

Sri Lankan police detain SEP member for over a week

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23 September 2008

Sri Lankan police are still holding Socialist Equality Party (SEP) member Velummailum Kamalthasan and his brother-in-law Santhiralingam Ilancheliyan in the police lock-up at Negombo after more than a week, in spite of vigorous objections by the SEP.

Police arrested Kamalthasan and Ilancheliyan in Negombo on Monday September 15 as they were preparing to travel to Colombo by bus. They were ordered out of the bus then taken to the police station, despite having produced police registration documents to verify their identity.

The police have refused to free Kamalthasan and Ilancheliyan claiming that “further inquiries” into their possible connections to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were necessary. The SEP has already confirmed in writing that Kamalthasan is a longstanding member of the party, which is well-known for its opposition to the LTTE’s separatist program and terrorist acts in general.

The illegal character of the arrests was further exposed when SEP political committee member Nanda Wickremasinghe, accompanied by the party’s lawyer Chandrasiri Hewamanage, went to Negombo on Saturday to demand the immediate release of the two men.

Hewamanage challenged Negombo Head Quarters Inspector Somasiri Liyanage to explain the legal basis for the continued detention of Kamalthasan and Ilancheliyan. Liyanage claimed that the police had obtained a three-month detention order for the two men. He acknowledged that there was no evidence against them and said they would be released in two or three days.

There is no guarantee, however, that the police will keep their word. Already several deadlines for the release of the two men have been broken. When pressed, Liyanage refused to commit himself to a definite date.

The SEP’s lawyer asked to be shown the detention order for the two men. Liyanage immediately declared that he did not have a copy, saying it might be with the police intelligence branch. As it turned out, the intelligence branch could not produce the detention order either.

Even within the context of the country’s draconian emergency legislation, the police actions are illegal. As the government has plunged the country back to war, the security forces have rounded up thousands of Tamils as “LTTE suspects” and held them without trial. According to the emergency regulations, however, a detention order must not only be issued, but also explained to the detainee, who has to be given a copy. At this stage, it is yet to be demonstrated that a detention order has been issued for Kamalthasan and Ilancheliyan.

The sweeping and discriminatory nature of police arrests was clear from Liyanage’s own comments. “There is a large Tamil population living in Negombo,” he said. “They have come from the north and east after being displaced. Among this concentration of Tamils in Negombo, there are LTTE supporters and persons controlled by the LTTE.

“How can we say clearly who is and who isn’t a terrorist supporter in this context? We have put out a wide net. Unfortunately we can’t avoid innocent people getting caught. We have to treat every Tamil with suspicion. We have to carry out orders from above,” Liyanage said.

Wickremasinghe and Hewamanage also asked the police inspector at the Negombo intelligence branch for a copy of the detention order. The officer who would only give his first name—Herath—said that his branch did not have the order at the moment. He could not say where the document was, but insisted that it would be produced before the courts.

Like Liyanage, Herath declared that the police were in a difficult situation, saying, “It is difficult to trust anybody”. He admitted there was no evidence against Kamalthasan and Ilancheliyan but said that he had to wait on a report from the police at Karainagar, in the war-ravaged northern province where the two men originally resided.

Herath asked for a statement from the SEP to confirm that Kamalthasan was a party member. The party has already provided such declarations to other police officials. Wickremasinghe nevertheless recorded a statement, reiterating that Kamalthasan was an SEP member and protesting against his illegal detention.

Following the visit by SEP representatives, a particularly sinister exchange took place between Kamalthasan and a policeman who is yet to be identified. The officer came to the cell to ask whether the SEP was going to file a case against the police and to urge the two men to oppose such a move. He then added in a rather menacing tone: “You will have to continue to live in the area, won’t you?”

The comment is an unmistakable threat to retaliate against the men if the SEP proceeds to fight for their democratic rights. In the context of Sri Lanka, such threats generally mean physical violence. Since the government of President Mahinda Rajapakse recommenced the war in mid-2006, hundreds of people have been abducted, “disappeared” or murdered by death squads either directed by the security forces or acting with their complicity.

The arrest of Kamalthasan and Ilancheliyan is part of the broader attack on basic democratic rights being carried out by the government as part of its reactionary communal war. The entire Tamil minority and anyone who opposes or criticises the war is being treated as a criminal and subject to harassment and arbitrary arrest, or worse.

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

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.

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We publish below letters sent by *World Socialist Web Site* readers.

Sirs,

The detention of 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, is an action that has no justification and requires their immediate release.

As a teacher of history and a member of the American Federation of Teachers, I maintain that the supporters of the Socialist Equality Party are the only political organisation in Sri Lanka who consistently strive for the unity of the Sri Lankan working class, Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim alike and, 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 arbitrary arrest of Kamalthasan and Ilancheliyan can only be interpreted as having political purposes. Justice demands their immediate release and the guarantee of their safety and well-being.

Sincerely,

H. L.

USA

Dear Sirs,

It is now more than a week since the arrest of Velummailum Kamalthasan, a longstanding member of the Socialist Equality Party, and his relative, Santhiralingam Ilancheliyan, by Negombo police. The Central Bank Employees Union vehemently opposes their arrest and detention and demands their immediate release.

We have been informed that police officers have said they were unable to release the arrested persons because of the intervention of the Socialist Equality Party. By making this statement, the police have opposed the democratic right of the Socialist Equality Party to defend Kamalthasan and Ilancheliyan. The police are carrying out an act of political victimisation.

Our trade union considers the arrest of Kamalthasan and Ilancheliyan and their detention in the police lock-up as part of the repression against the Tamil masses.

The Socialist Equality Party is fighting to unite the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim working people. The SEP opposes the renewed war of the government and also the separatism of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and its terrorist acts.

We insist that the police release Kamalthasan and Ilancheliyan immediately and we support the Socialist Equality Party’s international campaign for their release.

K.B. Mavikumbura,

On behalf of the executive committee of the Central Bank Employees Union, Sri Lanka



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact