

# International protests mount against LTTE arrest of Tamil socialists in Sri Lanka

12 August 1998

The international campaign spearheaded by the *World Socialist Web Site* to secure the release of three Tamil socialists arrested by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is reaching a growing audience around the world.

On August 11 the BBC World Service broadcast a segment on the arrest of Thirugnana Sambandan, Kasinathan Naguleshwaran and Rajendran Sudarshan, all of whom are members of the Sri Lankan Socialist Equality Party. The arrests took place in Kilinochchi, a region in the north of the country which is under the control of the LTTE, the separatist guerrilla group waging war in the north and east of Sri Lanka.

Among those interviewed for the program were members of the Sri Lankan party's exile organizations in France and Germany, and Chris Marsden, leader of the SEP of Britain. They discussed 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. The arrest of comrades Sambandan, Naguleshwaran and Sudarshan, they explained, was an act of political repression aimed at intimidating the Tamil masses and silencing opposition to the LTTE's policies. Throughout the broadcast it was stressed that the three SEP members are in grave physical danger, and other SEP supporters in the region face similar attacks.

Sambandan and Naguleshwaran were arrested on July 26 while they were posting SEP placards. Sudarshan was seized by the LTTE at his home on August 2.

Despite an outpouring of letters and faxes protesting the arrests, the LTTE has refused to issue any statement on the whereabouts or condition of the detainees. It 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.

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 Naguleshwaran spoke with the LTTE official in charge of the area, Theepan. He said he had ordered the arrests 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 Naguleshwaran'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. The LTTE has made no statement as to the charges against the detainees.

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 faxed a letter to the LTTE demanding that it make known the condition of the detainees and the location where they are being held. They further demanded that their

relatives and comrades of the SEP be allowed to visit them and make sure that they are not being mistreated. Finally, they demanded that the three men be immediately 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 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 Wednesday, August 12 at 9 PM Keith Jones, the national secretary of the SEP of Canada, will be interviewed on Radio Shanti in Toronto (105.5 FM). The hour-long program, to be carried in English, Sinhalese and Tamil, will be directed in the first instance to the 150,000 Sri Lankan Tamil and Sinhalese immigrants who live in the Toronto area.**

Toronto was at one time a bastion of LTTE support, but opposition to the LTTE has grown in recent years as the Tamil refugees have learned of the LTTE's suppression of democratic rights in the areas under its rule.

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](mailto:editor@wsws.org)

Fax: (US) 248-967-3023

See Also:

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