

Sri Lankan SEP demands release of arrested member

The the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka)
18 September 2008

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka is demanding the immediate and unconditional release of party member Velummailum Kamalthasan and his brother-in-law Santhiralingam Ilancheliyan, who were arrested by Sri Lankan police on Monday in Negombo, about 40 kilometres north of Colombo. The two men have been kept illegally inside a police lock-up for the three days since.

The arrests are part of the systematic harassment of Tamils, hundreds of whom are arbitrarily detained without trial as suspected LTTE members under the country's draconian emergency laws. The police claim to be holding the pair because they originally come from Jaffna, and insist that investigations have to be made to ascertain whether they have connections to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Despite the fact that the SEP provided a statement that Kamalthasan was a longstanding member of the party, the police have refused to release him. It is now clear that he is still being detained—three days later—as an act of outright political victimisation. The SEP's opposition to the government's racist war is well known, as is its fundamental disagreement with the bourgeois nationalist politics of the LTTE.

Kamalthasan, 30, has been a member of the SEP since 1998. He lives with his family at Palangathurai, an area in Kochchikade near Negombo and used to reside in Karainagar in Jaffna. Formerly a boat-making worker and fisherman, Kamalthasan and his family have, like thousands of others, been displaced several times by the country's 25-year civil war. He worked in Dubai for two years and returned to Sri Lanka in September 2007. Santhiralingam, 37, is a three-wheeler taxi driver who has been living in Negombo for the past 23 years.

Kamalthasan and Ilancheliyan were approached by

police while boarding a bus in Negombo for Colombo at about 11 a.m. on Monday. The police team ordered the two out of the bus for questioning. Both produced registration documents from the police stations in their respective areas as identification. The police ignored the documents and took them to the Negombo police station for "further questioning".

Herath, an intelligence branch officer who would only give his first name, questioned Kamalthasan and Ilancheliyan about their original places of residence and ordered them held in the police lock-up, saying more information was needed. The SEP contacted the Negombo Head Quarters Inspector (HQI) Somasiri Liyanage to protest the arrests and was told that Kamalthasan would be released if he was an SEP member.

However, when an SEP representative visited the police station, the situation had changed. Intelligence officer Herath had told HQI Liyanage that the two were past residents of Jaffna. Information was then requested from the Terrorist Investigation Division (TID) in Colombo and Karainagar to check any involvement in "terrorist activities".

Despite assurances that the TID details would be received by Tuesday morning, the SEP was confronted with further stonewalling. On Tuesday morning, the Negombo police claimed that the reports were expected that afternoon. They also refused to record a formal complaint by the SEP about the arrest of its member.

The Negombo Superintendent of Police P.K. Vithanage flatly rejected the SEP's declaration that, as a party member, Kamalthasan had no possible connection to the LTTE or "terrorism". The following day, SEP general secretary Wije Dias faxed a letter to the police attesting that Kamalthasan was an SEP member and calling for his release. Yet HQI Liyanage

indicated that the two men would be placed under a detention order, but refused to say when.

In a damning admission on Tuesday evening, police officers told relatives of Kamalthasan that they could not release the two men because of the SEP's intervention, which had "spoiled the situation". In other words, Kamalthasan and his brother-in-law continue to be held, not because of any evidence linking them to the LTTE or "terrorist activities," but because the SEP demanded the release of its member and insisted on the democratic rights of both men.

The detentions are part of the climate of fear and persecution, particularly against Tamils and opponents of the war, created by the government and military since mid-2006, when President Mahinda Rajapakse effectively tore up the 2002 ceasefire by launching renewed offensives against the LTTE. Along with routine harassment of the Tamil population, the security forces and associated paramilitary groups have been implicated in hundreds of abductions, disappearances and murders.

On August 7 2006, just weeks after the resumption of the war, SEP sympathiser Sivapragasam Mariyadas was shot dead at his home in the eastern rural town of Mullipothana. On March 22 2007, SEP member Nadarajah Wimalaswaran and his friend Sivanathan Mathivathanan disappeared while returning to their homes on Kayts Island from neighbouring Punguduthivu Island. In both cases, evidence assembled by the SEP points to the involvement of the military or paramilitary groups.

Police now carry out searches and identity checks throughout the island. All Tamils are required to register at their local police stations if they live outside their original area of residence. Human rights organisations have reported cases of extortion by police officers who arbitrarily take Tamils into custody, releasing them only after being paid a bribe.

Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse signalled a further stepping up of the security dragnet last Saturday when he told the *Daily News* that a "massive influx" into Colombo posed an increased security risk. Describing the arrival of 6,950 people from the war-torn North and East as "unprecedented," he declared that they should "go back to their places" if they had no legitimate reason for moving.

The arrest of Kamalthasan and his brother-in-law is a

sharp warning to the working class as a whole. As the government intensifies its reactionary war against the LTTE, while simultaneously assaulting the living standards of the working class, it faces mounting hostility and disaffection. In an effort to silence criticism and suppress opposition, it is resorting to open repression.

The SEP calls on workers, young people, intellectuals and all organisations that support the defence of basic democratic rights to demand the immediate release of Kamalthasan and Ilancheliyan. We also call on readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* to support our campaign by writing to the appropriate authorities in Sri Lanka.

Letters should be sent to:

Gotabhaya Rajapakse
Secretary, Minister of Defence
15/5, Baldish Maratha
Colombo 3, Sri Lanka
Fax: 009411 2541529

Inspector General of Police
Police Headquarters
Colombo 1
Sri Lanka

Superintendent of Police
Office of Superintendent of Police
Negombo
Sri Lanka

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

Socialist Equality Party
P.O. Box 1270
Colombo, Sri Lanka.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact