

LTTE official issues death threat against SEP in Sri Lanka

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16 September 2002

A local official for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Semmanan, has issued what amounts to a death threat against members of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) on Kayts Island in the northern Jaffna area of Sri Lanka. He also warned that the LTTE would halt the SEP's political activities in the north of Sri Lanka and take over a fishermen's union organised by the party.

Semmanan, who is the Kayts representative for the LTTE, told a meeting of the Ampihainagar Fishermen Co-operative Union on September 6: "In our history we have not allowed this type of party. What happened to Rajiv Gandhi who sent armies to Sri Lanka? Very soon we will find out the disease and give the proper medicine. The LTTE has medicines for any disease."

The message is unmistakable. Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated in May 1991 by a female suicide bomber while he was attending an election rally in Madras. While the LTTE has never claimed responsibility for the murder, it has not denied its involvement—suicide attacks being one of its trademark methods.

The immediate reason for the death threat was the refusal of the fishermen's co-operative to hand over 15,000 rupees (about \$US160) from union funds to the LTTE. The sum of money is the equivalent of four or five month's wages for a fisherman in the area.

Semmanan summoned the cooperative leaders to the LTTE's Kayts office on August 23 and demanded the money to build another office in West Velanai at nearby Kannapuram. The union committee met the following day and decided not to grant any money to the LTTE on the grounds that the union had no right to spend its funds on anything except matters concerning workers' interests. Its representatives conveyed the decision to the LTTE office.

The LTTE sent another letter on August 29 rejecting the decision and arbitrarily called a membership meeting on September 6. The union committee decided not to participate, as did the majority of union members. Only the union president Velmurugan, assistant secretary Thilakeswaran and 25 members, out of a total membership of 102, attended the meeting.

At the meeting, Semmanan criticised the union committee for refusing to give funds to the LTTE, saying that other fishermen's unions had "supported in several ways." He then directly attacked the SEP, saying that he had received information that the union was based on "some kind of policy".

"That policy does not support the Sri Lankan military and other organisations. It is based on the working class. This is the Socialist Equality Party's (SEP) policy. We have come to know that this party is carrying out activities at Ampihainagar village. We have had experience with this type of party opposing us," he declared.

Semmanan then referred to the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi and warned that the LTTE would quickly "find out the disease" and "give the proper medicine".

He claimed to be speaking on behalf of the LTTE leadership, declaring: "We have informed our leaders in Vanni about the SEP's activities. They were very angry and told us they would kick them [SEP members] to the south of Sri Lanka. Because of the strength of our struggle, countries around the world have forced the Sri Lankan government to hold peace talks with us."

Semmanan concluded by saying that the union had to give funds to the LTTE or else the union committee would be changed, so that it would obey the LTTE. He demanded that another meeting be held on September 13, but no one—neither union members nor LTTE

officials—turned up.

The serious threats against the SEP by a senior LTTE official and his hostility to the party's defence of the interests of the working class are a sharp warning to all workers of the political role for which the LTTE is being groomed.

Semmanan's comments were made just over a week prior to the commencement of peace talks between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government, and two days after the government formally lifted the ban on the organisation. At the negotiations, which are due to begin today in Thailand, the LTTE will be pushing for the establishment of an interim administration in the north and east of the island.

Semmanan boasted that the LTTE's struggle had resulted in the major powers forcing the Sri Lankan government to the negotiating table. In reality, the US, Britain and other countries have exerted pressure on both the government and the LTTE to negotiate an end to the long-running civil war, which has become a barrier to their economic and strategic interests on the island and threatens to further destabilise the already volatile Indian subcontinent.

Whatever the exact terms of any settlement thrashed out, it will be a power-sharing arrangement between the Sri Lankan elites aimed at intensifying their mutual exploitation of the working class and oppressed masses—Sinhalese and Tamil alike—and making further inroads into basic democratic rights. For its part, the LTTE, which is desperate to negotiate the best possible deal, is prepared to use any means necessary to suppress opposition to its policies.

This is not the first time that the LTTE has targeted the SEP. In July 1998, the LTTE detained four SEP members in areas under its control in the Killinochchi district of the Vanni. For two months, the LTTE leadership refused to explain why the four had been arrested or even to acknowledge it had detained them. The SEP members were finally released after a powerful international campaign conducted by the SEP and its sister parties of the International Committee of the Fourth International through the *World Socialist Web Site*.

It is significant that in the midst of last week's meeting, Semmanan felt compelled to refer to the class character of the SEP's program and to its widely known opposition to the Sri Lankan military occupation

of the north and east.

From the start of the war in 1983, the SEP, and its forerunner the Revolutionary Communist League, has fought for an independent political program for the working class. It has opposed the murderous policies of successive governments in Colombo, called for the unconditional withdrawal of Sri Lankan troops from the north and east, and campaigned against the systematic abuse of the democratic rights of the Tamil minority.

At the same time, the SEP has opposed the separatist program of the LTTE. It has consistently and intransigently fought for the unity of the working class and oppressed masses—Sinhala and Tamil—in the struggle for a united Socialist United Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam as an integral part of the struggle for a Union of Socialist Republics throughout the Indian subcontinent and internationally.

The SEP calls on all workers, youth and professional people to oppose and condemn the LTTE's threats against our members and to insist on the democratic right of the SEP to conduct its work and freely campaign for its political perspective throughout the island.



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