

Sri Lanka

## Tamil youth and SEP supporters arrested

**Our reporter**  
**14 July 1998**

Sri Lankan police have arrested and detained eight workers and young people, including a supporter of the Socialist Equality Party, Uday Kumar, in Hatton, a major tea plantation area. These same youth were among a group of 13 detained for some two years by Sri Lankan authorities until their release was won by the SEP in December 1996. They were accused of being supporters of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Now they have been taken into custody as suspects in the bombing last month of a factory at the Shannon tea estate.

The eight, who were picked up in the week following the bombing, were previously detained in 1994-96 on the same suspicions. But the police and the People's Alliance regime of president Chandrika Kumaratunga could not produce any evidence to substantiate the charge. The SEP, the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, waged a political campaign throughout the working class for their release, as part of its campaign to win the release all political prisoners.

Appreciating the principled struggle carried out by the SEP, which at the same time clearly differentiated itself from the politics of the national separatist LTTE, several of those detainees joined the party after their release. Uday Kumar, who has now been detained for a second time, remained a consistent supporter of the SEP and stood as a party candidate at the last local government election in the area in March 1997.

Another one of the group of 13 previous detainees who joined the SEP after his release, Devapathi Savarimuthu, was also brought to the Hatton police station as a suspect in the recent bomb explosion. But due to the immediate intervention of the SEP on his behalf the police released him the same day, June 24, after taking a statement. The threat of arrest still hangs

over him.

The incident at the tea factory occurred on June 1. Two alleged bombers approached the facility in the middle of the night. The plant was operating at the time and the individuals rang the bell to gain entry. When the chief tea-maker appeared at the door, he was ordered to open it. The latter, saying that he had to get the key, went upstairs and called on workers to help him. Seeing the group of workers approaching, the two individuals fled. The workers gave chase and threw stones at the men.

A few minutes later, while the workers were still looking for the intruders, a bomb exploded near the engine room of the factory. Although there were no casualties, a part of the factory was heavily damaged.

When questioned by the authorities, the tea-maker indicated that the two men he confronted spoke Sinhalese very well. But all those who have been detained are Tamil-speaking young plantation workers and unemployed youth. The LTTE has been blamed for the explosion and the authorities are attempting to implicate the youth with having LTTE connections.

Both Uday Kumar and Savarimuthu, along with other SEP members in the Hatton-Maskeliya area, made a strong political intervention during the 600,000-strong plantation workers' strike in April of this year. The bureaucracies of the plantation workers unions, who support the PA regime, tried to intimidate the SEP members and supporters by physically attacking them at one of the workers' demonstrations and demanding the police arrest them. The police obeyed the demand of the PA regime's trade union allies, but had to release all the SEP members and supporters when the party leadership intervened. The police officer who spoke to the SEP secretary tried to cover up their illegal arrest, claiming that the police

brought them to the station only out of concern for their safety.

There is good reason to believe that these same forces, including officials of the Ceylon Workers Congress and the UP Country Peoples Front, whose leaders occupy ministerial posts in the PA regime, are behind the latest attempt to frame up SEP members and supporters for the bomb explosion at the Shannon factory. It is likely that the PA regime and the trade union bureaucracies will try to frame up other SEP members in the area as well, in preparation for a general clampdown on the party.

This was the motive behind the recent arrest of SEP member Selliah Rajkumar for the second time on the baseless charge that he was collecting arms for the LTTE. In the same way that the war against the Tamil masses is being used to suppress the demands of the workers for higher wages, job security and decent living standards, bogus connections are being used to repress all political opponents of the PA regime. This must be taken as a serious warning by the workers and oppressed masses.

The detained youth face the threat of bodily harm or worse as long as they remain in custody. When the SEP attempted to see Uday Kumar at the detention centre, the authorities at the anti-subversive unit would not allow it. When a lawyer representing the SEP insisted on seeing Kumar, he was allowed to do so only in the presence of the Officer in Charge. Kumar had been weeping, indicating either police harassment or physical abuse.

The crime the SEP supporters have committed in the eyes of the ruling class and its allies is dedication to an international socialist program. The attempt to witch-hunt the SEP members and supporters must be defeated. A vigorous political campaign must be waged for the release of Uday Kumar and the other seven detainees, as part of a campaign for the release of all political prisoners.

**Letters of protest should be sent to:**

1. The Defence Secretary, Ministry of Defence,  
15/5, Baladaksha Mawatha, Colombo 03, Sri Lanka  
(Fax 0094-1-541529)

2. Attorney General, Attorney General's Department,  
Colombo 12, Sri Lanka  
(Fax 0094-1-436421)

3. The Inspector General of Police, Police

Headquarters,  
Colombo 01, Sri Lanka

We welcome copies of all letters sent in defence of Uday Kumar and the other detainees.

The address of the SEP, Sri Lanka is:  
General Secretary, Socialist Equality Party,  
No. 90, 1st Maligakanda Lane, Colombo 10, Sri Lanka.  
E-mail: [wijed@applesri.lk](mailto:wijed@applesri.lk)

See Also:  
Sri Lankan police detain Tamil socialist  
*SEP member Selliah Rajkumar held for 24 hours*  
[2 July 1998]

Sri Lankan government tightens censorship  
[13 June 1998]



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