

Raveenthiranathan Senthil Ravee

October 12, 1969-February 28, 2007

7 March 2007

Raveenthiranathan Senthil Ravee (Senthil), a member of the International Committee based in London, was killed in a car accident in the early hours of February 28 on the London-bound M20 motorway. He leaves behind his wife Anparasi and three children, Turphin, Ajann and baby Leon.

The ICFI expresses its profound sympathy for Senthil's family over their loss. He was a loving husband and father, fiercely proud of his children and determined that they would have a better life through the ending of class oppression.



Raveenthiranathan Senthil Ravee

Senthil was born on October 12, 1969, in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. He belonged to a generation that paid a heavy price for the betrayal of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), which took the liquidationist politics of Pabloite revisionism to its logical conclusion and joined the capitalist government of Madam Bandaranaike's Sri Lankan Freedom Party in 1964.

The LSSP enjoyed enormous political authority because of its previous struggle to build the Fourth International in Sri Lanka and India, and had stood alone in advocating the unity of the Sinhala and Tamil masses. For this reason, the Tamil masses had looked to the working class and its revolutionary party as the instrument of their own liberation from national oppression. Instead, the LSSP not only took responsibility for the preservation of the Sri Lankan state, but agreed to a constitution that institutionalised anti-Tamil racism.

This betrayal was opposed by revolutionaries who went on to form the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International and forerunner of today's Socialist Equality Party, the Revolutionary Communist League. Even so, it was to have a lasting impact on the political development of the working class, undermining confidence in a socialist perspective and facilitating the growth of petty bourgeois nationalist organisations amongst both the Tamil and Sinhala

masses.

Senthil's political development can only be understood in this context. His parents were working as teachers in the plantation areas where most Tamils are employed. There, he witnessed firsthand the appalling levels of exploitation and racism they faced.

In the immediate aftermath of the bloody anti-Tamil pogroms, at the age of 15, Senthil joined the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS). Unlike other nationalist organisations, this group claimed to advance a socialist perspective and to represent working people. It cited in particular the plantation workers as a central factor in the struggle for the creation of a separate Tamil nation, Tamil Eelam.

In 1987, just three years after he became politically active, the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord was signed. This was an attempt by both governments to bring an end to the nationalist insurgency in the North and East of Sri Lanka, which threatened the interests of the Indian bourgeoisie in mainland Tamil Nadu.

The main nationalist group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), endorsed the Accord, citing its promises of limited autonomy as a step towards self-determination. However, there was widespread opposition to the sending of the Indian army to the North and East. A bloody conflict ensued, in which the Tamil people were trapped between the Indian army on the one side and the internecine warfare that broke out between the Tamil nationalist organisations on the other.

Following the withdrawal of the Indian Army in the beginning of 1991, thousands of youth left Sri Lanka to seek political asylum in Canada and the European countries. Senthil was amongst this number, arriving in Paris in August 1991. Disillusioned with EROS, he was involved in discussions with other exiles on the formation of a new political organisation. It was during this period that he first came into contact with supporters of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

This provided Senthil with his first opportunity for understanding not only the significance of the betrayal of the LSSP, but also the RCL's principled struggle against it in defending Trotsky's theory of the Permanent Revolution and

advancing the socialist unification of the Sinhalese and Tamil working class in opposition to national separatism.

Senthil not only assimilated these lessons with respects to Sri Lanka, but became a committed internationalist and advocate of world socialism.

From the moment that he joined the ICFI in 1994, Senthil worked tirelessly in seeking to build its influence amongst Tamil exiles, but never to the exclusion of political interventions in the European working class. When the Tamil-language section of the *World Socialist Web Site* was launched in 2000, he embraced this as a decisive instrument in building the ICFI on the Indian subcontinent.

Living in Europe, Senthil was not only confronted with the impact of racist legislation but was also forced to endure the depredations that affect immigrant workers most harshly.

It is not without significance that Senthil was killed as he returned in the early hours of the morning from a visit to Paris, where he had been trying to secure refugee status for his sister.

Without professional qualifications, Senthil was forced to take on a series of poorly paid, unskilled jobs to make a living for his family. Over the next 12 years, this twice necessitated a move from France to Britain. In addition, Senthil was particularly desirous of improving his English-language abilities—which he considered essential to the development of political work in India.

Perhaps the best measure of the value and significance of someone's life is the impact he makes on others. In Senthil's case, the deep sadness his death has caused is testimony to a remarkable man.

In a number of recollections sent to the *World Socialist Web Site*, a picture is painted of a man of deep conviction and humanity.

Tony Robson and Tania Kent write:

“Senthil's most striking feature was his desire to learn, whether this involved politics, history or mastering the English language.

“He would always seek to fully participate in branch meetings. If there was an issue he was unsure of, he would say so upfront. He would strive to overcome his limitations of English to make himself understood and to understand others. He managed to combine this intensity with a mischievous sense of humour which was always very welcome and endearing.

“Living in East London enabled him to appreciate the class chasm that existed within the heart of British imperialism. Like many Tamils in Britain, he worked long hours for low pay in dead-end jobs, usually as a petrol station attendant. He was working at one station in Canning Town when he was approached by a local mother who appealed to him to give her a free loaf of bread so she could feed her kids. Senthil was genuinely shocked.

“He was always ready to take on new challenges and broaden his horizons. For anyone to die in circumstances such as these is tragic, but for someone such as Senthil who embraced life

with both hands and was just 37 seems particularly cruel. We will always remember him with that cheeky grin on his face.”

Trevor Johnson was a longtime friend of Senthil, having met him initially in London when he was first learning English:

“He took politics very seriously, and gradually grew in confidence so that he could speak more often on the main issues.

“Senthil was not the kind of person who talks about himself much—his achievements were many, but he did not like to talk about them. He had a special little smile that said, ‘I could say more about that, but you understand why I don't...’

“It is a terrible tragedy that Senthil is dead. I hope that his family can find some consolation in the fact that he died as he lived—trying his best for his friends and comrades.”

Ajay Prakash is a young Tamil contributor to the WSWs who worked with Senthil and was a close friend. It is fitting that he have the last word:

“Senthil was the backbone of the building of the Tamil language web site and did a lot of translation.

“Since 2005, we have stepped up our work in seeking to politically analyse events on the Indian subcontinent, which will allow us to build a section there. We were in constant discussions together, meeting at least three times a week. It was he who encouraged me to begin writing and proposed that we begin a study of Indian history.

“I have lost so much—a leading comrade, a Marxist leader and guide. He was the backbone of my development since I moved to London. He helped me find a house and a job and developed me with care.

“Sleep well, Comrade Senthil. We will take care of your family and children, with hope, one day, that they too will take up the struggle to lead the world into socialism.”

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