class by President Dissanayake's government.

The working class cannot allow such attacks to occur. In implementing the IMF's ruthless austerity program, the government will take you on, sooner than later. An attack on one section of our class brothers and sisters is an attack on us all!

We urge workers:

- Raise your voice to demand that the four teachers be immediately released from remand and all charges and accusations against them be dropped; and that the police attack on the teachers' protest be condemned!

- Issue statements and organise action, such as picketing, at your workplace.

This police operation is a warning to the entire working class. The JVP/NPP regime will not hesitate to crush any action by workers that challenges its pledge to fully implement the IMF austerity measures.

Following last week's repressive police action against CSDOA protesters, a delegation of ten SDOs were allowed to meet with the Deputy Education Minister Madura Senaratne. His only "promise" was to put their case before the cabinet.

President Dissanayake formed a ministerial sub-committee headed by the Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya to look into

the matter. However, senior minister and Cabinet spokesman Dr Nalinda Jayatissa spelled out the real attitude. “The government cannot provide instant solutions to complex and prolonged issues of this nature,” he declared.

This is a clear message that the SDOs will not get any solution to their legitimate demands. It is also a message to all workers that they “cannot provide instant solutions to complex and prolonged issues” i.e., to their problems.

This is a government which promised to “renegotiate” the IMF’s austerity measures to alleviate its impact on the people, that it would abolish the executive presidency and all other repressive laws, including the Prevention of Terrorism Act, and that it would maintain welfare subsidies for masses.

But as President Dissanayake declared in his inaugural policy statement to parliament on November 21, the economic crisis means “[W]e are hanging on a thread...[and] there is no room for mistakes.” The government’s focus, he insisted, was on “ensuring economic stability and reaffirming trust with the relevant economic stakeholders” through implementing the IMF’s program.

While Dissanayake remains silent about his pledge to abolish the executive presidency he has begun using its broad powers, including calling out the armed forces throughout the country.

Duminda Hulangamuwa, the president’s senior economic advisor, has also declared that the government will start taking steps to “reduce the 1.3 million employees in the public sector to at least 750,000”—that is destroy 550,000 jobs—because the treasury has no money.

The systematic “restructuring” of hundreds of state-owned enterprises, including their privatisation and commercialisation and the closure of others, has been initiated. This restructuring will destroy hundreds of thousands more jobs, along with the implementation of cuts to wages and pensions.

Dissanayake has announced that his government will establish five large special economic zones. These will be cheap labour platforms for global investors and their big-business clients in Sri Lanka.

These are just some of the harsh attacks being implemented by the government. They demonstrate that there is no solution to the burning problems confronting workers within national limits and the capitalist system.

For our part, we must recognise that the attack on SDO teachers is a warning and prepare to defend our rights by organising independently of all the capitalist parties and the pro-capitalist trade unions.

In line with the Dissanayake regime, the trade union bureaucracies controlled by the JVP and other so-called independent unions have aligned themselves against the SDOs.

Some bureaucrats from the JVP trade unions have become MPs and ministers. Mahinda Jayasinghe, Deputy labour minister and the secretary of Teacher Services Union, has publicly accused SDOs of injuring police officers. Everyone must “give time to the government” because it has been just

elected, he said.

Ceylon Teachers Union leader Joseph Stalin, who pretends to be independent, has sided with the JVP/NPP government. Stalin has said that he is vehemently opposed to SDO teachers being absorbed into the teacher service, claiming it violates the statute rules for teacher service.

Workers cannot rely on these trade union bureaucracies to defend their rights. The CSDOA is falsely claiming that SDOs can achieve their demands by pressuring the government. This is a political dead end and will lead to defeat. This is why workers must establish independent action committees in their workplaces, working-class neighbourhoods and the plantations. Trade union bureaucrats and capitalist parties will not be allowed in these committees.

We urge SDOs to establish action committees to initiate a struggle to free those arrested and to defend your democratic rights.

More broadly and urgently, the CWAC is calling for the working class to rally on the following demands:

- No to the brutal IMF program!
- No to privatisation or restructuring, and for all SOEs to be placed under the democratic control of their workers!
- No to the repayment of foreign debts!

Our allies in this struggle are our international class brothers and sisters. In the US, the UK, throughout Europe, Australia, India and more broadly, the working class has come into struggle to defend their rights from the attacks of corporations and governments.

We urge you to turn to the working class internationally! This can be achieved by coordinating your actions globally by joining the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

The CWAC is ready to assist you to form action committees at your workplaces.

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