Sri Lankan police continue to detain SEP member

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Sri Lankan police have refused to release Socialist Equality Party (SEP) member Velummailum Kamalthasan and his relative Santhiralingam Ilancheliyan, who have now been held without charge for five days in the Negombo police station lock-up.

The pretext for their detention is to allow the police to make "further inquiries" into any connection to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). As part of the government's escalating war against the LTTE, the security forces have detained thousands of Tamils as alleged "LTTE suspects" under the country's draconian anti-terrorism legislation.

Police are continuing to detain the two men despite a letter sent by SEP general secretary Wije Dias to the Inspector General of the Police on Wednesday confirming that Kamalthasan is a party member. While opposing the government's renewed war, the SEP is well known for its longstanding opposition to the LTTE's separatist program and to terrorist acts in general.

The SEP and the International Students for Social Equality (ISSE) are urging workers and young people as well as *World Socialist Web Site* readers to write urgently to the Sri Lankan authorities to demand the immediate and unconditional release of Kamalthasan and Ilancheliyan.

The two men were detained on Monday morning while preparing to travel by bus from Negombo to Colombo. Police checking the bus ordered them out for questioning. Despite producing registration documents issued by their local police stations to confirm their identity, they were taken to Negombo police station.

When contacted by the SEP at the Negombo police station, Head Quarter's Inspector Somasiri Liyanage at first promised to release the two men if the party could prove Kamalthasan was a member. By Monday evening, however, he had changed his tune. Liyanage and an intelligence branch officer Herath told an SEP representative that as the two men originally came from Jaffna, inquiries would have to be made there about any LTTE links.

The police claim they are waiting on information from the Terrorist Investigation Department (TID) and Karainagar police in Jaffna. Negombo police superintendent P.S.K. Vithana bluntly refused to release Kamalthasan and Ilancheliyan, declaring that being an SEP member was not a guarantee of having no connection with the LTTE. He did not attempt to justify this malicious lie.

In speaking to Kamalthasan's relatives, the police have openly expressed their hostility to the SEP, declaring that the party's intervention had "spoiled the situation". In other words, the two men are not being held because of possible connections to the LTTE, but because the SEP demanded their release.

The continued detention of Kamalthasan and Ilancheliyan is a clear case of political victimisation and is illegal. Under Sri Lankan law, police can hold a suspect for 24 hours or, in cases of suspected terrorism or conspiracy against the state, for up to 48 hours. After that period, the police must take any detainee to a magistrate's court to obtain a remand order. Neither Kamalthasan nor his relatives have been told on what legal basis he is being held or why he has not gone before a court

Kamalthasan joined the SEP in 1998 in Poonahari, where he had fled after being displaced from his hometown of Karainagar. After returning to Karainagar, he attempted to earn a living through fishing and making fibreglass fishing boats, but the navy's restrictions on fishing made that difficult. Like many others, he went to the Middle East as a migrant

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worker to support his family.

Kamalthasan returned to Sri Lanka last year and has been staying with relatives in Negombo, just to the north of Colombo. He supports his wife, elderly parents and two sisters, one of whom is sick.

SEP representatives who have spoken to Kamalthasan and Ilancheliyan report that the two men are in good spirits despite the difficult and crowded conditions in the police lock-up. They are being held with three other young Tamils who have been similarly detained.

Since plunging the country back to war in 2006, the government and the security forces have unleashed a campaign of harassment and repression directed particularly against the country's Tamil minority, but also aimed at any critics of its policies. Arbitrary detentions have been accompanied by hundreds of abductions, "disappearance" and murders by death squads operating with the complicity of the security forces.

The defence ministry announced a further tightening of restrictions on Thursday, with an order for all Tamils from Jaffna, Vavuniya, Kilinochchi, Mullaithivu and Mannar who have been living in Colombo for the past five years to register with the police by tomorrow. Commenting last weekend, Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse justified the new "security measure," declaring that "human control" was necessary.

The SEP and ISSE have launched a campaign for the immediate release of Kamalthasan and Ilancheliyan. We call on our supporters, WSWS readers and all those concerned about deepening attacks on democratic rights to write to the Sri Lankan authorities to demand their freedom.

Letters should be sent to:

Gotabhaya Rajapakse
Secretary, Ministry of Defence
15/5, Baladaksha Mawatha
Colombo 3, Sri Lanka
Fax: 0094 112 541 529

Inspector General of Police
Police Headquarters
Colombo 1, Sri Lanka
Fax: 0094 112 446 174

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.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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