

Sri Lankan SEP holds media conference over disappearance of party member

Our correspondent
31 March 2007

The Sri Lankan Socialist Equality Party (SEP) held a media conference in Colombo yesterday as part of the SEP/WSWS campaign to demand that the Sri Lankan government and military conduct an urgent investigation into the disappearance of party member Nadarajah Wimalaswaran and his friend Sivanathan Mathivathanan in the northern Jaffna islands on March 22.

Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan were last seen at around 6.30 p.m. that day on Punguduthivu island, riding a motor bike toward a long causeway connecting it to Kayts island, where they both live. The commander at the Punguduthivu navy camp claimed the two men passed through the navy roadblock on his side of the causeway. The commander of the Velanai navy camp in Kayts Island, in charge of the roadblock at the other end, denied any knowledge of them.

Either Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan passed through the second checkpoint or they did not. If they did, then the navy must have a record of it. If they did not, the navy has either seized them at one of the two roadblocks, or they disappeared before reaching the second. Since the causeway itself is under military control, the navy is either directly responsible for their disappearance or has access to those who witnessed it.

The SEP holds the Sri Lankan government responsible for the disappearance and is demanding that the authorities investigate. All the northern islands off the Jaffna peninsula are under the tight security of the navy, which works closely with the Eelam Peoples Democratic Party (EPDP) paramilitary.

The SEP sent invitations to all major print and electronic media to attend the press conference. Several radio channels and newspapers published news of the disappearance of Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan before the conference was held. *Suriyan FM*, a popular Tamil radio channel, reported the case in its March 28 evening news bulletin and again the following morning. A leading Tamil daily, *Veerakesari*, referred to it in a March 29 report on the widespread disappearances of Tamils, and said the SEP had called a media conference over the issue. *Tamil Net* also mentioned the case in a March 29 report about disappearances in Jaffna.

Journalists from *Sirasa TV*, a popular private television channel, the English daily the *Island* and Tamil dailies *Thinakkural* and *Sudar Oli* attended the press conference, held at Hotel Nippon. SEP central committee member Vilani Peiris chaired and introduced SEP general secretary Wije Dias and SEP central committee member M. Aravinthan.

Two radio channels, *Sirasa FM* and *Isura FM*, reported the SEP campaign in their evening news bulletins yesterday. *Sirasa TV* broadcast sections of the media conference in its main news broadcast at 10 p.m. The level of coverage reflects the growing concern among

ordinary people over the increasing disappearances and abductions amid the Sri Lankan government's escalating war in the country's North and East and interest in the SEP's campaign.

Wije Dias told the press conference that the disappearance of Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan was an attack on the socialist movement and a warning to all those who fought for democratic rights.

"Since joining the SEP, the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, in 1998, based upon his commitment to world socialist policies, Wimalaswaran has been a courageous fighter for the defence of the social and democratic rights of people in this country, particularly the rights of Tamil people who have been thoroughly suppressed."

Dias said the campaign had received support from WSWS readers internationally—from the US, Europe and Australia, as well as from Turkey, where such disappearances were also common. Pointing to the fact that the entire northern Jaffna islands area was under tight navy control, Dias said President Mahinda Rajapakse's government was responsible for the disappearance. Dias accused the Ministry of Defence of disregard and inaction over the SEP's formal complaint lodged on March 24 over the incident.

"Only yesterday we received a letter from the Ministry of Defence in response to our complaint. This two-line letter says only the issue had been referred to the Inspector General of Police. There was no reference to any action taken. This is the way the ministry has responded to hundreds of other disappearances reported in the past several months. It is contemptuous and reflects its disregard for human lives."

Dias also outlined the SEP campaign for an investigation into the murder of SEP supporter Sivapragasam Mariyadas at his home in Mullipothana in the eastern Trincomalee district last August 7. After eight months, the police had carried out no serious investigation to find and arrest Mariyadas's killers.

Dias said the Rajapakse government was intensifying the war, imposing increasing burdens on living conditions and attacking the democratic rights of working people and student youth. Noting growing popular opposition, he said: "Losing support among the masses, the Rajapakse government is branding anyone who fights for their basic rights as 'Tigers'—members or supporters of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam [LTTE]."

Asked about the SEP's numerical strength in Jaffna, Dias declined to provide exact figures for security reasons, explaining that the SEP had been subjected to the disappearances and other attacks. He pointed out that the SEP was the only political organisation in Sri Lanka that functioned in both the north and south as a single party. He

related how the SEP had won the release of four of its members from LTTE custody in the LTTE-controlled Wannai area in 1998 through an international campaign launched by the WWS.

A journalist from the *Island* asked who the SEP believed was responsible for the disappearance. Dias explained that the disappearance had taken place within a navy-controlled zone and, in particular, on a causeway between two navy roadblocks. Pointing to the fact that EPDP was working closely with the navy, Dias stated that if the EPDP had been involved in the incident it must have acted with the navy's knowledge. "We can't rule out the involvement of the EPDP. But we hold the Rajapakse government responsible for this disappearance," he said.

The SEP once again calls on its supporters and WWS readers to demand that the government and the defence ministry immediately conduct an urgent and full investigation in order to locate the two men.

Letters can be sent to:

Gotabhaya Rajapakse,
Secretary of Ministry of Defence,
15/5 Baladaksha Mawatha,
Colombo 3, Sri Lanka
Fax: 009411 2541529
e-mail: secretary@defence.lk

N. G. Punchihewa
Director of Complaints and Inquiries,
Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission,
No. 36, Kinsey Road,
Colombo 8, Sri Lanka
Fax: 009411 2694924

Copies should be sent to the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka) and the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Socialist Equality Party,
P.O. Box 1270,
Colombo, Sri Lanka.
Email: wswscmb@sltnet.lk

To send letters to the WWS editorial board please use this online form

Below are the copies of a further selection of the letters sent so far.
28 March 2007

We are writing to you to express our deep concern over the disappearance of SEP member, Nadarajah Wimalawarman, and his friend, Sivanathan Mathivathanan, who have been missing since Thursday evening [March 22]. We understand that all the evidence to date points to the involvement of the navy, which controls the northern islands near Jaffna, where both men live.

We believe that inaction of the Sri Lankan government will be totally unacceptable and we are writing to you to demand an immediate inquiry into what has happened in this case.

We are also gravely concerned to learn that after hearing of the disappearance on Friday, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) of Sri Lanka immediately lodged formal complaints at the Gotaimbara naval camp on Punguduthivu and the Velanai naval camp on Kayts Island. The commanding officers—Hemantha Peiris at Punguduthivu and Silva at Velanai—both denied arresting Wimalawarman and Mathivathanan and declared that they knew nothing about the men's disappearance.

We are the citizens of a country where such "disappearances" are widespread and common. In Turkey also most of the cases follow the same pattern: the missing persons are allegedly detained at their homes and taken to a police station but later their detention is denied

by the authorities, in most cases police officers or state prosecutors. And in many cases, torture or ill-treatment at the hands of the security forces is reported or feared.

We anxiously await your response.

Yours sincerely,

SI on behalf of 7 WWS readers in Turkey

Sirs:

It is necessary for the Sri Lankan government to heed the demand of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) for an urgent investigation into the disappearance on 22 March 2007 of SEP member Nadarajah Wimalawarman and his friend Sivanathan Mathivathanan. Although it is known that these fishermen are on the register of the roadblock on the Punguduthivu side of the causeway from Kayts as of 6:30 p.m., having ridden there on Mathivathanan's motorbike, a Bajaj brand, number plate NPMR 2098, the security forces have continued to deny any involvement in or knowledge of these men's probable abduction in an area that is under the military's firm control.

A possible motive for an abduction by security forces was inadvertently revealed when relatives of Wimalawarman and SEP members responded to a request to his wife to visit the Gotaimbara commanding officer Peiris. A naval soldier at the camp gate indicated he had some knowledge of the case when he erroneously accused the two victims of being members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The SEP and its members have been wrongfully accused and targeted in the past by both the government and the LTTE in the renewed expansion of the civil war for supporting the opposing side, because of their opposition to the policies of both the government and the LTTE. The SEP openly declares its opposition to both the LTTE separatist demands and the occupation of the North and the East by troops. The SEP, as true socialists, are concerned only with the interests and needs of the working class as a whole, campaigning for the unity of Tamil, Sinhala, Muslim, and all workers in Sri Lanka and internationally.

As a teacher of history, and a delegate in the New York Local of the American Federation of Teachers, I know the government of Sri Lanka cannot escape its responsibility, to immediately investigate this case and correct the wrong against these two victims, by believing that governments are excused from injustice through invoking a War on Terror, whether in Sri Lanka or its false model found here in the United States. In the United States, the mass of people are beginning to wake up to the knowledge that the government's War of Terror is being used to justify interests that are not theirs. On cases such as that of Wimalawarman and Mathivathanan are found the points on which turn the interests of justice and the interests of the common mass of people. The righteous action is to see that an investigation and aid for Wimalawarman and Mathivathanan are immediately forthcoming.

Sincerely,

HL, New York



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wsws.org/contact