

# Sri Lankan SEP holds protest to demand release of Tamil socialists

Our Reporters  
21 August 1998



The August 18 Colombo demonstration against the LTTE arrests

The Sri Lankan Socialist Equality Party organized a demonstration and public meeting August 18 in the capital city of Colombo, to demand the release of three of its members who were arrested and are being detained by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Thirugnana Sambandan, Kasinathan Naguleshwaran and Rajendran Sudarshan were arrested in Kilinochchi, a district in the north of the country 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.

Over 100 members and supporters of the party participated in a protest held in front of the main railway station in Colombo. Thousands of workers from government and private work places on their way home from work saw the demonstration and many stopped to read the placards and inquire about the arrests.

The public meeting held later that day attracted nearly 200 people, including urban and plantation workers, teachers, fishermen, housewives and youth from different parts of the country. The meeting was chaired by K. Ratnayake, the editor of the SEP's newspaper, *Kamkaru*

*Mawatha*, and was addressed by M. Aravindan, a SEP Central Committee member and Wije Dias, the general secretary of the party. Speeches were given both in Sinhalese and Tamil.

A message was read from the mother of Rajendran Sudharshan, one of the arrested SEP members. She had traveled to Colombo from Kayts, in the north of the island, after hearing of the arrest of her son on a national radio broadcast. She sent the following statement to the meeting:

"I am Singamany Rajendran.

"I earnestly request that the leadership of the LTTE immediately release from their custody my son Rajendran Sudharshan and the other two persons, Thirugnana Sambandan and Kasinathan Naguleshwaran, who were doing political work with my son.

"As far as I know my son and the two others were fighting for the defence of the democratic rights of the Tamils, as members of the Socialist Equality Party.

"My son Sudharshan is a father of three children. He left his village, Paruthiyadaippu in Kayts in 1990 with the commencement of second Eelam war carried out by the previous UNP government. Since then he has been living with his family in Kilinochchi in Vanni with limited facilities.

"I have made many appeals to Sudharshan to come back to Kayts and stay with us. In spite of the numerous difficulties he faced, he did not agree to my requests. I understood that he made that decision only to continue his struggle for the socialist policies.

"My son and his friends have never engaged in robberies, killings or any other crimes. Therefore I see no justification for their arrests and detention.

"I know that they engaged in their political activity under the great restrictions imposed on them. Those activities were related to the enormous hardships faced by the poor peasants, youths and refugees from the northern

peninsula. In the areas the LTTE controls, they claim that they are fighting for the liberation of the Tamil people. With these arrests how can we believe them?"



The audience at the SEP public meeting held in Colombo on 18 August

After reading this statement to the meeting, SEP general secretary Wije Dias posed the question: "How can any one believe, after listening to Sudharshan's mother, the words of the LTTE, now spread through the Internet, that they arrested these people because of their illegal activities? As everybody knows these comrades were arrested because of their socialist convictions and the policies they fought for."

Wije Dias continued: "Unlike the statement from Sudharshan's mother, the comments on the LTTE supporters' web site, which can well be considered a statement from the LTTE, are unsigned. At the same time, hundreds of letters from Sri Lanka and throughout the world demanding the release of our members have gone unanswered by the LTTE leadership for two weeks. The LTTE cannot justify their brutal action. They feel that they are not accountable to the world public, let alone the Tamil people they claim to liberate. Can such a movement be expected to defend the democratic rights of the people?"

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 campaign to unite Tamil and Sinhalese working people on the basis of an international socialist perspective.

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.

Letters, faxes and e-mail messages protesting the arrests have been sent to the LTTE offices in London from around the world.

In Australia, teachers union delegates representing schools throughout the far western suburbs of Sydney have "strongly condemned" the LTTE's seizure of the three SEP members and demanded their immediate release.

Wednesday's monthly meeting of the St. Marys-Mt. Druitt Teachers Association, attended by some 20 delegates, adopted a resolution denouncing the arrests as a "fundamental attack on democratic rights."

A Sydney hospital worker, a member of the Communications Electrical and Plumbing Union, has also sent a fax demanding the release of the three SEP members. He pointed to the long and principled history of the SEP (formerly the RCL) in campaigning for the democratic rights of the Tamil people.

The *World Socialist Web Site* urgently calls on all 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



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**