

Sri Lankan ex-lefts promote illusions in Tamil National Alliance

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The pseudo-radicals of the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) in Sri Lanka are engaged in a new and utterly opportunist campaign to promote the bourgeois Tamil National Alliance (TNA) as a party—indeed the only party—representing the interests of ordinary Tamils.

In doing so, the NSSP is not only providing much-needed political assistance to the discredited TNA but also lining up with US and European imperialism, which are seeking to pressure the Sri Lankan government to negotiate with the Tamil organisation.

Interviewed this month in the Tamil newspaper, *Uthayan*, NSSP leader Wickremabahu Karunaratna insisted the government had to negotiate with the TNA as “the sole representative for the Tamil people” and provide “a political solution” to the country’s protracted civil war that ended with the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009.

Referring to the outcome of national elections last year, Karunaratna declared: “People in the North and East have already established the TNA as their sole representative through their vote.” In fact, in the parliamentary elections of April 2010, Tamil voters stayed away in droves. In the northern, predominantly Tamil district of Jaffna, the voter turnout was just 23 percent, of which the TNA received less than half.

The low turnout expressed a general disgust with the entire political establishment, including the TNA. Many Tamils were outraged at the TNA’s support for the opposition candidate, Sarath Fonseka, in the earlier presidential election in January, against the incumbent, Mahinda Rajapakse. Fonseka was the army commander who directed the final offensives against the LTTE that led to the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians and, along with President Rajapakse, bore responsibility for these war crimes.

In the aftermath of the war, the army detained around 300,000 men, women and children in detention camps for months before sending them back to their devastated villages and towns with virtually no assistance. Thousands of young people were sent to undisclosed re-education centres for “LTTE suspects.” Much of the north and east of the island is under permanent military occupation. Murders and disappearances by pro-government death squads continue—with at least 30 in the past six months.

Joblessness and poverty are rife.

The TNA, which previously functioned as the LTTE’s parliamentary representative, has done nothing to defend the rights of ordinary Tamils or alleviate the terrible conditions in which many live. Its negotiations with the Rajapakse government for “a political solution” consist of haggling over a power-sharing arrangement between the Sinhala and Tamil ruling elites, involving the devolution of limited powers to the North and East.

The NSSP’s support for the TNA’s “political solution” based on devolution seeks to keep Tamils straitjacketed within the framework of communal politics that has already produced a disaster. The LTTE’s collapse in 2009 was not primarily a military defeat, but was a result of its bankrupt perspective of a separate capitalist state of Tamil Eelam. Facing a relentless military offensive, the LTTE was organically incapable of making any appeal to the working class either in Sri Lanka or internationally. Instead, the LTTE leaders spent their final days making futile appeals to the “international community” to intervene—that is, to the imperialist powers that had backed Rajapakse’s criminal war.

With a state of Eelam off the agenda, the TNA, with the NSSP’s assistance, is promoting the illusion that a Tamil province with limited powers would help end the suffering of the Tamil masses. With such a “solution,” the TNA would simply function as a loyal provincial policeman for the Colombo government, in order to facilitate the joint exploitation of the working class.

This perspective directly blocks the unification of workers—Sinhala and Tamil—around their common class interests in the struggle for a workers’ and peasants’ government and a socialist program. The NSSP is peddling this communal line precisely at the point when the widespread disaffection among Tamils is meeting up with growing unrest among workers in the south of the island over rising prices and deteriorating living standards.

The NSSP is not only serving the interests of sections of the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie, but those of US imperialism. The US and its European allies backed Rajapakse’s war against the LTTE only to find that China, a rival power, had gained significance influence in Colombo through its provision of military and financial aid with

no strings attached.

In the final months of the war, the US began to raise limited concerns about the fate of Tamil civilians being bombarded by the Sri Lankan military and subsequently supported an investigation into Sri Lanka war crimes. This campaign had nothing to do with defending ordinary Tamils. Rather Washington was once again employing the phony banner of “human rights” to advance its own interests, using the threat of a war crimes inquiry to encourage Rajapakse to distance himself from Beijing.

Subsequently, the US, along with India, has thrown its weight behind the TNA’s negotiations with the Rajapakse government and its call for a “political solution.” Washington is clearly looking to the TNA to provide some additional leverage in Colombo. For New Delhi, support for the TNA is also designed to head off criticism in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu that it has failed to defend the rights of Sri Lankan Tamils.

Far from exposing these machinations, the NSSP is promoting the dangerous illusion that Tamils should put their faith in the US and India. In his interview with *Uthayan*, Karunaratna declared: “If the government tries to postpone a political solution indefinitely, the US and India will push Mahinda’s government out. The US and India brought Mahinda to power, they largely contributed to bringing the war to an end. Therefore they are in a position to intervene in the Sri Lankan issue.”

The NSSP’s open support for an intervention by US imperialism in Sri Lanka parallels the backing given by various pseudo-radical outfits for the NATO bombing of Libya, also carried out under the guise of defending the civilian population.

While the US and its European allies are not at the point of intervening militarily in Sri Lanka, their manoeuvres in Colombo are just as predatory. Underlining the strategic significance of the island and its proximity to key Indian Ocean shipping lanes, a 2009 report by the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee declared the US could not afford to “lose Sri Lanka.”

The US and India tacitly supported the Rajapakse government’s renewal of the war against the LTTE in mid-2006, ignoring the Sri Lankan military’s open breaches of the 2002 internationally-backed ceasefire. Right up until the final months before the LTTE’s defeat, Washington and New Delhi not only remained silent about the army’s gross abuses of democratic rights, but provided military assistance.

The NSSP, however, shamelessly presents the latest human rights posturing of the US and its allies as good coin. In a column late last month in *Virakesari*, Karunaratna declared: “Today the international pressure is very high [on the Sri Lankan government]. The hope of the international community is that in the war-devastated north and east the priority should be given to due rights of people including democratic activities.”

The NSSP is playing a similar role internationally. During a visit to Britain late last year, Karunaratna reached an agreement to form “a left front” with the British Tamil Forum (BTF), a bourgeois Tamil exile organisation that is openly courting the support of the Western imperialist powers for its separatist agenda. The BTF played a key role in the inauguration of the Global Tamil Forum that took place in the British parliament building in February 2010 with the blessing of the then Labour government, the Tory opposition and the Obama administration. Keen to put a left face on their pro-imperialist orientation, the BTF feted Karunaratna as a special guest at their annual heroes’ day event last November and he readily obliged.

The NSSP has a long history of opportunist alliances that have always served the needs of various sections of the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie. In 2009, the party joined a “platform of freedom” with the right-wing United National Party, helping it to posture as a defender of democratic rights against the Rajapakse government. Now, without a word of explanation, the NSSP is seeking to revive illusions among the Tamil masses in the TNA.

Workers and youth must reject the NSSP’s opportunist manoeuvring and the communal politics on which it is based. The social needs and democratic aspirations of working people—Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim alike—can be defended only through the independent mobilisation of the working class in the struggle for a workers’ and peasants’ government to implement socialist policies. That is the perspective for which the Socialist Equality Party in Sri Lanka fights.



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