

Brother of murdered SEP supporter in Sri Lanka speaks to WSWS

Our correspondents
7 September 2006

Sivapragasam Mariyadas, a supporter of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka, was murdered by gunmen on the night of August 7 at his home in Mullipothana, a rural town about 20 kilometres from the eastern port of Trincomalee. The SEP has launched an international campaign to demand a full investigation and the prosecution of the killers.

To date, no serious police inquiry has been conducted. The details gathered by the SEP so far point to the killers being members of the security forces, the police or allied paramilitaries. The murder highlights the systematic terrorising of the local population in the North and East, as the government and the military attack the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and plunge the country back into civil war.

Mariyadas's elder brother, Sivapragasam Benedict, 34, spoke to the WSWS about the tragedy. Benedict heard about his brother's murder on the night and said he was still in shock. He expressed his support for the SEP campaign to bring his brother's killers to justice.

"One of my brother's Muslim neighbours informed us over the phone. But we were only able to go to Mullipothana the next morning because it was impossible to travel at night due to the security situation in the area."

Benedict lives in Selvanayagapuram near Trincomalee. Heavy fighting between the army and the LTTE for the town of Muttur, south of Trincomalee, meant that there were security forces and roadblocks throughout the district.

"My brother's house was situated behind a Muslim school where hundreds of refugees from Muttur were taking shelter. There is a large army camp about half a kilometre away. Only a well-trained and experienced person could carry out this sort of murder. It would not be easy for anyone else to carry out this crime and

escape without being caught," Benedict said.

Over 500 people came to Mariyadas's funeral near Selvanayagapuram on August 9. Benedict said his family members had heard from Sinhalese and Muslim mourners that they had been approached by soldiers who told them that they should not attend the funeral of an LTTE member. He denied that his brother had anything to do with the LTTE.

"A few days after my brother's death, two soldiers from Selvanayagapuram came to my home at about 6 p.m. asking me to come to their camp at 7 p.m. I went to the local police station to complain. The police advised me not to go. Next day morning I went to the camp accompanied by a Tamil policeman whom I knew. The soldiers were angry that I had informed the police and turned us away. I feared for my life."

Slanders about Mariyadas were also spread by soldiers in Mullipothana. When family members went there to make arrangements about Mariyadas's business, local Muslims and Sinhalese expressed their condolences, saying he was a very good person. At the same time, however, several asked if the LTTE had conferred a medal on Mariyadas at his funeral. The military had been circulating the story in the town.

"It is a campaign," Benedict said. "Whenever a Tamil is killed, he is branded as an LTTE member. We are living in fear in Trincomalee. People don't know what will happen from one moment to the next. At any moment, anything can happen in Trincomalee.

"When Mariyadas decided to move to Mullipothana, we advised against the idea. We were concerned because relations between Sinhalese, Muslims and Tamils have been very strained. But Mariyadas told us that no one would harm him.

"My brother spoke Sinhala well. He always shared in the happiness and sorrows of others. If there was ever

any hesitation in doing [photo] assignments at the settlements of Sinhala people, he would go there and come back without any trouble.

“He was so open and forward. If there was any problem with the military, he would criticise the soldiers in front of their faces. He was the same in criticising LTTE people.”

Both Benedict and Mariyadas studied at Trincomalee’s St. Joseph School. Mariyadas was a good student and studied mathematics up to advanced level but he could not get into university. After they finished school, the two brothers set up photographic studios—Benedict in Trincomalee and his brother in Mullipothana.

Benedict explained that the resumption of war in the district had created huge difficulties.

“Due to the war, we have no freedom. We can’t go anywhere to conduct business or meet our basic needs. This is a big problem. I have left the district for that reason. All ordinary Tamils face the same situation.

“Selvanayagapuram, where we live, is about three kilometres from Trincomalee town. About 1,000 families live there. Many of them work as day labourers and those close to the sea go fishing. The fishermen have big problems. Once the war started, they could not go to sea because of the ban on fishing and naval clashes. So they can’t earn a living and have to look for other work.

“People have their movements limited. Those who go out, return home at 4 or 5 p.m. Shops are also closed early. You don’t see young people on the streets. If the schools are open, half the children do not attend classes. Life is difficult.

“Although I am not sure what it is, there should be a solution to the problems we are facing. We want an end to war, and peace for everyone.”

The SEP and the WSWS urge all our readers and supporters to write to the Sri Lankan authorities protesting the murder of Mariyadas, demanding a full investigation and the arrest and charging of all those responsible.

Protest letters should be directed to:

Inspector General of Police Chandra Fernando,
Police Headquarters, Colombo 1, Sri Lanka.

Fax: 0094 11 2446174

Email: igp@police.lk

Attorney General K.C. Kamalabeyson,

Attorney General’s Department,

Colombo 12, Sri Lanka.

Fax: 0094 11 2436 421

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.

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