

Sri Lankan police drag out hearings over LTTE's threats against SEP

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20 February 2003

Despite continuing threats by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) against members of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) on Kayts Island in northern Sri Lanka, three court cases earlier this month confirm that the police are in effect shielding the LTTE. Reluctant to act at all, police officials have dragged out proceedings and downplayed the LTTE's actions.

The initial death threats were made by local LTTE official Semmanan last September after the Ampihainagar Fishermen's Co-operative Union, which the SEP was instrumental in forming, refused to hand over funds for the construction of an LTTE office in the area. On October 8, LTTE member Karthikesu Amirthalingam carried out an unprovoked attack on SEP member Nagaraja Kodeeswaran, causing serious injuries to his head, neck and shoulders.

The police only brought charges after the SEP and *World Socialist Web Site* waged an international campaign demanding that action be taken against the LTTE members involved and that the LTTE leadership guarantee the SEP's basic democratic rights.

After nearly two decades of civil war, the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE are involved in negotiations over a power-sharing arrangement that will allocate the LTTE a significant role in the administration of the north and east of the island. The unwillingness of local officials on Kayts Island to take action over threats to SEP members stems from their concern not to offend either Colombo or its future partners in the LTTE.

On the eve of the latest court hearings, the LTTE issued further threats. A notice appeared on February 3 in several places on Kayts Island calling on "all people to wipe them and their party's work from the island areas." It named four SEP members and sympathisers and denounced them for "making statements against the LTTE".

Two of the court cases took place on February 7. The first involved Semmanan, who was the LTTE area leader for Kayts when he first made the death threat against the SEP, and has since been promoted to deputy political leader for Jaffna, the main town in northern Sri Lanka. He did not appear in court for a second time.

Local police only took action against Semmanan nearly four months after the SEP made a formal complaint. The first hearing was scheduled for January 21 but the police failed to deliver the summons to the defendant and he did not appear. Likewise, in the fortnight prior to the February 7, the police again did not deliver the summons, letting Semmanan off the hook again. As a result,

the presiding magistrate postponed the hearing to March 7. When pressed by the SEP and its legal counsel, police promised to issue the summons.

The second case on February 7 involved LTTE member Amirthalingam who was charged over his attack on SEP member Kodeeswaran. When Amirthalingam first appeared in court on December 4, the police prosecutor indicated that he would be charged only with assault causing simple injury with a blunt weapon. When Kodeeswaran's lawyer challenged the police, pointing out the assault had been with a knife not "a blunt instrument," the magistrate ordered a Judicial Medical Officer's (JMO) report into the injuries.

The JMO report, however, which was produced in court on February 7, lined up with the police and declared that Kodeeswaran had suffered lacerations that amounted in legal terms to "simple injury". Kodeeswaran's counsel pointed out that the victim had been attacked with a knife. His injuries were serious enough for him to be transferred from the local Velanai hospital to the central Jaffna teaching hospital where he was treated for four days.

The lawyer requested that the case be reviewed by the Attorney General, that the charges be amended to grievous injury or attempted murder, and indicated he would cross-examine the JMO at the next hearing. The magistrate postponed the case to March 21 and asked Kodeeswaran's counsel to meet with police to discuss the amending of charges.

The third case took place in Kayts court on February 11 to hear complaints by SEP members concerning further LTTE threats and harassment. These included a statement by LTTE supporter Muththiah Velmurugan, who falsely told an LTTE meeting of fishermen that SEP members were threatening him and if anything happened to him they should be held responsible.

Rather than act against the LTTE, however, the police told the court on January 21 that a breach of the peace may take place in the Ampihainagar area due to conflict between the LTTE and the SEP. The police provided no evidence that SEP members had been doing anything other than attempting to carry out legitimate political activities. The magistrate said he would consider a binding order on both parties to keep the peace at the next hearing.

The case was again postponed on February 11 until March 4. The acting magistrate had to excuse himself as he had appeared as legal counsel for LTTE member Velmurugan at the previous hearing. The SEP intends to oppose the police report and any

attempt to impose a binding order on the party, which will be exploited by the LTTE to mount further provocations and limit the SEP's political work in the area.

There is no let up in the LTTE's threats against the SEP on Kayts. On the night of February 8, two persons visited a relative of SEP member Muthulingham Muruganathan. One of the pair identified himself as Thamilarasan and said he was a member of the LTTE's intelligence branch. He produced a photograph of Muruhanathan and told his relative to tell five SEP members to resign from the party. If they failed to do so, he warned, action would be taken against them.

The ongoing campaign of intimidation and threats against the SEP is the sharpest warning of what the LTTE has in store for working people as a whole. The LTTE's negotiators at the peace talks sponsored by the major powers have already pledged to work as partners with the Colombo government in implementing the economic restructuring measures demanded by the IMF and World Bank.

The SEP intends to continue and intensify its campaign to defend the rights of its members and all workers against the LTTE's threats and thuggery. We wish to thank all those who have supported the campaign to date and issue an urgent appeal for further letters of protest and for financial support. Faced with mounting legal costs, the SEP has decided to increase the size of its campaign fund from the present 50,000 rupees to 250,000 rupees (\$US2,500).

The following is a selection of recent emails condemning the LTTE's threats.

RS from California wrote:

"I am completely opposed to the present and past threats and physical attacks on the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) members in Jaffna and on the island of Kayts. These abuses must be stopped immediately!

"If your position is truthful, why resort to violence? I believe the SEP is correct when it says that 'the LTTE cannot openly present its agenda before the fishermen of Kayts, so it is incapable of answering the SEP's objections to its broader pro-capitalist program. Instead it resorts to thuggery and lies'."

MW from Canada stated:

"You are not only attacking the democratic rights of the SEP but those of the working class as a whole. I protest sharply against this. I demand the LTTE:

- * cease its threats and attacks against the SEP immediately
- * respect the democratic rights of the SEP and to stop obstructing its work
- * make amends for the damage it has done immediately!

"I am in complete solidarity with the campaign of the SEP against these attacks and will support it!"

LB from Canada wrote:

"Those who are responsible for the death threats must be brought to justice. Is the fight of four members of the SEP in Sri Lanka to defend democracy and liberty a crime?"

AT sent the following email:

"When the LTTE attacks workers who are organising themselves, it sends a message to all workers that the wants of the LTTE come before the needs of the workers' and their families.

"When the LTTE threatens any political party it sends a warning throughout civil society, stifling free speech and making the LTTE itself remote and out of touch from the people.

"The LTTE threatens the SEP, which might not have the mass membership of the LTTE, but has won wide respect in Sri Lanka for its constant defence of the rights of Tamils and opposition to the Sri Lankan occupation of the north and east of the country.

"As part of an international socialist movement, the SEP has also presented the real situation on the island to a sympathetic audience of political activists the world over. The website www.wsws.org, reaches further by providing excellent news and analysis to discerning readers, including media professionals such as myself."

Further 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: 44-201-403-1653

Please send copies of all statements to the WSWs at:

Email: editor@wsws.org

Fax:

United States: 248 967 3023

Britain: 0114 244 0224

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Donations can be sent to:

Account Number 1472834301 at the Kirullaopona Branch of the Commercial Bank of Ceylon
94A Pamankada Road
Kirullaopona
Colombo
Sri Lanka



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact