

International campaign demands release of Sri Lankan socialists

The WSWs Editorial Board
13 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 gathering support throughout the world. On Wednesday letters and petitions from textile workers in West Bengal, India, chemical workers in Australia and bus drivers in London were among the protests sent to the LTTE demanding the release of Thirugnana Sambandan, Kasinathan Naguleshwaran and Rajendran Sudarshan, all of whom are members of the Sri Lankan Socialist Equality Party.

News reports of the arrests were also widely broadcast Wednesday in Sri Lanka and in Toronto, a city with one of the largest Sri Lankan Tamil and Sinhalese immigrant communities in the world.

The three SEP members were arrested in Kilinochchi, a district 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. Sambandan and Naguleshwaran were taken into custody on July 26 as they were posting SEP placards in the area. Sudarshan was arrested August 2 in his home.

The LTTE is notorious for using violence, including murder, against its political opponents. 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.

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.

Through the efforts of the Sri Lankan SEP and its sister parties internationally news of arrests have been widely circulated. The government-owned Sri Lankan Broadcasting Corporation radio station included news of the arrests among its lead stories aired Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning. Reports on private radio stations and TNL, an independent television station, were also aired.

On Wednesday night, Keith Jones, the national secretary of the SEP in Canada, was interviewed on Radio Shanti in Toronto. The program was carried in English, Sinhalese and Tamil in a radio broadcast directed to the 150,000 Sri Lankan Tamil and Sinhalese immigrants who live in the Toronto area.

An increasing number of workers are expressing their concern over the fate of the Sri Lankan socialists. In a letter to the LTTE, an organization of textile workers in India wrote, "We, the workers and employees of the National Jute Manufacturing Corporation in Kharda, West Bengal, strongly condemn the attack on the SEP members of Sri Lanka, on 26 July 1998 in Kilinochchi by the LTTE. The severe oppression of the SEP members is in clear violation of the fundamental democratic rights of the people.

"We understand that the SEP in Sri Lanka, and its predecessor the Revolutionary Communist League, is the only organisation which has worked for 30 years for the real liberation of the toiling masses, including Tamils.

"We demand their release immediately.

"Signed, Durga Prasad Shaw, Secretary"

Workers in various industries in Australia have also sent faxes demanding the release of the SEP members. At the Incitec fertiliser plant in Newcastle, a group of 20 workers sent a petition to the LTTE demanding the

release of the SEP members. It read in part: “As members of the Socialist Equality Party, they have been detained for expressing their basic democratic rights. This intolerable situation must end now with their return to family and friends.”

Dozens of London bus drivers also signed petitions protesting the arrests and demanding the release of the SEP members. Last week a group of Bell Atlantic telephone workers faxed a letter to the LTTE offices in London demanding that the organization make known the condition of the detainees and their location, allow their relatives to see them, and release the Tamil socialists immediately.

When the SEP in Sri Lanka first 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 fraternal parties in India, Europe, North America and Australia. Scores of additional protests have been sent by individuals in the US, Canada, Britain, Germany, Japan, New Zealand and Australia.

Despite this 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 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



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact