

Colombo press conference called to press for release of all SEP members - Sri Lankan Socialist Equality Party cites reports that LTTE has released three Tamil socialists

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The Socialist Equality Party of Sri Lanka held a press conference in Colombo on Tuesday to announce that it has received word that three of its members have been released by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) after more than six weeks in captivity.

SEP General Secretary Wije Dias said the SEP had received letters from Rajendran Sudharshan and Thirugnana Sambandan reporting that they and a third SEP member, Kasinathan Naguleshwaran, had been released unconditionally and apparently unharmed on September 13.

“The SEP,” said Dias, “views this as a very encouraging development. If the facts reported in these letters are true, it should be possible to bring this sorry episode—in which the LTTE has persecuted members of the socialist party that has spearheaded the struggle against Sinhalese chauvinism and the 15-year racist war against the Tamil population in the north and east of Sri Lanka—to a speedy and just conclusion.”

Dias said the letters appeared genuine, but the information they contained needed independent verification. “Also, we need to establish that all three comrades are in good health and that none of them was harmed in any way. Finally, we remain greatly concerned over the fate of the other two SEP members who remain in the LTTE’s custody.”

The SEP general secretary called on the LTTE to allow the SEP to establish direct contact with its freed members so as to ascertain their physical condition and learn more about their interrogation. He also urged the LTTE to guarantee that it will take no further action against SEP members in Killinochchi, an area just

south of the Jaffna Peninsula that is under its control, and that it will allow the SEP to exercise its democratic rights as a political party unimpeded.

The arrest and detention of the five SEP members is a clear case of political repression. Theepan, the LTTE official who ordered the July 26 arrests of Samabandan and Naguleshwaran, told their relatives two days later that he had done so because the SEP’s political work—i.e. its struggle for a socialist-internationalist program—was proving an obstacle to the LTTE.

Subsequently, the LTTE’s leadership-in-exile in London failed to even acknowledge that its officials in Killinochchi had arrested members of the SEP, let alone give any explanation for their detention. The LTTE authorities in Killinochchi, meanwhile, rebuffed all attempts by the detained SEP members’ relatives and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to obtain information about their whereabouts and well being.

Fears for the safety of all SEP members and supporters in Killinochchi were heightened with the apprehension of Rajendran Sudharshan August 2, and the arrests of A. Rasaratnam and E. Nayalvale August 31.

In his statement to the press, Dias noted that the letters from Sambandan and Sudarshan thanked the SEP and the International Committee of the Fourth International for rallying international working class and democratic public opinion in their defense. Over the past six weeks many working class and human rights organizations, trade union officials and concerned individuals have responded to the call of the

SEP and the ICFI for messages of protest to be sent to the LTTE demanding that it cease its repression of the SEP and immediately and unconditionally release all SEP members in its custody.

After conducting its own investigation to establish the facts in the case, Amnesty International issued a statement September 11 urging all members and supporters of its Urgent Action Network to press the LTTE to provide assurances that its SEP captives not be ill-treated or tortured, allow representatives of the ICRC and relatives to visit them, and clarify the reasons for their detention.

Yesterday, the Victorian Branch of the Australian Education Union, which represents 24,000 primary and secondary schools teachers in the Australian state of Victoria, faxed a letter to the LTTE that declared, "We support calls for the [SEP members'] immediate release and protest in the strongest terms these illegal detentions."

The strong response for the defense campaign indicates many have recognized that the LTTE has held the SEP members in violation of the most elementary norms of judicial procedure, in effect "disappearing" them.

The widespread support for the campaign in Sri Lanka is also a tribute to the political struggle of the SEP, which is known throughout the island for its steadfast defense of the democratic rights of the Tamils. In calling on the LTTE to release the SEP members, even the SEP's political opponents pointed to its uncompromising opposition to Sinhalese chauvinism.

The widespread interest in the plight of the SEP members was reflected at yesterday's press conference. Among the journalists present were reporters for the Independent Television Network, Reuters, the *Island* (the best-known English-language daily) and two Tamil-language dailies.

Much of the discussion at the press conference centered on the SEP's opposition to the war that the Sri Lankan government has waged against the Tamils in the north and east since 1983. In answer to a question concerning the SEP's call for all Sri Lankan security forces to be withdrawn from the north and east, SEP General Secretary Dias explained that the war is the outcome of the Sinhalese ruling class's decades-long drive to communalize politics, so as to channel social discontent away from a challenge to capitalist rule and

maintain its monopoly on political power. While the Tamils have borne the brunt of the war, it has been directed against all the oppressed. The bourgeoisie has used the war as a cover to drive down the living standards of the masses in the south and to justify sweeping attacks on their democratic rights.

Dias then explained that the SEP fights for a United Socialist States of Sri Lanka and Tamil Eelam. But the class unity of the Tamil and Sinhalese workers and oppressed which is required to realize this perspective will only be forged through an intransigent struggle against the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie and its state, and against its national oppression of the Tamils.

Asked if the international defense campaign would continue, Dias said, "Yes. We will not relent until we have confirmation of the release of all our members."

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges all labor and human rights organizations and all those who are concerned with upholding democratic rights to press the LTTE for the immediate and unconditional release of all SEP members in its custody.

Letters of protest 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:

E-mail: editor@wsws.org

Fax: (US) 248-967-3023



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact