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Sri Lanka

Stop the repression ! Release political prisoners ! Uphold democratic rights !

- IV Online magazine - 2022 - IV571 - August 2022 -

Publication date: Monday 22 August 2022

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The Samajawadi Janatha Sansadaya (Socialist People's Forum) denounces the arrests of activists of the people's struggle (*Aragalaya*), and police violence on peaceful student protestors, on Thursday 18 August. Twenty arrests were made, while four remain in police custody as of today, following an anti-government demonstration demanding the re-opening of public universities after three years of closure, the release of political prisoners, the abolition of executive powers of the president along with other constitutional reform, and for economic relief for those worst affected by the ongoing economic crisis.

Inter-University Students Federation (IUSF) Convenor Wasantha Mudalige, Inter-University Bhikkus (Buddhist monks) Federation Convenor Galwewa Siridhamma Thero, and IUSF Kelaniya University member Hashan Jeewantha, have shockingly been detained for up to 90 days - renewable up to 12 months - under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) of 1979. Meanwhile, Chintaka Rajapakse of the La Via Campesina affiliated Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reform (MONLAR) has been remanded under the ordinary criminal law at least until 26 August.

Sri Lanka's state of emergency imposed by Ranil Wickremesinghe as Acting President, lapsed on 18 August. The IUSF demonstration did not violate any court order and the fewer than 1000 protestors were non-violent with no damage to public property or injuries caused to persons including state security forces. However, hundreds of armed riot police and Special Task Force personnel used water cannon and tear gas to disrupt the demonstration. Once the march had been dispersed, the police chased and assaulted students who were on the run.

Since the political stabilisation of the ruling class in Sri Lanka, following the parliamentary election of Ranil Wickremesinghe on 21 July, there is a wave of state repression against prominent personalities of the people's struggle movement including trade unionists who spoke in its rallies and media conferences, as well as victimisation of hundreds of citizens who entered the state buildings occupied by protestors on 9 July.

President Wickremesinghe, who also holds the ministerial portfolios of Finance and Defence, profited from the citizens' uprising that removed the Rajapaksa family from government. However, he is now intent on suppressing the *Aragalaya*, to secure his regime until presidential and parliamentary elections are due in 2024 and to administer economic shock therapy through a new wave of neoliberal structural reforms.

On behalf of comrades of the IUSF and MONLAR, the Samajawadi Janatha Sansadaya appeals to the international labour movement and all those in solidarity with the people's struggle in Sri Lanka, to launch actions for the immediate release of all political prisoners, for the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, and for the democratic rights of the peoples of Sri Lanka including freedoms of expression, association, and assembly.

In addition to pickets of Sri Lankan diplomatic missions and interventions by representatives of workers and left organisations, please send letters of protest to:

President Ranil Wickremesinghe

Presidential Secretariat

Galle Face

Colombo 01

Sri Lanka

ps@presidentsoffice.lk

Samajawadi Janatha Sansadaya (Socialist People's Forum)

Colombo. 20 August 2022

PS:

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