

WSWS launches campaign against LTTE death threats

Defend the democratic rights of the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)

By WSWs editorial board
5 October 2002

The *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) and the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) of Sri Lanka call on all WSWs readers, labor and human rights organisations and all those committed to the defence of democratic rights, to condemn the death threats made by local Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) officials against members of the SEP on the island of Kayts in the north of Sri Lanka.

The SEP has a long and principled history in Kayts. The party has unswervingly fought to defend the independent interests and basic rights of the Kayts fisherman and their families against the depredations of the Sri Lankan military, the Colombo regime and its political agents in the north.

This perspective, however, directly cuts across the interests of the LTTE, which is in the process of transforming itself into the Sri Lankan government's junior partner in the north of the country. The first death threat against the SEP was made only two days after the ban on the LTTE was lifted by the Sri Lankan regime and just 10 days prior to the opening of peace negotiations between Colombo and the LTTE in Thailand.

Having fought a bitter and protracted civil war against the racist Sinhala state, the LTTE leadership is now seeking to establish its credentials with Colombo and the western powers. In exchange for official political legitimacy and a place in the corridors of power, it will enforce the free market policies required by the IMF and World Bank and summarily deal with opposition from the working class and oppressed masses.

That is why the LTTE has threatened the lives of SEP members and issued warnings that it will move to ban the party from conducting its political work.

The attack on the SEP and its democratic rights is a forewarning of what Tamil workers can expect from the

LTTE under the new administrative setup being worked out, behind closed doors, in Colombo and Thailand.

The first death threat was made on September 6 by the LTTE's Kayts representative, Semmanan, at a meeting of the Ampihainagar Fishermen's Co-operative Union, an organisation founded by the SEP. Semmanan told the gathering that the LTTE did "not allow this type of party." He warned that the SEP could expect similar treatment to that suffered by Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, who was assassinated in 1991 by a suicide bomber. "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 clear implication was that the SEP had "invaded" the LTTE's political territory and should be dealt with accordingly.

Claiming to speak on behalf of the LTTE's leaders, Semmanan went on to declare that they were "very angry and told us they would kick them [SEP members] to the south of Sri Lanka."

These extraordinary comments were made in response to a refusal by the fishermen's co-operative to hand money over to the LTTE, after the LTTE tried to extort a substantial sum (around four to five months' wages for an average worker) to fund the building of its new office.

During the next two weeks, Semmanan tried to arbitrarily convene two meetings of the co-operative to overturn the decision. But the vast majority of members boycotted both meetings. Clearly furious at the response, on September 27 Semmanan dispatched his deputy, Arunthavan, to intervene at a regular union meeting. In a five-minute address, Arunthavan repeated Semmanan's death threat against the SEP members and reiterated that any party opposing the LTTE would be "chased away," irrespective of whether complaints were registered with

the police, the Norwegian peace monitoring mission or even with the LTTE leadership.

Having failed to bully the union into complying with the LTTE's demands, the repeated threats were aimed at intimidating the SEP and serving notice to the fishermen's co-operative and the ordinary people of Kayts that any further opposition would not be tolerated.

The WSWs and SEP demand immediate clarification from the LTTE itself. Is Semmanan acting, as he claims, on the LTTE's behalf? Were his threats authorised by the LTTE leadership? Does the LTTE endorse them? If not, will Semmanan and his deputy be brought to order and disciplined?

We call on all Tamil organisations, in Sri Lanka and internationally, to join with us in urgently demanding that the LTTE publicly and unconditionally repudiate its local officials' contemptible threats, as well as their assault on the SEP's democratic right to conduct political work in the north.

This is not the first time the LTTE has targeted the Socialist Equality Party. In July 1998, the LTTE arrested and detained four SEP members in the Kilinochchi district in the north. The SEP members had been campaigning among Tamil workers for the SEP's program: the immediate withdrawal of Sri Lankan troops from the north and east of the island, and the unity of Tamil and Sinhala workers for the Socialist United States of Sri Lanka and Eelam against the separatist perspective of the LTTE. While initially the LTTE leadership refused to acknowledge it had seized the four, it was eventually forced to release them as a result of a powerful international campaign conducted by the SEP and the International Committee of the Fourth International through the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Nor is this the first time the SEP has been attacked in Kayts. In March 2000, local officials of the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) physically assaulted members and supporters of the SEP who were leading the struggle of local fishermen against ongoing harassment and attacks by the Sri Lankan military on their livelihoods and daily lives. The EPDP's vicious and cowardly assault demonstrated conclusively that its representatives functioned as nothing but hired mercenaries and thugs for the Colombo regime.

The latest death threats against the SEP indicate that the LTTE is preparing to perform a similar role. The Sri Lankan Trotskyists of the SEP will not be intimidated by the LTTE's gangsterism. The criminal threats from this organisation only demonstrate its hostility to the working

class—Tamil and Sinhala alike—and the necessity of building an independent movement in Sri Lanka to unite workers in the north and south against their common oppressors.

The WSWs and SEP again call on all those who cherish fundamental democratic rights to demand that the LTTE withdraw and repudiate the death threats against the SEP's members and guarantee the rights of the SEP to engage in its political work, free from harassment and intimidation.

Letters and statements should be posted or emailed to:

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LTTE Jaffna Office

Potpathy Road, Kokuvil

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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

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202 Long Lane

London SE1 4QB

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Telephone: 44-171-403-4554

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