

Sri Lankan SEP holds meeting to demand inquiry into member's disappearance

Our correspondent
12 April 2007

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) held a public meeting in Colombo on April 9 to demand that the Sri Lankan government urgently investigate the disappearance of party member Nadarajah Wimalaswaran and his friend Sivanathan Mathivathanan. About one hundred people, including workers, intellectuals, students and housewives attended the meeting in the Public Library Auditorium.

SEP Political Committee member K. Ratnayake, who chaired the meeting, said that there had already been a stream of letters from Sri Lanka and other countries including the US, Britain, Canada, Australia, Turkey, Germany and Spain demanding an immediate investigation. The Emergency Conference Against War, called by the International Students for Social Equality and the Socialist Equality Party on March 31-April 1 in Ann Arbor Michigan, also passed a resolution.

Ratnayake explained: "Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan disappeared on the evening of March 22 on the northern Jaffna islands. They were last seen at around 6.30 p.m. on Punguduthivu island, riding a motor bike towards a long causeway connecting it with 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 Kayts navy camp, in charge of the roadblock at the other end, denied any knowledge of them.

"Eyewitnesses saw Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan being body checked by navy personnel and questioned by two police officers at the Kayts roadblock on their way towards Punguduthivu at about 5.30 p.m. There is a heavy navy presence throughout Kayts island. It is impossible for a person to disappear without the navy knowing. The SEP accuses the navy and police of complicity in this disappearance. The government of President Mahinda Rajapakse, which has plunged the country back to war, is responsible for these disappearances."

Ratnayake pointed out that the police and the military have done nothing to locate Wimalaswaran and Mathivathanan despite the SEP's formal complaints to the defence ministry, the navy camps on Kayts and Punguduthivu and to the police in Jaffna. A cover up was going on. Ratnayake recalled the killing of SEP supporter Sivapragasam Mariyadas at Mullipothana in

the Trincomalee district on August 7 last year. The lack of any police inquiry underscored the attitude of the Rajapakse government to the hundreds of people who have disappeared or been killed over the past year.

Describing Wimalaswaran's life, Ratnayake said: "Wimalaswaran came from a poor family in Kayts and lost his father in his early childhood. When only 10 he had to shoulder the economic burdens of the family and earned money by fishing. He only attended school up to eighth grade. This is the situation facing most youth under conditions of civil war."

Wimalaswaran grew up in the midst of war. Some youth of his generation joined the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to fight the Colombo government. Wimalaswaran met SEP members and was convinced of the bankruptcy of the LTTE's political perspective. He saw the necessity of an international socialist perspective to solve the national question and the other burning issues facing working people. He was in the forefront of defending the rights of fishermen and others in Kayts.

Ratnayake emphasised the pressing importance of the meeting. "Nineteen days have gone since the disappearance of Wimalaswaran and his friend. Their lives are in great danger." He called on everyone at the meeting to help intensify the campaign to find and release them.

SEP General Secretary Wije Dias told the meeting: "This disappearance is not an accident. It is the result of the brutal civil war, which has been continued by successive governments in Colombo for the last 25 years. As a result of this war, more than 75,000 have been killed. Since January last year, following the escalation of war under the Rajapakse government, more than 4,000 people have died and over 225,000 have been displaced. Over the same period, hundreds were disappeared."

Explaining Wimalaswaran's role on Kayts, Dias said: "Behind his popularity is the struggle in which he engaged as a member of the SEP to give conscious expression for the aspirations of tens of thousands who wish to end the war. At the same time, he was a frontline fighter against the various harassments of the navy, which has occupied the zone, to defend the rights of the fishermen and their livelihoods.

"As socialists, we acknowledge the value of the life of every human being. At the same time we insist that the social value of the life of a person who fights for socialism against the brutal

war and social inequality is infinite and immeasurable. In that sense, the disappearance of a socialist such as Wimalaewaran is infinite and immeasurable.”

Explaining the global context of war in Sri Lanka, Dias demonstrated the relationship between the Sri Lankan civil war and the Bush administration’s imperialist aggression. “We have entered an era of civil wars, imperialist wars and world war. The US invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 were acts of imperialism. Over the past four years, as the US military has sought to establish its control over the Iraqi population, we have seen unending death and destruction. We have witnessed the levelling of entire cities. This was only the beginning of the carnage. The war cannot end by pressurising the Bush administration or any other person occupying the White House. Such thoughts are an illusion.”

Dias explained the SEP campaign was not only to press for an investigation into the disappearance of Wimalaewaran and Mathivathanan. It was also to educate working people on the necessity of building an independent political movement based on a socialist perspective to defend democratic rights and social conditions. Appealing to those responsible for the war will not halt the disappearances.

Dias pointed out that the Civil Monitoring Committee (CMC) formed by Mano Ganeshan, a parliamentarian of the Western Province People’s Front (WPPF), and Siritunga Jayasuriya, leader of the United Socialist Party (USP), was holding a seminar on the same day. While the CMC protested against the disappearances, it allied itself with the right-wing United National Party (UNP). UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe was the main speaker at the seminar.

“His party is not only responsible for starting the communal civil war against Tamils. The UNP is also responsible for the disappearance of tens of thousands of Tamils and Sinhala rural youth. Wickremesinghe was implicated in the torture chamber at Batalanda (in the suburbs of Colombo). The USP is now whitewashing Wickremesinghe and promoting his party as a defender of democracy,” Dias charged.

Dias also noted the role of Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) leader Wickramabahu Karunaratne who has organised the Committee for Investigation of Disappearances. He sent a letter to the US ambassador, Robert Blake, declaring: “As your government is concerned about threat to democracy and human rights violation here, we appeal you to raise this issue [of disappearances] with the Sri Lankan government.” Karunaratne wrote this even as the Bush government is carrying out carnage in Iraq and backing the Rajapakse government’s war in Sri Lanka.

In Sri Lanka, as in other countries, social inequality has deepened, Dias explained. The profits of big companies and banks have increased many-fold and the working class faces sharp attacks on its living standards. Social inequality and democratic rights are incompatible. The intensifying communal war backed by chauvinist parties such as Janatha Vimukthi

Peramuna (JVP) and the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) is being used to divert mass anger and carry out far reaching attacks democratic rights.

Only viable perspective for the working people is fight for a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam as part of the Union of Socialist Republics of South Asia and internationally, Dias said. The demand for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Sri Lankan forces from North and East is crucial to forging unity among Tamils and Sinhalese. He called on the audience to intensify the campaign for Wimalaewaran and Mathivathanan and to join the SEP to build a mass internationalist and socialist party of the working class.

Letters demanding an inquiry into their disappearance 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

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