

International protests against Australian government exclusion of Tamil socialist

19 January 1999

Further protests from Europe, the United States, New Zealand and Australia have been sent to the Australian government, demanding the reversal of its racist and politically-motivated decision to bar Tamil socialist, Rajendiram Sutharsan from visiting the country.

On December 30, the Australian High Commission in Colombo, Sri Lanka, advised Sutharsan that his application for a visitor's visa had been denied, on the grounds that he could not prove that he would not remain in Australia. Sutharsan, a member of the Socialist Equality Party of Sri Lanka, had applied for the visa to attend an educational seminar, at the invitation of the Socialist Equality Party in Australia. He was also due to address meetings in Melbourne and Sydney on his recent detention by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Sutharsan was one of four SEP members arrested by the LTTE for conducting political work in the Kilinochichi area in the north of Sri Lanka. They were held for nearly two months, and only released after an extensive international campaign organised by the International Committee of the Fourth International through the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Despite being sent extensive documentation of the global campaign for Sutharsan's release, as well as further material, requested by the High Commission, relating to his political and personal commitments in Sri Lanka, the Australian authorities refused to reverse their decision.

Seven students from the University of Bielefeld in Germany signed a letter condemning the decision as "not only racist, but also an arbitrary way to treat democratic rights, which shouldn't be expected from a parliamentary democracy like Australia."

"Your claim that Mr Sutharsan would use the temporary visa to emigrate to Australia is absurd, and cannot be verified. We believe the arguments of the

Australian SEP to be conclusive: that Rajendiram Sutharsan is deeply rooted in Sri Lanka politically, and also for family reasons, and does not wish to leave the country for a longer time. Because of this we can only assume that your decision to refuse him the possibility of travelling to Australia is based on political reasons.

"We condemn your behaviour and demand that you respect his democratic rights..."

From New Zealand, a *WSWS* reader denounced the government's decision as "both arrogant and entirely spurious. Mr Sutharsan's trip was sponsored by a political organisation well-known in the Australian and international working class...."

"One is entitled to ask whether a visitor in a similar situation, on a visit hosted by either the Liberal Party or the Labor Party, would be treated similarly. To ask the question is to answer it. It is apparent that this decision has a very definite political basis, related to Mr Sutharsan's socialist political views."

The letter went on to point out that the Immigration department's action stood in the "long and sorry tradition of Australian governments, going back to the Egon Kisch affair of 1934, which have used immigration laws to deny working people and intellectuals the right to political contact and discussion over vital international issues which are of concern to them."

An Australian worker wrote: "This man has had to endure the hardship of illegal detention for two months, at the hands of the Tamil Tigers....He has handled himself with bravery, dignity and principle and has been denied the chance to thank his friends and supporters by the racist policies of the Australian government..."

"How can you call Australia free and democratic when you pursue policies such as this? Ordinary people have had enough of your hypocrisy."

Nearly 200 workers and housewives, many of them Sri Lankan immigrants, signed petitions in Melbourne and Sydney over the weekend, condemning the government's decision as an "attack on the fundamental rights, not only of Mr Sutharsan, but also of those in Australia who wish to hear his views" and demanding that it be immediately reversed.

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 join in the condemnation of the denial of Sutharsan's visa and to demand that he be allowed to enter Australia.

Letters, faxes and emails should be sent to:

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Suite MF40

Parliament House
Canberra 2600, Australia
Fax: 61-2-6273-4144

Alexander Downer

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade
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Canberra 2600, Australia

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Australian High Commission

PO Box 742
Colombo, Sri Lanka
E-mail: austcom@sri.lanka.net
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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