

International campaign against attacks on Sri Lankan socialists: Asian Tribune publishes WSWs reply to LTTE apologist

The Editorial Board
14 October 2002

On October 12 the Asian Tribune, an internet newspaper widely read by Tamils internationally, published a letter by David North, chairman of the WSWs Editorial Board, replying to a letter attacking the WSWs campaign in defense of the Socialist Equality Party of Sri Lanka. Officials of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on the island of Kayts in the north of Sri Lanka have issued threats against Socialist Equality Party (SEP) members, and on October 8 a well-known member of the LTTE violently assaulted an SEP member, who is also an official in the Kayts fishermen's union.

On October 6 the Asian Tribune had published in full the statement posted the previous day by the WSWs detailing the LTTE's threats against the SEP and calling for an international campaign in defense of the SEP's democratic rights. On October 7, the Tribune published a letter by a Tamil journalist, V. Thangavelu, denouncing the WSWs campaign and accusing the Sri Lankan SEP of fabricating the LTTE threats against its members. V. Thangavelu had sent his letter to the WSWs on October 5 and forwarded a copy to the Tribune.

The editor of the Tribune, K. T. Rajasingham, solicited from the WSWs editorial board a reply to V. Thangavelu's accusations. David North sent the reply on October 12, and the Tribune published it the same day under the headline: "Editorial Board of the World Socialist Web Site Clarifies to our Maximum Satisfaction." North's letter was followed by a postscript that reiterated: "We are convinced and satisfied with the explanation of the Editorial Board of the World Socialist Web Site."

Below we are publishing the letter from V. Thangavelu and the reply by David North.

Dear editor,

Your SEP is clearly fishing in troubled waters. It is only through the web pages I hear about the SEP and its activities. By all accounts SEP is clearly a fringe organization exploiting the poor Tamil fishermen in Kayts.

This is not the first attempt by Trotskyites to shed crocodile tears for the "poor Tamil working class." Before you, N. M. Perera, Colvin R. de Silva and company tried and failed!

I refuse to believe the LTTE is taking your fringe organization seriously. The death threats appear to be a figment of your imagination. Especially the insinuation that Semmanan dragged the name of Rajiv Gandhi! Please give me the names of the office bearers of the Ampihainagar Fishermen's Co-operative Union to verify the veracity of your charges.

Thangavelu

Dear Mr. Rajasingham:

Thank you for your letter.

There should be no question as to the veracity of the statements that have been published in the *World Socialist Web Site* relating to the threats made by the LTTE against members of the Socialist Equality Party on the Kayts Island in the northern Jaffna area of Sri Lanka. There is nothing vague about our reports. We name the LTTE official who made the threats against the SEP as well as the time, place and circumstances of the threats. We also give the name of the assassin who attempted three days ago to murder an SEP member.

Mr. Thangavelu, on the other hand, makes no attempt at a factual refutation other than his own subjective declaration that "I refuse to believe the LTTE is taking your fringe group seriously." He may choose to believe or not believe whatever he wishes, but the fact is that the LTTE has in the past attacked supporters and members of the SEP in the North. In 1998 four members of the SEP were arrested by the LTTE. Three of those seized were incarcerated for nearly two months. One was held for 13 days. Their release was secured only as a result of an international campaign in their defense.

Mr. Thangavelu's outrageous claim that the death threats recently made against SEP members are merely a "figment" of our imagination has found a bloody refutation in the knife

wounds inflicted on Nagarajah Kodeeswaran by a would-be assassin from the LTTE on October 8. Is Mr. Thangavelu now going to assert that Comrade Kodeeswaran injured himself?

Mr. Thangavelu's claim to objectivity is shattered by the language he employs. He refers to the SEP as a "fringe organization," hoping in this way to confuse people who are not familiar with the politics of Sri Lanka. In fact, the history of the SEP as a political party spans more than 30 years. Among its founders are highly respected Marxian socialist leaders, such as General Secretary Wije Dias, whose involvement in the Sri Lankan workers movement spans more than 40 years. It is precisely the deep historical roots of the SEP in the Sri Lankan and international socialist movement that Mr. Thangavelu resents and despises. "This is not the first attempt by Trotskyites to shed crocodile tears for the 'poor Tamil working class,'" he writes. "Before you, N. M. Perera, Colvin R. de Silva and company tried and failed!"

This statement clearly exposes the chauvinist politics that underlies Mr. Thangavelu's hatred of the SEP. His attack on N. M. Perera and Colvin R. de Silva refers to the valiant efforts of the pre-1963 LSSP to forge the unity of the Sinhalese and Tamil working class in a unified struggle for socialism against the national bourgeoisie. The great hartal of the early 1950s was the historic high point of that powerful social movement of the Sinhalese and Tamil masses. Subsequently, after its tragic decision to join the coalition government of Madam Bandaranaike in 1964, the LSSP betrayed the internationalist principles upon which the fight for Sinhalese-Tamil unity was based.

The Revolutionary Communist League (predecessor of the SEP) emerged out of the struggle against that betrayal. In the decades that followed, the RCL/SEP waged an unrelenting campaign in defense of the democratic rights of the Tamil people in all sections of Sri Lanka. It has opposed every form of Sinhalese chauvinism, while rejecting the politically bankrupt and reactionary separatist perspective of the LTTE.

Now that the LTTE is itself compelled to acknowledge—in the cynical comments of its master theoretician, Anton Balasingham—that its longstanding separatist perspective is bankrupt, it lashes out furiously against those whose criticisms have been vindicated. Its unprincipled and terroristic methods are well known to be the stock-in-trade of the LTTE.

Mr. Thangavelu feigns outrage at the statements of the SEP, as if it were preposterous to allege that the LTTE uses violence against its political opponents. Yet all those familiar with the history of the LTTE know better. Mr. Prabakaran may now prefer a three-piece suit to jungle attire, but changing one's clothes does not change one's

political methods.

Rather than justifying attacks on socialist militants who have long defended the democratic rights of the Tamil people, Mr. Thangavelu should issue a forthright and unequivocal condemnation of the LTTE's use of physical violence against its political opponents.

Yours sincerely,

David North

Chairman

WSWS Editorial Board

The WSWS is calling on all human rights organizations and individuals committed to the defense of democratic rights to denounce the LTTE's attacks and uphold the right of the Socialist Equality Party to conduct its political work free from intimidation and violence.

Letters and statements should be posted or emailed to:

Jaffna

Ilamparithi

LTTE Jaffna Office

Potpathy Road, Kokuvil

Jaffna

Colombo

LTTE

c/- Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission

PO Box 1930

Galle Road

Colombo 3

Email: slmm-hq@mfa.no

They can also be posted or faxed to:

London

The LTTE

c/- Eelam House

202 Long Lane

London SE1 4QB

United Kingdom

Telephone: 44-171-403-4554

Fax: 44-171-403-1653

Please send copies of all statements to the WSWS at:

Email: editor@wsws.org

Fax:

United States: 248 967 3023

Britain: 0114 244 0224

Australia: 02 9790 3501



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact