

Sri Lanka: N SSP leader campaigns for right-wing, pro-US presidential candidate

Pani Wijesiriwardena—SEP presidential candidate
27 December 2014

In the campaign for the January 8 presidential election in Sri Lanka, all of the fake left organisations have, in one way or another, lined up with Maithripala Sirisena, a bourgeois politician who was until recently health minister in the current government of President Mahinda Rajapakse. Sirisena broke ranks and is now the “common candidate” backed by virtually all opposition parties including the right-wing United National Party (UNP).

The pseudo-left Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) is just the most naked in its support for Sirisena. Its leader Wickremabahu Karunaratne is a fervent campaigner for Sirisena, appearing on his platform and painting the opposition candidate in bright liberal-democratic colours as the only alternative to the Rajapakse “dictatorship.”

Until the last week of November, Karunaratne had been campaigning to make UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe, the common opposition candidate. However, when Sirisena defected on November 21 and announced his candidacy with Wickremesinghe’s backing, the NSSP leader quickly changed his tune.

At a news conference held on November 26, Karunaratne lamented: “We have been campaigning for Ranil’s candidacy since 2005. However, they have chosen Sirisena. We will give him ‘critical’ support.” There is nothing “critical” about the NSSP’s support. The party is fielding its own presidential candidate, but as Karunaratne explained, only to “campaign for the common opposition candidate [Sirisena].”

Any doubts that Karunaratne might have had about Sirisena were immediately cleared up. After all, his friend Wickremesinghe, together with former President Chandrika Kumaratunga from Rajapakse’s Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), were the chief architects of the plot to engineer Sirisena’s defection.

More fundamentally, the NSSP have been ardent supporters of the bogus US “human rights” campaign that has been directed against Rajapakse over war crimes carried out by the military during its offensives against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The US, which backed the war against the LTTE, is now exploiting the Sri Lankan army’s atrocities to pressure Rajapakse to distance himself from China.

Wickremesinghe and Kumaratunga engineered Sirisena’s

candidacy to oust Rajapakse at the election with Washington’s knowledge and approval. Since her presidency ended, Kumaratunga has developed close relations, as an advisor of the Clinton Global Initiatives, with former US President Bill Clinton and his wife Hillary Clinton. As secretary of state under Obama, Hillary Clinton aggressively implemented the “pivot to Asia” aimed at undermining and militarily encircling China.

The NSSP’s Karunaratne shamelessly functions as the cheerleader for Sirisena and criticises other fake-lefts for not being as open in their support. He appears on election platforms not only with Sirisena, Wickremesinghe and Kumaratunga but with former army commander Sarath Fonseka and representatives of the Sinhala-Buddhist extremist Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), which was until recently part of the ruling coalition.

When contacted by the WSWs, the NSSP’s party office boasted that Karunaratne had addressed every major election meeting for Sirisena held so far across the country, including in Matara, Kandy, Kurunegala and Panadura. The official explained that the NSSP was also organising its own independent meetings in some place—to boost the campaign for Sirisena.

Speaking at a joint election meeting in Matara on December 4, Karunaratne portrayed Sirisena as a political giant who had fought against the multinational companies (MNCs). “It is a deadly venture to fight multinational companies while serving as a cabinet minister under a leader [Rajapakse] who is traitor to the country,” he declared.

What a sham! Sirisena’s “fight” against MNCs was to legislate to put a cancer warning picture on the cigarette packets which was opposed by the tobacco companies. Karunaratne is completely silent on Sirisena’s role as SLFP general secretary and a senior member of Rajapakse’s cabinet in fully supporting the government’s policies attacking the democratic rights and living conditions of workers and poor and conducting the brutal communal war against the LTTE.

In branding Rajapakse as a “traitor,” Karunaratne is joining hands with the right-wing chauvinist forces. At the Matara meeting, he made a point of thanking JHU chairman Athureliye Rathanasara for also speaking of Sirisena’s “fight” against the multinationals. Rathanasara, a Buddhist monk, is notorious for

his Sinhala-Buddhist extremism. Embracing his reactionary communal outlook, the NSSP leader exhorted all patriotic people to “vote for Maithree [Sirisena].”

Karunaratne’s demagoguery over Sirisena’s “fight” against the multinationals is a cynical ruse to disguise the real agenda of the opposition candidate and his backers. If Sirisena is elected, he will shift foreign policy away from Beijing towards Washington, in the process enmeshing Sri Lanka even more closely in the US drive to war. He will also continue and deepen Rajapakse’s austerity program, dictated by the IMF, and will be just as ruthless in suppressing the opposition of working people.

At the same time, Karunaratne justifies his support for Washington’s man by falsely portraying the US as the global champion for democracy, including in Sri Lanka. In his column for *Ceylon Today* on December 5, he declared that Rajapakse must be “a problem for the global capitalism” because while he has followed the IMF line, he has failed to keep his human rights promises. “In the recent past they [imperialists] practiced the ‘democratic’ way of supporting mass agitations for good governance and also demanding the blood of rulers,” he wrote.

This is nothing but a filthy apology for all the interventions and provocations of the US and its allies carried out in the name of “human rights” and “good governance.” These include the ouster and brutal murder of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, the US-backed regime-operation against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and the fascist-led coup in February that toppled the elected Ukrainian president—all of which have been supported by the NSSP and its pseudo-left co-thinkers around the world.

Karunaratne continued by saying that “his [Rajapakse’s] cordial relationship with China is no compensation for the weakening of [Sri Lanka’s] links with the West and India.” He is speaking for sections of the Sri Lankan ruling elite, including Wickremesinghe and Kumaratunga, who have decided that Rajapakse’s attempts to balance between Beijing and Washington are no longer viable. As geo-political tensions accelerate, they believe that Sri Lanka has no alternative but to unconditionally commit to the US camp, even if that means being drawn into war.

The NSSP tries to hide the reactionary nature of Sirisena’s campaign by pointing to the autocratic rule of Rajapakse and his cabal. Rajapakse is certainly responsible for gross abuses of democratic rights, war crimes and the extension of police state measures following the end of the war against the LTTE. But those promoted by the NSSP also have a long anti-democratic record—particularly the UNP which started the war against the LTTE with an island-wide anti-Tamil pogrom, and was responsible in the late 1980s for the military-backed death squads that murdered 60,000 rural youth in the south of the island.

Against the “fascist-styled dictatorial leader Mahinda Rajapakse,” Karunaratne declared that there would be “an anti-

MNC and pro-environment, pro-worker, peasant and fishers movement where the candidate [Sirisena] appeals to the people to prepare for an all-island mass struggle if the dictator violates the democratic election process.”

Not only is this an attempt to exploit the widespread discontent and opposition to Rajapakse but Karunaratne is foreshadowing a rebellion, not of working people, but layers of the middle class—NGO activists, trade union bureaucrats, lawyers, academics and assorted liberals—should Sirisena lose the election. It is the type of “colour revolution” that has been engineered time and again, with US backing, particularly in the former Soviet republics to effect regime-change.

There is a profound political gulf between the SEP and all of the fake left organisations such as the NSSP that are lining up with imperialism and its preparations for war. The NSSP is the official Sri Lankan section of the Pabloite international—that is, it is aligned with those sections of the Fourth International that broke with Trotskyism in 1953. The entry of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) into the bourgeois government of Sirima Bandaranaike in 1964 demonstrated conclusively the class character of Pabloism. Karunaratne remained in the LSSP until the late 1970s and the NSSP remains completely mired in the politics of class collaborationism.

The Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), the predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), was established in 1968 as the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, on the basis of the assimilation of the lessons of the LSSP’s 1964 betrayal and the ICFI’s struggle against Pabloism. It is the only party in this election that represents the interests of workers. The SEP is seeking to build an international anti-war movement of the working class together with our sister parties of the ICFI against the growing danger of world war.

We insist that workers can only defend their interests through a struggle for their political independence from all factions of the capitalist class—in this election against both Rajapakse and Sirisena and all their hangers-on. The SEP fights for a workers’ and peasants’ government as part of struggle for socialism in South Asia and internationally as the only solution for the social crisis facing workers and poor masses. We urge workers, youth and intellectuals to read our election statement and to actively support our campaign.



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