

LTTE remains silent on arrest of Tamil socialists in Sri Lanka

Editorial Board
11 August 1998

Despite an outpouring of letters and faxes protesting the arrest of three Tamil socialists in Kilinochchi, in the north of Sri Lanka, the leadership of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the separatist guerrilla group waging war in the north and east of the island country, has refused to issue any statement on the whereabouts or condition of the detainees.

To date the LTTE, which controls the Kilinochchi region, has failed to even acknowledge the letters of concern and protest from supporters of the Sri Lankan Socialist Equality Party and the Fourth International, readers of the *World Socialist Web Site*, and human rights organizations around the world.

Since the first arrests more than two weeks ago, the plight of the three detained SEP members has been widely reported in the Sri Lankan press. LTTE authorities in Kilinochchi seized Thirugnana Sambandan and Kasinathan Naguleshwaran July 26 while the two were posting SEP placards. A third SEP member, Rajendran Sudarshan, was arrested by the LTTE at his home on August 2.

These three men are in grave physical danger, and other supporters of the SEP in the Kilinochchi area are likely targets for further repression at the hands of the LTTE authorities. The LTTE is notorious for using violence, including murder, against its political opponents.

The influence of the SEP has grown considerably in the Kilinochchi region, and the local residents are deeply concerned about the fate of the SEP members who have been taken into custody. Their arrest was the response of the LTTE leadership to the growing political support in the Tamil population for the SEP's socialist and internationalist policies.

On July 28 relatives of Sambandan and Kasinathan spoke with the LTTE official in charge of the area,

Theepan. He said he had ordered their arrest because the SEP's politics had become an obstacle to the LTTE's activities. Theepan added he had handed the two SEP members over to Pottu Amman, the head of the LTTE police in the area. Amman is well-known for his brutal treatment of LTTE opponents.

Theepan told Sambandan's and Kasinathan's relatives that the two would be released after two days of interrogation. Instead, the LTTE has stepped up its repression with the arrest of Rajendran Sudarshan. Neither the relatives nor comrades of the arrested men have been allowed to see them, or been told where they are being held.

When the SEP in Sri Lanka learned of the arrests, on August 4, it immediately sent a letter of protest to the LTTE's head offices, located in London, England. Similar messages have been sent by the SEP's sister parties in India, Europe, North America and Australia.

Scores of protests have been sent by individuals in the US, Canada, Britain, Germany, Japan and Australia. A group of American telephone workers currently on strike against Bell Atlantic faxed a letter to the LTTE demanding:

'1. That you immediately give an accounting of the fate of [the arrested SEP members]. Where are they being held? What are the charges against them?

'2. That their relatives and their fellow members of the SEP be allowed to visit them and make sure that they are not being mistreated.

'3. That they be released and any and all charges against them be dropped.'

Mr. John Ball of the Sri Lanka Project of the Australian Council for Overseas Aid wrote to the LTTE headquarters in London: 'I appeal to your office to urgently check this report and to use your contacts with the LTTE in Sri Lanka to ensure the well-being of any

detained SEP members and to secure their immediate release.'

The arrest of the SEP members is a clear case of a politically motivated attack on basic democratic rights. The SEP, the Trotskyist party in Sri Lanka, has unconditionally defended the democratic rights of the Tamil people. It has consistently opposed the war being carried out by the Sri Lankan government against the Tamil population in the north and east of the island, and demanded the withdrawal of government troops. The SEP members were arrested because of their principled advocacy of working class internationalism.

The *World Socialist Web Site* is conducting an international campaign, calling on human rights and civil rights organizations, labor groups and all individuals committed to the defense of democratic rights to demand the immediate release of the SEP members. Press releases have been sent to news organizations around the world.

On Tuesday, August 11, between 4:15 and 4:45 PM, London Time, the BBC World Service will broadcast a program focusing on the arrest of comrades Sambandan, Naguleswaran and Sudarshan, and the political struggle of the SEP to unify the Sinhalese and Tamil masses in the struggle for socialism not only in Sri Lanka, but throughout the Indian subcontinent. Among those interviewed for the program are members of the Sri Lankan party's exile organizations in France and Germany, and Chris Marsden, leader of the SEP of Britain.

On Wednesday, August 12 at 9 PM a radio station in Toronto, home to tens of thousands of Tamil refugees, will broadcast an interview with an SEP representative about the arrest of the Tamil socialists. Further details concerning this program will be posted by the WSWs tomorrow.

The WSWs urgently calls on all of its readers, all labor and human rights organizations, and all who defend basic democratic rights to send faxes and letters to the LTTE condemning the arrest of the SEP members in Kilinochchi and demanding their immediate and unconditional release.

Letters should be faxed to the LTTE c/o Eelam House (London) at: 44-171-403-1653
Telephone: 44-171-403-4554.

Statements can also be mailed to:
The LTTE

c/o Eelam House
202 Long Lane
London SE1 4QB
United Kingdom

Please send copies of all statements of protest to the WSWs at:

Email: editor@wsws.org

Fax: (US) 248-967-3023

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