

Sri Lanka: NSSP prepares new trap for Tamil workers and youth

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Last November Vikramabahu Karunaratna, leader of the ex-radical organisation, the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), paid a visit to Britain. Despite his occasional claims to still being a “socialist”, he gave full support to bourgeois Tamil political groups that operate in close alliance with British and American imperialism—the very forces engaged in wars of neo-colonial conquest in Iraq and Afghanistan, and whose only interest in Sri Lanka is the exploitation of its human and strategic assets.

Since its formation in 1978, the NSSP, while attempting to maintain a left face, has consistently engaged in sordid manoeuvres with various bourgeois parties in Sri Lanka as they shifted inexorably to the right. Karunaratna claimed that his visit to Britain was a private one, but, he participated in 20 political meetings and discussions before leaving London on December 7.

Karunaratna signed an agreement to form “a Left Front” with the British Tamil Forum (BTF), an organisation supported by the Tamil bourgeois nationalist separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Since the Sri Lankan army defeated the LTTE in May 2009, the organisation has fragmented into many parts, one of which is the BTF.

Karunaratna participated with great enthusiasm in the meetings arranged by the BTF. This leader of the so-called “Left Front” in Sri Lanka declared at the South Harrow meeting on November 25: “On behalf of the social democratic forces and the NSSP we have agreed to work with the British Tamil Forum to bring democracy to our country.”

Like the LTTE, the BTF advances a nationalist programme for the creation of an independent capitalist state and is openly courting the favour of the Western imperialist powers. In 2009 on May Day in Paris, when hundreds of thousands of French workers demonstrated against the Sarkozy government’s cuts in social expenditure, and the loss of jobs and mounting poverty, the LTTE supporters once again demonstrated where their class sympathies lie. They participated in the demonstrations carrying pictures of Obama, Brown, Sarkozy and Germany’s Angela Merkel, along with banners saying “Help us”.

On February 24, the BTF took full charge of the formation of The Global Tamil Forum (GTF) in the British parliament. The

GTF is a new organisation that purports to be the “authentic voice” of the Tamil diaspora. It had the blessing of the entire British political establishment and of the US government.

The then-Labour British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Foreign Secretary David Miliband met with representatives of the GTF. Senior Conservative William Hague, and his Liberal Democrat counterpart, Ed Davery, addressed the GTF conference. Conservative Party leader David Cameron (now prime minister) and Robert Blake, a former US ambassador to Sri Lanka and now assistant secretary of state for south and central Asian affairs, sent greetings. Reverend Jesse Jackson, who was introduced as “President Obama’s friend”, gave a speech welcoming the GTF’s founding.

In November, as Karunaratna announced his agreement with the pro-capitalist BTF for restoring “democracy” in Sri Lanka, thousands of students and teachers were demonstrating on the streets in all of Britain’s major cities, including London, to protest against the massive increase in university fees and the assault on their rights, being proposed by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government.

The demonstrators were subject to unprecedented brutality by the British government, which used riot police to attack the students. The British protests were part of a wave of strikes and demonstrations by workers and students against the imposition of austerity measures throughout Europe in France, Ireland, Greece, Portugal and Italy.

Karunaratna took no part in these demonstrations. His only concern was to curry favour with the BTF and, through it, the imperialist powers.

The NSSP leader was a “special guest” at a meeting in London on November 27 organised by the BTF and supporters of the LTTE to mark Heroes’ Day, where he gave a speech. The LTTE and its associated groups organised Heroes’ Day for the past 26 years, nominally to honour LTTE fighters killed in the war with the Sri Lankan army. Until his death in May 2009, LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran used this annual occasion to outline the latest twists and turns in the LTTE’s policies.

That BTF should form an alliance with Karunaratna, and promote him, among others, on the Heroes' Day platform in London in November is an indication of their orientation to sections of the Colombo establishment with which the NSSP associates.

In his speech, Karunaratna declared: "Tamils have been killed by successive Sinhala-chauvinist governments in Sri Lanka, last but not the least by the Mahinda Rajapakse regime." He went on to say: "It is an irony of history that [former army commander] Sarath Fonseka, who was selected to carry out this butchery against Tamils, is also suffering in jail with Tamil political prisoners." And, he added, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), "which pushed, promoted and campaigned for Mahinda to carry out this war, is now being beaten up by the same regime".

Karunaratna's references to Fonseka and the Sinhala chauvinist JVP were quite deliberate. By painting them as being in the same boat as Tamils, he was cultivating the dangerous illusion that opposition parties in Colombo could potentially defend the rights of Tamils, despite their entire history to the contrary.

Last January, before the presidential election, the NSSP and the pseudo-left United Socialist Party (USP) joined the "Platform for Freedom" with the right-wing United National Party (UNP) and one of its pro-capitalist allies—the Sri Lanka Freedom Party-Peoples Wing (SLFP-PW). The UNP and the JVP backed General Sarath Fonseka as a "common candidate" against incumbent President Mahinda Rajapakse.

By joining the "Platform for Freedom", the USP and NSSP had helped promote the UNP and its allies as "democrats" and thus also the UNP's campaign of support for Fonseka as "the democratic alternative" to Rajapakse. Fonseka, along with Rajapakse and his ministers in government, is directly responsible for war crimes, including the killing of thousands of Tamil civilians in the final months of the war. After the end of the war, Fonseka, fell out with Rajapakse, who had him convicted on trumped up charges to remove a potential political threat.

Last October, the JVP organised protests in Colombo against the conviction and jailing of Sarath Fonseka, in which the UNP, the NSSP and the USP participated. The same month, the NSSP and USP joined with the JVP and UNP to launch a petition to President Mahinda Rajapakse, calling for Fonseka's release. Karunaratna and USP leader Siritunga Jayasuriya also participated in a protest with the UNP in front of the Fort Railway Station in central Colombo. The JVP and UNP are bourgeois parties, mired in Sinhala communalism, which fully backed Rajapakse's criminal war and defended the military's gross abuses of democratic rights.

On November 25, Karunaratna also took part in a meeting in the British House of Commons with UNP parliamentarian Jayarat Jayawardane. He told the press that he had met with Jayawardane "to discuss the rehabilitation of displaced people due to the war in the North of Sri Lanka and make improvements in their

conditions." In reality, the meeting is part of the NSSP's ongoing manoeuvring with this right-wing party.

Karunaratna's participation in meetings and banquets arranged by bourgeois Tamil organisations in Britain, that are now discredited and fragmented, was no accident. It is a continuation of Pabloite opportunist politics, which has a long history of bitterly opposing the struggle of the Fourth International for the political independence of the working class. This treachery is prevalent not only in Sri Lanka, but also in France with the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA), which seeks to tie the working class to the Socialist and other "left" parties and their trade union allies.

During the last presidential and parliamentary elections in Sri Lanka, 78 percent of the population in the North and East, under the occupation of the Army, did not exercise their voting rights. It only shows that the Tamil working class and the oppressed masses have nothing but extreme disgust for the Rajapakse government and the Tamil and Sinhalese capitalist parties, including the LTTE, and the parties that call themselves leftists.

The NSSP leader is creating a dangerous trap in claiming that any of these bourgeois parties can "restore democracy". Sinhala and Tamil workers and students in Sri Lanka and abroad should reject with contempt such class-collaborationist organisations, which are obstacles to the fight for social equality and democratic rights. These can only be attained by the independent revolutionary mobilisation of the working class in alliance with the poor farmers on an internationalist, socialist programme.

The authors also recommend:

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