

Sri Lankan authorities forced to release two more of the Hatton Six

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3 September 2001

Six weeks after the Kandy High Court ordered their release, the Sri Lankan prison authorities have finally been compelled to set free two more of the Hatton Six—Suppu Udayakumar and Solamlai Loganathan—after a political and legal battle by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP). The two young Tamil men from Hatton in the central plantation area of the country were among six detained and held without trial since June 1998 under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

The high court ordered the release of four of the Hatton Six on July 3, after the Attorney General withdrew the charges against them. When arrested they had been accused of carrying out a bomb attack on a tea factory near Hatton. But after months in jail, the original charge was withdrawn and they were accused of carrying out bomb attacks on electricity transformers and an oil storage tank. The only evidence against the six were their own “confessions” extracted under torture—a fact that the Attorney General was forced to admit in unconditionally withdrawing the charges.

But despite have kept the six in detention for three years without trial and on the basis of bogus charges, the prison authorities refused to immediately release them. Citing various administrative pretexts, the Kalutara prison released the first two only after a fortnight.

Udayakumar and Loganathan were kept in jail on the flimsy grounds that they were wanted on other charges in the Nuwara Eliya court. At the instigation of a lawyer for the SEP, the local magistrate confirmed that the two had been bailed on the charges. The prison authorities then demanded a fresh order from the magistrate and failed on the first instance to produce the two prisoners in the Nuwara Eliya court.

Finally on August 13, Udayakumar and Loganathan were taken to court where the magistrate again

confirmed his bail decision. Even then the prison administration stalled, citing other formalities and took them to a prison in Badulla. But as protest letters began to reach the Attorney General’s office and the SEP warned of further legal action, the two were finally released on August 15. Prison officials packed them onto a night train without informing either their relatives or the SEP’s lawyer—an action, which in the Sri Lankan context, put them in danger.

Two of the Hatton six—Arunasalam Yogeshwaran and Ponnaiah Saravanakumar—are still in prison. The Attorney General did not withdraw the charges against them, despite the fact that they were co-defendants in the same case and their medical reports also showed they had been tortured. The SEP’s lawyer has filed petitions with the Attorney General, including medical reports, requesting their immediate release.

Yogeshwaran and Saravanakumar were brought before Kandy high court on August 29 but the government’s lawyer insisted that he wanted “more time” to discuss petitions with his superiors. The next hearing has been scheduled for October 25, which means another two months in jail, and it is not clear whether the two will be freed. The SEP has appealed to workers, youth and intellectuals to intensify the campaign for their immediate and unconditional release.

Hundreds of Tamils are detained without trial under the Prevention of Terrorism Act as part of the government’s repression against the Tamil minority in waging the 18-year-old war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Following the recent LTTE attack on the Katunatyake International Airport and the air force base, the police and military rounded up thousands of Tamils, particularly young people, in Negombo and in

Colombo itself. Dozens have been kept for “further questioning”.

The four released detainees participated in a press conference on August 20 organised by the SEP in Colombo. Reporters from state-controlled *Daily News* and Tamil language *Weerakesari* and *Thinakural* attended the press conference. Although not present, the *Sauriyan FM* —a Tamil radio service—broadcast a detailed report about the release of the four detainees and the SEP’s campaign.

SEP central committee member Vilani Peiris pointed out that the campaign on the *World Socialist Web Site* had finally compelled the Attorney General’s Department to admit that the case against the Hatton Six was based on confessions extracted by torture. All the institutions were aware of what was happening, she said. It was a deliberate frame-up. The detainees paid tribute to the SEP’s campaign, saying that human rights organisations had collected information about numerous similar cases but to no avail.

Those who have supported the SEP campaign over the last month include Arnold Costello, who sent the following fax to the Attorney General from Australia. “I am writing this letter in protest at the continued detention of Suppu Udayakumar and Solamalai Loganathan on bogus charges and demand their immediate unconditional release and the dropping of all charges against Ponnaiah Saravanakumar and Arunasalam Yogeshwaran. I am full solidarity with the SEP Sri Lanka and the WSWs in their campaign on behalf of the Hatton six.”

K.S. Chandrasekar, a Tamil poet from the Hatton area, wrote: “I protest against continuous detention of two youths—named Ponniah Saravanakumar and Arunasalam Yogeshwaran. This detention is a violation of their fundamental democratic rights. This is a part of the racist war in Sri Lanka and also a part of the attacks upon Tamil masses. Moreover, this is oppression against plantation workers. Therefore I urge you to release these two youths unconditionally and immediately.”

Other letters were sent to the Attorney General by the Director of the Hatton-based Centre for Social Concern, Fr. Mari Anthony; a plantation schoolteacher, Devaraj; and a shop employee, V. Jeevarajah.

The SEP is calling for further letters to be sent demanding the unconditional and immediate release of

Yogeshwaran and Saravanakumar and is appealing for financial support for its 100,000 rupee campaign fund.

Send your contributions:

The Treasurer,
Socialist Equality Party,
P.O. Box 1270,
Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Your protest letters should be directed to
The Attorney General,
Attorney General’s Department,
Colombo 12,
Sri Lanka.

Fax: 0094-1-436421

Please send copies of your all protest letters:
Socialist Equality Party,
P.O. Box 1270,
Colombo, Sri Lanka.
Fax: 0094-74-612587

World Socialist Web Site e-mail: editor@wsws.org



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact