

New support in Britain for campaign against LTTE's persecution of Tamil socialists

Chris Marsden
26 September 1998

A number of prominent Labour MP's in Britain have made calls for the release of the members of the Socialist Equality Party in Sri Lanka, imprisoned by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

This support was given prior to the announcement that the four members of the SEP seized by the LTTE have been released. According to a letter from Killinochchi dated September 24, the fourth and last prisoner, Rasarapnam Rajavale was freed on September 16. The letter adds that like the three SEP members released on September 13, Rajavale is in good health.

Ken Livingstone, Labour MP for Brent East and a candidate for the new position of Lord Mayor of London, called for the 'immediate release' of the Tamil socialists, 'and the right of all parties to operate freely and without intimidation throughout Sri Lanka'.

Harold Best, MP for Leeds North West, told a World Socialist Web Site reporter:

'I wish to express my concern about the safety of the members of the SEP ... who were recently taken prisoner by the LTTE in the Killinochchi district in Sri Lanka. All fair-minded people must support the demand for the disclosure of their whereabouts and assurances about their safety. The International Red Cross must be given immediate access to these men and they must be allowed to communicate with their families.

'As the statement from Amnesty International points out, since the early 1990s, the LTTE has been responsible for killing thousands of Tamils. When I first heard about this organisation, I thought they were fighting for radical change in their country. I don't understand how they can turn to mass killings. The evidence is that they have lost support and are trying to intimidate their own people.

'Everybody has the right to speak and act freely in

fighting for their beliefs... One of my grandfathers was Irish. After the First World War, when the Black and Tans were operating in Ireland, he was taken away on some pretext that was not understood. He was released four days later, after having been badly beaten up by the state forces. According to my mother, he was never the same again.

'My family were poverty stricken peasants, who knew nothing about the IRA. That is why the Black and Tans felt free to go in for what they described as 'legitimate counter-terrorist tactics'. As a result, for my own reasons, I am absolutely opposed to terrorism--both State terrorism and that of so-called revolutionaries. We have to bring an end to 'the culture of the disappeared'. I will see Derek Fatchett in the Foreign Office and I will do everything in my power to secure the release of these men.'

Derek Fatchett, MP for Leeds Central, is a Minister of State in the Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Office. He wrote a letter stating, 'I can understand your concern about the safety and well being of the individual Tamils which you brought to my attention.

'I will raise this matter in the Foreign Office and we will do our best to find out the whereabouts of the individuals. As soon as I have any further information, I will come back to you again.'

The Leeds branch of the Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT) covers over 1,000 rail workers at the main city station. At a meeting of September 17, it passed a unanimous resolution stating:

'Leeds City branch of the Rail Maritime Transport workers Union demand the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) stop their terror campaign against the Socialist Equality Party in the Killinochchi region of Northern Sri-Lanka...We condemn these kidnappings and oppose the use of terror against socialist opponents

of the politics of the LTTE. We note with grave concern that the LTTE have ignored the inquiries made by the International Red Cross on behalf of the families of the kidnapped workers. We reiterate, release these workers unharmed back into the arms of their families.'

The resolution has been sent to the National Executive committee of the RMT.

Pending confirmation that the four comrades have in fact been freed and that no others remain in LTTE custody, the SEP and the World Socialist Web Site are continuing their campaign to force the LTTE to cease its repression and release all SEP members. The World Socialist Web Site urges all labour and human rights organisations, and those groups and individuals concerned with upholding democratic rights, to continue to press the LTTE for the immediate and unconditional release of all SEP members in its custody. We are also calling on the LTTE to publicly confirm the release of the SEP members and allow the Sri Lankan SEP to establish direct contact with its comrades by allowing a party representative to visit Killinochchi, or permitting one of those released to travel to Colombo.

Letters of protest should be faxed to the LTTE c/o Eelam House, (London) at: 44-171-403-1653 Tel.: 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

See Also:

Statement of SEP (Sri Lanka) General Secretary Wijesinghe on status of Tamil socialists held by the LTTE
[23 September 1998]

Fourth Tamil socialist reportedly released by LTTE
[25 September 1998]



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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