

Human Rights ? Rajapakse-style

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December 10th, Human Rights Day, was marked in Jaffna by a rally protesting at the continued oppression and denial of the human rights of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka.

The treatment of a solidarity delegation that had traveled to Jaffna from the capital, Colombo, in the south of the island, demonstrated all too clearly the repressive character of Mahinda Rajapakse's regime. The delegation included MP's and representatives of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) the Neva Sama Samaaj Party (NSSP) and the Socialist Party of Sri Lanka (SPSL, Sri Lankan section of the League for the Fifth International).

It was stopped by police before it could reach Jaffna and detained for several hours. Political materials such as banners and placards were forcibly removed and confiscated. If that is what happens to such a delegation, little imagination is needed to think of the obstacles confronting demonstrators trying to attend the rally from across the north of the island where the majority of Tamils live.

Police repression, however, did not prevent the rally taking place. As well as demanding an end to restrictions on movement and organisation, the key demand for the majority of protestors was the release of family members still held in camps and prisons, 18 months after the end of the war. Finally, the rally was addressed by members of the delegation from Colombo, Mavai Senadiraja (TNA) Sivajilingam (former MP TNA) Ranath Kumarasinghe (NSSP) and Mahinda Devege (SPSL).

Speaking after the rally, Mahinda Devege stressed that the continued occupation of the north and the denial of basic rights to the Tamil-speaking people went alongside increasing attacks on the living standards and rights of the whole working class population of the island ? as Karl Marx warned, ?a nation that oppresses another nation, can never itself be free!?

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