

British Trades Union Congress delegates condemn LTTE repression

International demands mount for release of Tamil socialists

Mike Ingram
16 September 1998

More than 200 delegates at the British Trades Union Congress annual conference signed petitions to demand the release of five Sri Lankan Socialist Equality Party members who have been apprehended by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The British SEP circulated the petition at the conference in Blackpool as part of an international campaign to demand an end to the LTTE's political repression of the Sri Lankan socialists.

The petition, which was addressed to the LTTE's London headquarters, read in part: "We demand an immediate end to your campaign of arrests and intimidation directed against the members and supporters of the Socialist Equality Party in the Killinochchi area in the north of Sri Lanka and the immediate release of those taken into custody.

"Since July 26 five SEP members have been arrested, Thirugnana Sambandan, Kasinadan Naguleshwaran, Rajendran Sudharshan, A. Rasaratnam and E. Nayalvale. No charges have been laid against them and all enquiries as to their whereabouts have been ignored. Your office refuses to acknowledge the arrests or answer correspondence relating to them.

"We consider your actions to be a blatant infringement upon the democratic rights of the Socialist Equality Party to fight for their political positions. We demand that you immediately inform the family and comrades of those held of their whereabouts and state of health and that they be released forthwith."

The letter was signed by 234 delegates, representing millions of workers throughout Britain. Signatures included such prominent individuals as Ken Cameron, leader of the Fire Brigades Union; John Foster, General Secretary of the National Union of Journalists; Jim

Simmins, National Officer of the professional union MSF; and Frank Cave, the Vice President of both the National Union of Mineworkers and the Socialist Labour Party.

Dozens of delegates from Britain's largest union, the 1.4 million-strong UNISON, signed the letter, as did General Council member Roger Bannister.

The petitions were sent to the LTTE together with a cover letter from Julie Hyland, the assistant national secretary of the British SEP, which drew attention to the broad sections of the British working class represented by the signatures. Hyland wrote, "We will continue to expose your actions before the British and international working class," and concluded by demanding that the LTTE "acknowledge this correspondence and respond to our demands with the utmost urgency."

The support from TUC delegates follows the urgent appeal issued by Amnesty International calling for messages to be sent to the LTTE's leadership-in-exile urging it to provide assurances the SEP members will not be ill-treated or tortured, to allow International Committee of the Red Cross representatives and relatives to visit its SEP captives, and to clarify the reasons for their detention. The appeal was distributed through the organisation's Urgent Action Network via e-mail, fax and telegram, to thousands of AI members and other concerned individuals and organisations world-wide.

The SEP has a long and proud record of championing the democratic rights of the Tamils. Like its predecessor the Revolutionary Communist league, the SEP has always opposed the anti-Tamil legislation and policies of the Sri Lankan state, including the

privileged status of the Sinhalese language and Buddhist faith under the Sri Lankan constitution. It is an indefatigable opponent of the racist war and demands the withdrawal of all government troops from the Tamil majority areas. For these principled stands, several of its members have been murdered by Sinhalese chauvinists and arrested by the government.

The SEP has come under attack from the LTTE, a separatist guerrilla group, because of its principled struggle to unite Sinhalese and Tamil workers and peasants against the capitalist government in Colombo, on its fight to establish a socialist republic of Sri Lanka and Tamil Eelam.

The *World Socialist Web Site* urgently calls on all of its readers, all labor, human rights and Tamil organisations, and all those who defend basic democratic rights to send faxes and letters to the LTTE condemning the repression of the SEP and demanding the immediate and unconditional release of the five SEP members.

Letters should be faxed to the LTTE c/o Eelam House (London) at:

44-171-403-165

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:

E-mail: editor@wsws.org

Fax: (US) 248-967-3023



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact