

WSWS readers condemn Australian ban on Tamil socialist

15 January 1999

The campaign of the *World Socialist Web Site* to demand that the Australian government reverse its decision to deny Tamil socialist Rajendiram Sutharsan a temporary visa to visit the country has begun to win an important response.

Readers of the WSWS have commenced sending protest letters to the government and the Australian High Commission in Colombo, Sri Lanka condemning the decision to bar Sutharsan as racist and a fundamental attack on the democratic rights of free speech and political association.

Rajendiram Sutharsan was invited by the Socialist Equality Party of Australia to attend its summer educational school in early January and to then address meetings and discussions on his recent 50-day detention by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and his release, together with three fellow members of the Socialist Equality Party of Sri Lanka, as the result of an international campaign waged via the WSWS. Sutharsan's visit was also planned to allow him to thank those in Australia who supported the campaign for his release and to discuss the political situation facing Sri Lankan workers, both Sinhala and Tamil.

The Australian High Commission gave as its reason for banning Sutharsan that he had not proved that his visit was genuine and raised concerns that he would seek to remain in Australia. On December 31 last, Jan Cleland, an official in the High Commission, refused to reverse the decision despite being provided with a 25-page submission by the SEP of Australia documenting the global campaign to free Sutharsan, accompanied by a letter guaranteeing his return to Sri Lanka and explaining the arrangements for the visit, precisely as requested.

In one of the first protest letters a law lecturer in Kyoto, Japan, wrote to the Australian government: "I write as a lawyer, a supporter of the Socialist Equality

Party, and as an individual concerned about fundamental principles of free speech and freedom of association, to strongly protest the recent decision of the Australian government to bar Tamil socialist Rajendiram Sutharsan from attending the summer educational school of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) of Australia.

"The refusal to reverse its initial denial of a visa despite the submission of substantial supporting documentation by the Australian SEP seems to compel the conclusion that the Australian government has acted improperly, disregarding its own standards governing the grant or denial of visas."

AI of Ann Arbor, Michigan, wrote: "Given the clearly educational and temporary nature of his proposed visit, given assurances of his sponsors in the Australian Socialist Equality Party, which quite frankly, need not to have been made, it seems clear that the relevant government units are behaving in an anti-democratic and prejudicial manner.

"In the United States we are quite familiar with the practice of barring racial and national minorities the same democratic rights as others, not to mention depriving socialists of equal treatment under the law, under whatever pretences."

HL of New York, New York, wrote: "As one who supported the international campaign, backed by Amnesty International, labor officials, and many others concerned with basic rights, to free Mr Sutharsan from detention as a political prisoner of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, I found it outrageous to learn that his rights are again being violated, now by an agency of the government of Australia...

"In Sri Lanka the SEP is known as the only party to offer an alternative to the brutally divisive war of the Sinhalese Sri Lankan government and the Tamil

chauvinism of the LTTE, in its call for unity of Sri Lankan workers in a struggle for a socialist government in their own interest. Preventing the free movement and communication of workers does not only restrict the rights of the SEP, it also serves to deny fundamental rights of workers to hear the SEP state its case. This is a crass dismissal of democracy and a crude form of censorship.

"As a teacher of history, such an infringement is reminiscent of how McCarthyism, Stalinism, or fascism operate to prevent the freedoms of the working class. As a member of a trade union, this is an affront to the rights of all who struggle to organise workers."

A civil rights attorney in Los Angeles wrote: "I learned through the *World Socialist Web Site* that you are denying Rajendiram Sutharsan a visa to visit Australia and speak about his experiences as a political prisoner of the LTTE in Sri Lanka. Your alleged concern about Mr Sutharsan's not returning home after his visa expires is purely pretextual, as he has a wife and children waiting for him there, and his hosts in Australia have guaranteed his return.

"Your action deprives both Mr Sutharsan and the members of his audience in Australia, who are entitled to hear first hand about the conditions in that country, the basic democratic rights of free speech and political association. It stirs memories of the despicable racist immigration policies in Australia's history."

Workers in Australia also wrote, condemning the government for denying them the democratic right to meet Sutharsan and hear him speak. The WSWs will continue to publish extracts from protest letters in the days ahead.

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges labour and human rights organisations, and all groups and individuals concerned with the defence of democratic rights-in Sri Lanka, Australia and internationally-to condemn in the strongest terms the refusal of Sutharsan's visa, and to demand that he be allowed to enter Australia.

Letters, faxes and e-mails should be sent to:

Philip Ruddock
Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs
Suite MF40
Parliament House
Canberra 2600, Australia
Fax: 61-2-6273-4144
Alexander Downer

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade
Parliament House
Canberra 2600, Australia
E-mail: minister.downer@dfat.gov.au
Fax: 61-2-6273-4112

Australian High Commission
PO Box 742
Colombo, Sri Lanka
E-mail: austcom@sri.lanka.net
Fax: 94-1-682-311

Please send copies of all statements of protest to the *World Socialist Web Site* at:

E-mail: editor@wsws.org
Fax: (Australia) 61-2-9790-3501



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact