

Sri Lankan regime to try LTTE leaders for Central Bank bomb attack

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Sri Lanka's High Court ruled last month in favour of an application by the Attorney-General to try in absentia eight top leaders of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, for the December 31, 1996 bombing of the headquarters of Sri Lanka's Central Bank.

The charged include the LTTE's top leader Velupillai Prabakaran and Pottu Amman, the head of the LTTE's security-intelligence service. Prabakaran and Amman also potentially face charges in India, where they are accused of masterminding the 1991 assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

State prosecutors reported to the Sri Lankan High Court that it has been impossible to apprehend or serve summonses on the eight LTTE leaders, who are believed to be living in the Vanni-Mannar region of the island, much of which is under the LTTE's control.

The ultimate outcome of this case will be bound up with the fate of military and diplomatic manoeuvring between Sri Lanka's People's Alliance regime, its parliamentary opposition, the LTTE, and the imperialist powers, many of which are now pressing for a new effort to negotiate an end to the 15-year-long war between Tamil nationalist guerrillas and the Sri Lankan state. On November 26, some two weeks after the High Court ruling, Prabakaran issued a call for 'peace' negotiations under 'third party mediation'. He also suggested the LTTE might be willing to accept something less than a fully separate Tamil Eelam state.

One reason the Sri Lankan state has been able to proceed with charges in this case, unlike other attacks on civilian targets, is because Sri Lankan security forces have apprehended two purported LTTE members who allegedly participated in the Central Bank bombing.

No one should be deceived by the claims of the Sri Lankan government that the trial of Prabakaran and the

other LTTE leaders has anything to do with rendering justice to the 1,400 people wounded in the bombing or the families of the 100 who were killed.

It is the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie and its state, which for decades discriminated against the island's Tamil minority and increasingly incited communal violence against the Tamils, that is ultimately responsible for the 15 years of violence and suffering. Moreover, the People's Alliance regime will use the trial to whip up chauvinism against the Tamils and support for its prosecution of the war against the Tamils of the North and East.

That said, the bombing of the Central Bank was a heinous crime, most of whose victims were Sinhalese workers. The bombing strengthened reaction by casting the Tamil struggle against national oppression as a communo-ethnic conflict and thus assisted the efforts of the Sinhalese chauvinists to drive a wedge between the working class and the Tamils.

Most of the dead and wounded were members of the militant Central Bank Employees Union (CBEU). Under the leadership of the Socialist Equality Party, the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the CBEU had a proud record of defending the democratic rights of the Tamils and had consistently opposed the war conducted by the Colombo regime. Repeatedly the CBEU had gone on record as demanding that all Sri Lankan troops be withdrawn from the Tamil majority areas in the North and East of the island. Several SEP members were injured in the bomb blast and one, Palangasinghe, was killed.

The PA government and the Sri Lankan military seized on the bombing to intensify their racist campaign against the Tamils, carrying out mass arrests of civilian Tamils, and to transform the Fort area in

downtown Colombo into a veritable armed camp. These new security arrangements have been used to justify the suppression of militant actions, such as telecommunications workers' protests against privatisation.

In the case of the Central Bank workers, the state used the bombing to launch an attack on their working conditions, then obtained an interim injunction to prevent the CBEU from launching industrial action on the grounds that such action would assist the LTTE's efforts to disrupt the functioning of the bank.

The state's attempt to use the bombing against the bank workers were aided and abetted by opportunists within the CBEU, many of them associated with the Neva Sama Samaja Party. Whereas the SEP fought for workers to undertake their own defence through the development of independent working class action committees, the opportunists sued the government for not adequately protecting the workers from terrorism.

Only the total independence of the working class from the bourgeoisie and its People's Alliance government, security forces and state can create conditions in which the Tamil masses will once again turn to the working class as the sole force capable of securing their democratic rights. Such a policy necessitates that all repressive actions, including the trial of the LTTE's top leaders by the Colombo regime, be resolutely opposed by the working class and oppressed

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