

Sri Lankan N SSP repudiates socialism and the October Revolution

Socialist Equality Party Sri Lanka
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The Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) in Sri Lanka has repudiated the struggle for socialism, attacked Leon Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution and called the October Revolution a historical mistake.

NSSP leader Wickremabahu Karunaratna has issued statements to this effect as his party seeks new alliances with capitalist parties in Sri Lanka to move into the direct service of the imperialist powers. The NSSP deepened its alliance with the Democratic People's Front (DPF), a Tamil bourgeois party, to contest recent local government elections in Sri Lanka. However, the significance of these positions goes far beyond the formation of a new unprincipled alliance of the NSSP with bourgeois parties.

In his September 4 column in the *Lakbimanews* weekly, Karunaratna wrote: "There cannot be socialism in a poor, economically backward country like ours in the sense it was discussed in the socialist political movement in the West. Socialism arrives after the development of capitalist economy as a world entity. On the basis of world capitalism, there should be a democratic world government. The implosion of that will lead humanity to socialism."

With such statements the NSSP is making clear that it is completely hostile to a struggle for socialism in Sri Lanka and Asia. From the NSSP's standpoint, socialism is not on the agenda for the indefinite future. Instead, workers face a long struggle not to overthrow capitalism, but to persuade business owners and major capitalist governments around the world to get along peacefully and grant the masses a "democratic world government."

This perspective is utopian and reactionary. The Western imperialist powers increasingly threaten countries like China and Iran militarily as they face a deepening economic crisis and mass protest at home. Washington now even claims the right to kill its citizens without trial. There cannot be any serious struggle for democracy without a socialist struggle for social equality and democratic control of world economic production by the working class.

After repudiating the struggle for socialism in the backward countries, Karunaratna goes on to attack the theory of permanent revolution advanced by Leon Trotsky. Unlike the NSSP, which insists that there can be no socialism in backward countries, he writes, "He [Trotsky] predicted the possibility of workers coming to power in a backward country... In other words, unequal development in the world has opened up a shortcut to world socialism."

The NSSP is deeply hostile to the positions of Trotsky. Trotsky explained that the tasks of the democratic revolution could not be carried out by the capitalist classes in backward countries in the imperialist epoch.

They could not carry through the advances of the eighteenth century democratic revolutions—granting land to the peasants, establishing democratic rights, opposing feudal and religious backwardness—or achieve national unity, genuine independence and freedom from imperialist oppression.

Instead, only the working class taking the leadership of the oppressed masses can fulfil these essential tasks of the democratic revolution—as a by-product of socialist revolution and part of the struggle for world socialism. Trotsky insisted that to play this role, the working class must establish its political independence from every capitalist party.

This perspective underlay the seizure of power in October 1917 by the Bolshevik Party in Russia, leading to the formation of the USSR and a struggle to extend socialist revolution to Europe and Asia. Precisely because Karunaratna is hostile to the theory of permanent revolution he goes on to attack the USSR and declare that it had nothing to do with socialism.

Because of the defeats of the subsequent wave of revolutionary struggles in Europe in the 1920s, Karunaratna writes, the result of Trotsky's perspective was "the isolation of Russia as a one-party state with a nationalised backward economy. The latter was not a socialist state in any political sense, but a crude aberration."

By calling the USSR an "aberration" that was not socialist "in any political sense," Karunaratna implies that the proletariat's coming to power in Russia in 1917 was a mistake and a historic dead-end. The revolution should not have been carried out.

This not only implies that the entire revolutionary struggle for socialism in the twentieth century was historically illegitimate, it casts aside the Trotskyist movement's struggle for the principles of Marxism against the Stalinist degeneration of the Soviet Union and of the Communist International, and Trotskyism's struggle to establish the political independence of the working class.

In the war-devastated economy of early Soviet Russia, encircled by hostile imperialist powers, the bureaucracy became hostile to the struggle for world socialist revolution and to Trotsky personally. Instead, it argued for "socialism in one country." Based on its so-called "two-stage" theory of revolution, it said workers in the backward countries should first fight for democracy, putting off the struggle for socialism to a later historic epoch.

When Karunaratna today insists that the backward countries must first have democracy and not socialism, it is to prepare his party to move into the direct service of imperialism and political reaction. The NSSP leader

writes that they are “not looking for a socialist unity, but for a unity of those who strive for democracy and social equity. Such a broad grouping was called a ‘social democratic alliance.’”

What is Karunaratna’s so-called “social democratic alliance?” Simply put, it is unity with right-wing capitalist parties. Karunaratna has stated that the NSSP’s new alliance with the DPF represents the “emergence of a radical social democratic movement.” However, his aim is to broaden the alliance to include the United National Party (UNP), the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie’s traditional right-wing party.

Over the past several years, the NSSP has engaged in frequent and close collaboration with the UNP and its leader, Ranil Wickremesinghe. In early 2009, the NSSP, along with another pseudo-left group, the United Socialist Party, formed the “Platform of Freedom” with the UNP, supposedly to defend democratic rights, and participated in protests along with the UNP.

In the local election campaign, Karunaratna made an absurd appeal to the UNP to become a social-democratic party. In an interview with the *Daily Mirror*, Karunaratna insisted: “The UNP has to be a social democratic party; they cannot survive as a right-wing political party because all right-wing politics have been taken over by Mahinda”—that is, Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse.

In another interview, he said, “If the UNP does not change its policies to social democratic... all advantages will go to the government.”

Karunaratna’s appeal to the right-wing UNP to turn itself into a bourgeois “left” party is cynical and absurd. He knows Rajapakse and his Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) are discredited by the Sri Lankan civil war, which the Rajapakse regime ended by massacring the Tamil nationalist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and the worsening poverty facing the masses. Since he opposes a politically independent struggle by the working class, Karunaratna must find a new force in the political establishment with which to develop a new, corrupt alliance. Since it cannot be the bourgeois “left” SLFP, he chooses the right-wing UNP.

The UNP is traditionally the staunchly pro-Western party in Sri Lanka, with close connections to Washington. It has repeatedly warned Rajapakse against tilting towards Beijing. It is concerned with Rajapakse’s ties to China, which greatly expanded during the civil war, fearing this will isolate Sri Lanka from Western imperialism.

The NSSP is also looking for a front with the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), the main Tamil bourgeois party. Karunaratna is promoting the TNA as the “sole representative of the Tamil people” and calling on the Colombo government to come to a “political solution” with it. This would be nothing but a power-sharing arrangement with the Tamil bourgeoisie.

The NSSP leader is well aware that the Obama administration has demanded that the Colombo government hold talks with the TNA. This coalition of Tamil parties—formerly a proxy for the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, which supported the LTTE’s campaign for a separate state—is scheduled to meet with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the end of this month for discussions.

The NSSP’s appeal to the TNA goes in the same direction as its appeal to the UNP—serving US imperialism while attempting to tie the disaffected Tamil masses to the political establishment.

Washington is seeking to use human rights violations, including war crimes during the civil war, to pressure the Colombo government. The Obama administration wants to undercut Rajapakse’s developing relations with China as the US strategic and economic rivalry with China intensifies.

The US, which backed Rajapakse’s war, has no sympathy for the democratic rights of the Tamils and pursues this policy purely based on its strategic and commercial interests. In December 2009, a report by the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee outlined the geo-strategic importance of Sri Lanka, which sits astride crucial navigation routes for Chinese and Indian commerce in the Indian Ocean. It concluded: “The United States cannot afford to ‘lose’ Sri Lanka.”

The NSSP’s pro-imperialist leanings were shown when it supported the imperialist-backed Libyan “rebels” who later formed the transitional government. While making pro forma criticisms of the NATO bombings, Karunaratna wrote that in order to “help” the Libyan people there should be “campaigning for a total embargo on arms sales to the [Gaddafi] dictatorship, freezing of the assets of the Libyan regime” and humanitarian aid. He also called for military aid to Libya from “the Arab people and armies, starting with the Tunisians and the Egyptians.”

That is, he wanted the US-backed Tunisian regime and Egyptian junta, which continue to oppress the working class in their own countries, to help the Western powers set up a new pro-imperialist regime in Libya. Karunaratna knew that his proposals for an arms embargo and the freezing of Libyan assets could be carried out only by the imperialist powers. They were, in fact, enacted by the US, the UK and France.

As it has become increasingly clear that NATO waged war in Libya to advance the predatory interests of these countries—grabbing Libya’s oil and defending Western imperialist strategic interests—Karunaratna has for the moment fallen silent on Libya.

The NSSP’s unabashed support for imperialism and the political right reflects the fact that it was never a Trotskyist party. Its origins are in the latter period of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), after the LSSP had betrayed the principles of socialist internationalism and the political independence of the working class, entering into a coalition government with the SLFP in 1964. Karunaratna and those leaders who later formed the NSSP supported this betrayal.

The LSSP was then the Sri Lankan section of the Pabloite movement—a political tendency that had broken with Trotskyism, rejecting the fight to build independent Trotskyist parties and repudiating the conception of the leading and revolutionary role of the working class. The Pabloites insisted that Trotskyist parties should enter into Stalinist and social democratic parties in the advanced countries. In the backward countries they proposed “united fronts,” even with national bourgeois parties. Thus they covered up the increasingly opportunist politics of the LSSP, which gravitated towards the SLFP, paving the way for the great betrayal in 1964.

The Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), the forerunner of Socialist Equality Party, was established in 1968 in opposition to the betrayals and degeneration of the LSSP. It based itself on the struggle of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) against the LSSP’s betrayal in 1964 and the anti-Trotskyist policies of Pabloism internationally. The RCL/SEP since then has fought against all forms of opportunism, including that of the NSSP, to defend Trotskyism and its program for socialist revolution based on the theory of permanent revolution.

Participating in the SLFP-led coalition government, Karunaratna and his colleagues supported every attack on the working class and the youth. They were in this government when it crushed the 1971 youth uprising, killing 15,000 youth and jailing thousands. In a monumental communal attack on the Tamil people, the coalition government imposed the 1972 constitution that entrenched Buddhism as the state religion. Karunaratna and his cohorts approved this attack.

The LSSP was thrown out of the coalition government after it had performed these services for the bourgeoisie. Only after that did the NSSP leaders leave the LSSP and form their own party in 1978. This group first joined the Committee for a Workers International (CWI), a group pretending to be Trotskyist but carrying out reformist and opportunist politics. In 1991, the NSSP became the Sri Lankan section of the Pabloite United Secretariat.

The party carried out unprincipled and reactionary manoeuvres all throughout the decades-long Sri Lankan civil war. When President J.R. Jayawardene's UNP government faced a crisis as the civil war against the LTTE began in 1983, he called a round table conference to seek the support of other parties. NSSP leaders enthusiastically participated in it.

In 1987, the NSSP supported the Indo-Lankan Accord, which paved the way for the entry of Indian "peace keeping" troops into the North and East of Sri Lanka to suppress the Tamils and disarm the LTTE.

In the mid-1990s, Karunaratna formed an alliance with the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), promoting illusions that this Sinhala extremist party was a progressive force. From 2002, the NSSP supported the UNP-initiated "peace process" with the LTTE, which was backed by big business and the imperialist powers.

One after another, these alliances were aimed at tying the working class to the capitalist parties and blocking its independent mobilisation against the capitalist class and for socialism.

Karunaratna now unabashedly promotes Sri Lankan capitalism with chauvinist rhetoric. In an interview with the *Mirror*, he explained: "I am with the national bourgeoisie against the foreign capitalists who are trying to replace the local capitalists. We believe that there are local capitalists and they have to be strengthened, that is the democratic task before us."

He is here saying that the working class should be an appendage of the big business parties and the oppressed minorities and poor, including the rural peasantry, must rally behind these parties to strengthen capitalism. Karunaratna's statements are a clear announcement of the NSSP's hostility to socialism and permanent revolution and its assumption of the role of defender of capitalism and imperialism against the working class.

The NSSP's opposition to socialism and its attack on Trotskyism reflect the integration of the entire international Pabloite movement into the orbit of imperialist politics. In France, the Pabloite Revolutionary Communist League (LCR) liquidated itself to form New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) in 2009, formally abandoning any association with Trotskyism. It was part of its attempt to establish direct ties with the bourgeois parties.

All of these petty-bourgeois groups have been driven into the camp of the bourgeoisie out of hostility to the emerging international revolutionary upsurge of the working class. Like the NSSP, the NPA supported the NATO bombardment of Libya, treacherously claiming that the military intervention aimed to defend protesters against Gaddafi. It backs the so-

called transitional regimes established in Egypt and Tunisia after the mass uprisings there and promotes their "democratic" pretences, though both countries are run by regimes backed by the military.

The formal abandonment of Trotskyism and socialism by the NSSP and its international co-thinkers shows that, in the face of the rising revolutionary struggles in the working class around the world, these parties are rallying to defend capitalism and imperialism against the workers. This vindicates the decades-long struggle of the SEP against all forms of Pabloism and anti-Trotskyist politics.

The SEP now stands as the only defender of Trotskyism and socialism in Sri Lanka and South Asia, embodying the colossal historical experience of the working class in the struggle against the betrayals of the LSSP and NSSP. The SEP advances the program of a workers' and peasants' government, a Sri Lanka-Eelam Socialist Republic, as part of struggle for socialism throughout South Asia and internationally. We urge workers and youth to build the SEP as a mass party.



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