

Sri Lankan pseudo-lefts justify front with right-wing UNP

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The pseudo-left United Socialist Party (USP) in Sri Lanka has issued a perspective document, entitled “Challenges facing Sri Lankan working class—2014,” which seeks to subordinate the working class to the right-wing, pro-US United National Party (UNP), in the name of opposing the repression of President Mahinda Rajapakse’s government.

In February, the USP published a brief statement on the Southern and Western provincial council election, declaring that its prime objective in the campaign was to build a “united left force” to fight for socialism. The USP is contesting the provincial election together with the pseudo-left Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP).

The USP’s call for a “united left front” has nothing to do with socialism. As with all its previous “fronts,” it is seeking to block an independent political movement of the working class. In this case, both the USP and NSSP are in a de facto alliance with the UNP, which is a notorious big business party, with a long history of attacks on the living standards and democratic rights of the working class.

The USP perspective declared: “In this environment of governmental repression, we have had to engage in united agitation, even at times with capitalist parties against the repressive measures of the Rajapakse regime. With even the capitalist UNP, imperialism’s lackey, we have had to appear on the same stage and participate in street agitations against the dictatorial regime’s repression and oppression”.

In order to defend its alliance with “imperialism’s lackey,” the USP falsifies history and blames the working class for the defeats inflicted by the betrayals of its leaderships. After declaring that the “organised working-class movement” alone can defeat the Rajapakse government, the perspective document declares: “Yet, the working class has not yet been able to overcome the defeat of the 1980 general strike and the wholesale destruction caused it by the old left movement’s leadership’s” 1964 betrayal in entering a bourgeois coalition government.

The USP refers to 1964 and 1980 not to clarify the historical record for the working class, but to cover it up and justify an alliance with the UNP. Nowhere in the entire

document do these political charlatans mention the fact that it was a UNP government that crushed the general strike movement. Nor do they examine how the “old left leadership”—the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and Stalinist Communist Party—as well as the NSSP, of which the USP was part, paved the way for this terrible defeat.

USP leader Siritunga Jayasuriya undoubtedly hopes that workers and youth either do not know about his party’s wretched history or have forgotten. The USP and NSSP leaders—Jayasuriya and Wickramabahu Karunaratne—were members of the LSSP in 1964 when it betrayed the principles of socialist internationalism and joined the government led by Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP)—the party that Rajapakse now leads.

Jayasuriya and Karunaratne remained in the LSSP throughout the first coalition government, which collapsed in 1964, and when the party took part in a second coalition government. They bear political responsibility for all the anti-working class policies of the SLFP-LSSP-CP coalition, including the brutal suppression of a rural uprising in 1971, the imposition of a communal constitution, policies discriminating against Tamils and attacks on living standards.

Jayasuriya and Karunaratne only quit the LSSP to form the NSSP after its devastating electoral defeat in 1977, amid widespread hostility in the working class. As its name implied, the NSSP was simply the LSSP with a new face.

The NSSP played a critical role in betraying the 1980 general strike of public sector workers in response to the devastating social impact of the UNP government’s “open market” economic policies. President J. R. Jayewardene used draconian emergency laws to sack around 100,000 workers in order to inflict a crushing blow against working class opposition to the International Monetary Fund’s dictates.

The forerunner of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL) fought to mobilise workers politically against the government’s assault, on the basis of socialist policies and a workers’ and peasants’

government, as part of its internationalist perspective.

Karunaratne and Jayasuriya bitterly opposed the RCL. They declared that there should be “no politics” in the strike movement and falsely claimed that the government could be pressured to give in to workers’ demands. The slogan of “no politics” lined up with the SLFP, LSSP and CP trade unions, which opposed any political struggle against the UNP government.

Now the politics of class collaboration and coalitionism of the NSSP and its split-off, the USP, have turned full circle. During the 1980s, the NSSP justified its support for the SLFP by denouncing the “right-wing UNP.” Now the NSSP and USP denounce Rajapakse and the SLFP, to defend their alliance with the UNP. In both cases, the purpose is to subordinate the working class to one or another faction of the bourgeoisie.

The USP denounces the “tiny sectarian lefts” for “screaming from the side-lines” in criticising its reactionary alliance with the UNP. No one is named, but the SEP is the only party that has consistently exposed the various fronts that the NSSP and USP have formed with the UNP over the past five years—the Platform for Freedom, the Opposition Protest and the Power of Unity.

The NSSP and USP are openly promoting a bourgeois government led by the UNP. To cite one example: the UNP organised a picket against the army’s firing on protesting Weliweriya villagers that killed three youth last August. The villagers demanded the closure of a factory, which they accused of polluting ground water in the area.

Speaking at the picket, Jayasuriya declared: “All of us—political parties, trade unions, mass organisations, media, Buddhist prelates—have come here to give notice to the government to leave. We must go forward to bring a people’s government, a democratic rule.”

The USP and NSSP portray the UNP as a defender of democracy and the living standards of working people. They are deliberately covering up the bloody record of the UNP, which started the island’s communal war in 1983 and backed it to the end. During the late 1980s, a UNP government presided over the massacre of more than 60,000 rural youth by military-backed death squads and is responsible for countless other anti-democratic acts.

In the north and east of the island, the USP backs the bourgeois Tamil National Alliance (TNA), which represents the interests of the Tamil elites. By aligning with the UNP and TNA, the USP and NSSP have displayed their pro-imperialist orientation. All these parties back the US resolutions in the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) calling on the Rajapakse government to address human rights violations during the war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The US is cynically exploiting the issue of “human rights” to pressure the Rajapakse government to abandon its close relations with China. Washington is aggressively moving to isolate Beijing diplomatically and militarily as part of its war preparations against China.

In its political machinations against the working class, the USP is also pushing for a “left” regroupment to build a “strong left movement.” It has particularly praised the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), formed by a breakaway faction of the Sinhala chauvinist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP).

The FSP has initiated discussions with the USP, NSSP, some trade unions and NGOs to “unite the left.” The FSP has praised SYRIZA in Greece—the “coalition of lefts” that has accepted the framework of the European Union and blocked workers’ opposition to successive Greek governments that implemented the bankers’ austerity measures. Like SYRIZA, the USP’s regrouping manoeuvres are aimed at suppressing any independent struggle by the working class. Only the SEP has rejected the FSP’s invitation and explained the reactionary role of such a regroupment.

The SEP’s provincial election manifesto warns that pseudo lefts have joined the ruling class parties and the media to blind workers to the dangers they confront in Sri Lanka and internationally. We explain that Sri Lanka is being drawn into the maelstrom of geopolitical tensions that is plunging the world toward war as the US exploits its military might to reassert its global hegemony.

On the basis of a socialist and internationalist program, the SEP is fighting to mobilise the working class against war, social counterrevolution and attacks on democratic rights. We urge workers and youth to join the SEP and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, to build the revolutionary leadership needed for the struggles ahead. We call for a vote for the SEP in this provincial election to show support for this revolutionary perspective.



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