

The pseudo-left USP and its bogus fight against the “Rajapakse dictatorship”

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The pseudo-left United Socialist Party (USP) issued a statement for the September 21 provincial elections that underscores its duplicitous role in posturing as socialist while politically supporting the opposition United National Party (UNP)—a right-wing bourgeois party. The USP is standing candidates in the Jaffna and Vavuniya districts in the North, and Nuwara Eliya in Central Province.

The USP declared: “Though our immediate aim is to defeat this racist neo-liberal Rajapakse dictatorship, the USP emphasises that it is standing in this election for the victory of a socialist program by crushing capitalist rule.” In reality, the reference to a distant, future fight for socialism is simply window dressing for the “immediate aim”—its alliance with the bourgeois UNP to oust the Rajapakse government.

The USP, together with the pseudo-left Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), recently took part in an “anti-dictatorship” protest organised by the latest UNP front—the “Force for Unity.” The UNP organised the demonstration against a brutal army attack on villagers demanding clean water last month at Weliveriya. Soldiers killed three youth.

At the UNP protest, USP leader Siritunga Jayasuriya stated: “We—the political parties, trade unions, mass organisations, media persons, great Buddhist monks—all have come here to give a notice to the government to go home. We must go forward to bring a people’s government, a democratic rule that will fulfil the equal rights of workers, students, and Tamil masses.”

This declaration speaks thousands of words about the USP’s “fight against the Rajapakse dictatorship.” Jayasuriya’s call for a “people’s government” and “democratic rule,” made as he rubbed shoulders with UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe, was nothing other than a pledge to subordinate the struggles of working people to the election of a UNP-led government.

Confronted by rising social tensions, the Rajapakse government is resorting to the police-state measures, developed during the country’s protracted communal war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), to suppress the resistance by workers to its austerity

measures.

A UNP government would do exactly same. The USP is shamelessly covering up the UNP’s record in initiating pro-market restructuring during the late 1970s, then launching the war against the LTTE in 1983, and ruthlessly prosecuting it for the next decade. Between 1989 and 1991, the UNP government was responsible for the slaughter of at least 60,000 rural youth in the south of the island by military-backed death squads.

The USP statement labelled the decision to hold elections for the northern provincial council “a victory for the democratic forces in the country.” This reference to “democratic forces” indicates support for the USP’s other ally—the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), the main party of the Tamil bourgeoisie—which pushed for the election in the North to take place.

President Mahinda Rajapakse only called the northern provincial election reluctantly as a manoeuvre in the face of pressure from the US and India. US imperialism backed his war against the LTTE, but is now exploiting the government’s gross abuses of democratic rights to force Rajapakse to distance himself from China.

The demand of the UNP-USP-NSSP front for a northern provincial election had nothing to do with defending the democratic rights of working people. It was fully in line with the push of the US and India for a “political solution” to the war that would involve a power-sharing arrangement between the Tamil elites and the Colombo government.

The USP supports this political project of the Tamil bourgeoisie, declaring that the only “sustainable way to resolve the Tamil people’s national question” is through the “acceptance of the right to self-determination.” This “right,” far from upholding the democratic rights of the Tamil masses, involves giving greater powers to the Tamil elites to pursue their exploitation of working people.

For the LTTE, the “right to self-determination” meant the formation of a separate capitalist state in the North and East of the island with the backing of the major and regional powers, particularly India. The TNA, which functioned as

the LTTE's parliamentary mouthpiece, has shifted its stance following the LTTE's defeat. It now seeks a power-sharing deal with the Colombo government involving the devolution of limited powers to the northern provincial council.

The USP criticises the TNA's view that the "Tamil national question can be solved with the help of the Indian bourgeoisie." But there is no doubt that the USP would quickly fall into line with any "political solution" reached by the TNA with US and Indian backing, and would hail it as another "victory for the democratic forces." In 2002, the USP supported the peace agreement struck between the UNP government and the LTTE that was aimed at implementing further pro-market restructuring and enabling the joint exploitation of the working class by the Sinhala and Tamil elites.

The USP is deeply hostile to the program of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), which insists that the democratic rights of working people—whether Sinhala, Tamil or Muslim—can only be defended as part of a unified struggle for a workers' and peasants' government to implement socialist policies. The SEP fights for a socialist republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam, as part of the struggle for socialism in South Asia and around the world.

The USP attempts to cover up its political support for bourgeois political formations such as the UNP and the TNA, by declaring at the end of its election statement that it fights for a socialist program "in opposition to the capitalist forces," including the UNP. For the USP, the fight for socialism is always in the future. In reality, it is working hand in glove with "the capitalist forces."

The USP plays the reactionary role of hoodwinking workers into believing the UNP stands for their democratic rights. In a statement just months ago, the USP declared its complete commitment to the UNP: "In order to defeat the dictatorial madness [of the government] we engaged in united struggles [with the UNP] in the streets in a fighting front and various agitations. In future also, we will not hesitate to unite [with the UNP]."

The USP falsely claims that Marxism justifies this class collaborationist politics. Its statement declares: "In a period like this when the working class movement has failed to carry out its historical role we have to fight lining up with even the capitalist forces at a tactical level to build the mass struggle."

Genuine Marxists have always insisted on the political independence of the working class from all factions of the bourgeoisie and opposed the class collaboration advocated by social democratic and Stalinist parties, as well as the various opportunist elements that broke with the international Trotskyist movement.

The USP, and the NSSP from which it split, both have

their origins in the tendencies led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel that broke from Trotskyism in 1953. The Pabloites bear responsibility for the betrayal of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) when it entered the bourgeois government of Sirima Bandaranaike in 1964.

USP leader Jayasuriya and NSSP leader Wickramabahu Karunaratne remained in the LSSP after its betrayal and through its participation in a second coalition government from 1970 to 1977. They only left and formed the NSSP after the LSSP was flung out of office amid deep hostility in the working class over its wretched betrayals.

Even then, the NSSP and USP supported Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), while denouncing the UNP as right-wing and "dictatorial." The USP and NSSP fell into line with the UNP as anger in the working class rose against the attacks on living standards by the 1994–2005 SLFP government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga and its failure to end the war.

By supporting the UNP, the USP and NSSP are paving the way for an even greater onslaught on democratic rights and living standards of working people. In lining up with the manoeuvres of US imperialism in Sri Lanka, they are effectively pledging their support for the US wars of aggression in the Middle East and its military build-up throughout the Indo-Pacific region for conflict with China.

The SEP is the only party standing in the provincial elections in opposition to imperialist war, austerity and the drive to dictatorial forms of rule. We are engaged in an uncompromising struggle to unite and mobilise workers and youth, independently of the ruling class and its parties, as part of the international fight to put an end to capitalism, which is the root cause of war and the oppression of the working class.



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