

# Social Democratic-Green government in German state of North Rhine-Westphalia deports Tamils

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On October 6, 29-year-old Nagarajah Rajakanthan and 27-year-old Ponnaiah Gunasingam were taken from the deportation centre in Moers, near Düsseldorf, and flown back to Sri Lanka on an Air Lanka jet.

The Tamil refugees had arrived in Germany at the beginning of the 1990s, fleeing from Sri Lankan government troops. After being locked up in the detention centre at Moers, the two began a hunger strike on September 4, together with two other Tamil refugees. The aim of the hunger strike was to prevent their deportation back to Sri Lanka.

From the middle of September the hunger strike was supported by picketers from pro-refugee organisations, as well as other refugees and their relatives. The hunger strike ended after 22 days following an indication from the Tamil translator who mediated between the authorities and the Tamil refugees that they might be freed from the deportation centre, and that the petitions committee of the Düsseldorf state parliament had agreed to a review of the deportation order. The petitions committee was due to make a decision on October 17.

One of the four refugees, Somasundaram S. Sundralingam, was immediately released from the centre following a custody review on September 27. A short time later the supporting organisations, including the Moers refugee council and the local PDS (Party for Democratic Socialism) branch in Moers, learned that seats on a plane back to Sri Lanka had already been booked for two of the hunger strikers.

Last Friday morning some of the supporters occupied the offices of Social Democratic Party (SPD) state deputies in various towns in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), including Essen, Cologne, Wuppertal, Krefeld

and Bielefeld, hoping to put pressure on NRW Interior Minister Fritz Behrens (SPD) and stop the deportations at the last minute. But representatives of the authorities and local government refused to give way.

Tamil refugees deported to Sri Lanka confront enormous dangers, under conditions in which the government's war against Tamil rebels in the North and East of the island has been intensified in the run-up to the national elections. Tamils who flee to the Sri Lankan heartland are likewise unsafe, especially in the capital Colombo. They face the permanent threat of raids by Sri Lankan security forces. Thousands of Tamils have been arrested, locked up, abused and tortured on the flimsiest of pretexts. A large number of those arrested have simply "disappeared".

The renewal of the state of emergency by the Sri Lankan People's Alliance government shortly before the election increases the danger of deported refugees being arrested by security forces directly upon their arrival in Colombo. The press and media are also subject to extensive censorship, which makes it virtually impossible to gather information on the war raging in the North of the country as well as conditions for the population in general.

In July of this year the German Foreign Ministry issued a report warning of the dangerous situation for Tamils throughout Sri Lanka, but this has not deterred interior ministers in a number of German states from pressing ahead with deportations. The authorities remain unmoved by the traumatic experiences of many refugees. On March 23 of last year, for example, Vellupillai Balachandran, a 39-year-old Tamil refugee facing deportation, committed suicide in the Moers deportation centre.

On October 6 members of the “No Person is Illegal” group occupied the offices of the Turkish airline in the town of Oberhausen to protest the imprisonment and threatened deportation of two Kurdish refugees, Halil Arslan and Hüseyin Calhan. Following the rejection of their application to stay in Germany, the two had sought asylum in a local church. On September 27 Calhan was arrested in the town of Aachen and taken to the deportation centre in Büren. Arslan, whose brother was murdered in Turkey, was arrested on September 22 in Oberhausen and incarcerated at the centre in Moers.



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