

Working class organizations, artists and intellectuals demand LTTE release Sri Lankan socialists

Editorial Board
19 September 1998

The campaign for the release of the five Socialist Equality Party (SEP) members arbitrarily arrested and illegally detained by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam is winning broad support in Sri Lanka.

Numerous working class and human rights organizations, artists, intellectuals and other concerned individuals have issued statements demanding that the LTTE cease its persecution of its socialist political opponents and release the five Tamil socialists. These include: the Ceylon Teachers Union, the largest organization of teachers on the island; the Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions, the labor federation affiliated with the Communist Party of Sri Lanka; the Ceylon Bank Employees Union, which represents all workers, Sinhalese and Tamil, at private and government banks, with the exception of Sri Lanka's central bank; and the Commercial and Industrial Workers Union.

The Lanka Sama Samaja Party, the oldest and largest working class political organization, has issued a statement urging the release of Thirugnana Sambandan, Kasinathan Naguleswaran, Rajendran Sudharshan, A. Rasaratnam and E. Nayalvale. The Neva Sama Samaja Party, a left-wing split-off from the LSSP, and the United Socialist Party have issued similar statements.

Eighteen academics at the University of Colombo, including Nira Wickramasinghe, author of an important study of the communalization of Sri Lanka politics *Ethnic Politics in Colonial Sri Lanka*, have written letters calling for the release of the SEP members. So too have performing artist Roger Senevirathne, filmmaker and journalist Sudath Mahadivulwewa, drama director Sunil Chandrasiri, and actor and radio producer W. Jayasiri.

The five Tamil socialists are in grave danger. Three of the SEP members have been in the custody of LTTE security forces in Killinochchi, an LTTE-controlled area south of the Jaffna Peninsula, for more than six weeks. Yet the LTTE's London-based leadership-in-exile refuses to even acknowledge the arrest of the SEP members, let alone provide any explanation for their detention. Similarly, the LTTE authorities in Killinochchi have ignored requests from relatives of the SEP captives and from the International Committee of the Red Cross for information as to their whereabouts and well being. **In effect the five SEP members have been disappeared by the LTTE.**

The LTTE has carried out numerous executions of its political opponents, including many civilians. Moreover, it is known to treat its Tamil detainees with particular harshness.

Many of those writing on behalf of the five SEP members noted that the SEP has a long and proud record of defending the democratic rights of the Tamils, of opposing Sinhalese chauvinism and the war the Sri Lankan state has waged against the Tamils of the North and East since 1983.

Dr. Carlo Fonseka, formerly a professor at Colombo University's Medical Faculty and now a member of the University Grants Commission, wrote: 'The Socialist Equality Party of Sri Lanka has an unbroken 30-year record of principled support for the rights of the Tamil speaking people of Sri Lanka. Perhaps it is the only political movement in Sri Lanka which has been uncompromisingly non-racist.' The Movement for Inter Racial Justice and Equality said in a September 9 press release, 'The Socialist Equality Party is well known for its steadfast stand on the Tamil people's right to self

determination and constant critique of the ongoing racist war.' The general secretary of the Commercial and Industrial Workers Union, Saranapala de Silva, said: 'The arrest of cadres of an organization like the Socialist Equality Party which has taken a stand specially against the war and national oppression cannot be justified any way.'

Even the SEP's political opponents have been forced to acknowledge that it has an unblemished record of opposing Sinhalese chauvinism. In its press release the LSSP declared, 'The LSSP is aware that the Samajawadi Samanatha Pakshaya (SEP) is a non-communal, non-racist organization and there is no question that these five persons could have been engaged in any work that can be understood as being against the aspirations of the Tamil people.' This is an implicit, albeit inadvertent, admission of the LSSP's own betrayal of the Tamil people and the working class, for the SEP and its forerunner, the Revolutionary Communist League, have spearheaded the struggle against the war, for which the LSSP has voted war credits, and against Sri Lanka's 1972 constitution. Written by the then Justice Minister and LSSP leader Colvin da Silva, the 1972 constitution did much to communalize Sri Lanka's political life by enshrining Sinhalese as the sole official language and Buddhism as the state religion.

Through the *World Socialist Web Site*, the International Committee of the Fourth International has waged a vigorous campaign to mobilize international support for the SEP detainees. Important new support for this campaign was won in the past week when 234 delegates to the annual gathering of the British Trades Union Congress signed petitions to the LTTE leadership demanding the immediate and unconditional releases of the SEP members. On September 11, Amnesty International issued an 'Urgent Action Appeal' on behalf of the five SEP members. The appeal called for members and supporters of AI's Urgent Action Network to send messages to the LTTE leadership urging it to provide assurances the SEP members will not be ill-treated or tortured, allow representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross and relatives to visit the captive SEP members, and clarify the reasons for their detention.

No time can be lost in seeking to extricate the SEP members from the clutches of the LTTE. All labor and

human rights organizations and those concerned with upholding democratic rights should call for the immediate and unconditional release of the SEP members. We especially urge Tamil organizations and all those who support the struggle of the Tamil masses against the Sri Lankan state to demand that the LTTE halt its repression of the SEP. The LTTE's violation of the SEP members' basic democratic and human rights and the LTTE's repression of the political force that has spearheaded the struggle against Sinhalese chauvinism can only strengthen the government and reaction.

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

See Also:

Appeals for the release of the five SEP members in LTTE custody

A selection from Sri Lanka

[19 September 1998]

Amnesty International issues urgent appeal on behalf of Sri Lankan SEP members

[15 September 1998]

LTTE arrests two more Tamil socialists

Labor and civil rights organizations must demand halt to repression of SEP

[9 September 1998]

LTTE communiqué threatens Tamil socialists with execution

[19 August 1998]



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact