

Sri Lankan pseudo-left leader joins top government advisory body

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Wickremabahu Karunaratne, leader of the pseudo-left Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), was appointed last month to the National Executive Council (NEC)—a multi-party body established by Sri Lanka’s new pro-US government to oversee the implementation of its so-called 100-day program.

The NSSP leader’s participation marks a new stage in the evolution of pseudo-left organisations into the direct agencies of the bourgeoisie and imperialism. He has been installed in the NEC to perform the same political function as he did throughout the January 8 presidential election campaign—to falsely present newly-elected President Maithripala Sirisena as a champion of democracy who will alleviate the social crisis facing working people.

Sirisena was, until the election was announced, a senior minister in the previous government of President Mahinda Rajapakse and, as such, bore responsibility for all of its attacks on the social conditions and democratic rights of the working class. His sudden defection to the opposition was engineered by former President Chandrika Kumaratunga with the support of Washington which was deeply hostile to Rajapakse’s ties with China.

Karunaratne joined the 13-member NEC, which is headed by Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, on January 22. Other members include Kumaratunga, former army commander Sarath Fonseka and Champika Ranawaka from the Sinhala extremist Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU). The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and Tamil National Alliance (TNA), are also represented even though, like the NSSP, these parties are not formally part of the government.

The NEC is not an elected body and acts above the cabinet, making recommendations to it. It has been formed to solicit support from other parties to give an appearance of “national unity” behind the new right-wing regime. It has been tasked with implementing Sirisena’s “100-day program” which is aimed at paving the way for parliamentary elections possibly as early as May. This includes constitutional changes to reduce presidential powers, an investigation into the corruption of the previous

government of President Mahinda Rajapakse, and cosmetic social measures to increase public sector wages, pensions and welfare benefits.

These short-term measures are aimed at capitalising on the seething discontent among workers and the poor against Rajapakse’s attacks on living standards and democratic rights and consolidating a parliamentary majority for the new government. The current ruling coalition, including Wickremesinghe’s United National Party (UNP), Fonseka’s Democratic Party and the JHU, are in the minority.

However, the NEC’s main function is to give its stamp of approval to the Sirisena government’s rapid shift in foreign policy away from China and towards the US. US Assistant Secretary of State Nisha Biswal has already visited Colombo to further the Obama administration’s aims of integrating Sri Lanka into its “pivot to Asia” and preparations for war against China.

The Sri Lankan government’s official web site last week boasted: “The revival of the cordial relationship between the two countries [US and Sri Lanka] that was fast deteriorating during the previous regime is a result of the fruitful discussions the Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, as the opposition leader, had with the US State Department officials including [Nisha] Biswal and former Ambassador to Colombo Michelle Sison.”

Karunaratne has been brought onto the NEC to function as apologist-in-chief for the government’s pro-imperialist policies and to cover up the preparations being made for a deepening of Rajapakse government’s assault on the working class and poor. The NSSP leader has performed this function for years for Wickremesinghe, presenting this right-wing bourgeois politician as democratic and progressive. His UNP has a long record anti-working class measures, repression and was responsible for starting the island’s protracted communal war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Speaking at a press conference to announce his NEC appointment, Karunaratne declared that Sirisena’s campaign had led to the emergence of “a patriotic national movement

with the intervention of working people and those who have interests in the national question and those forces who wanted freedom and democracy.”

The NSSP leader went on to claim that the NEC “was established to represent these forces” and would be “considering how to take decisions to implement this democratic revolution.” In another statement, Karunaratne proclaimed that Sirisena’s victory was “a people’s uprising” that had “enabled the smashing up of every fascist style action of Mahinda Rajapakse.”

Sirisena did not come to power as the result of a “democratic revolution” or “people’s uprising” but through a carefully prepared plot orchestrated behind the backs of working people. The chief role in steering the disaffection and hostility against Rajapakse into the arms of Sirisena and his collaborators was played various liberals, academic groups, NGOs and above all the fake lefts—the NSSP, United Socialist Party, Frontline Socialist Party.

This is the politically criminal modus operandi of the pseudo-left organisations internationally as they have lined up with imperialism. In Ukraine, the fake lefts all rallied behind a so-called “people’s uprising” led by fascists and backed by the US and Germany to oust the elected President Victor Yanukovich and provoke a confrontation with Russia. This reckless imperialist intervention has fuelled a devastating civil war and threatens a nuclear war with Russia.

In Libya and Syria, pseudo-left groups including in Sri Lanka hailed the US-backed regime-change operations against Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and Syrian President Bashar al Assad as revolutionary uprisings. These organisations bear political responsibility for the devastation that has been wrought on the Syrian and Libyan peoples.

Karunaratna is shameless in his support for the new government. He was elated that it had sacked Chief Justice Mohan Peiris last month and reinstalled his predecessor Shirani Bandaranayake. Rajapakse had impeached Bandaranayake on trumped up charges of corruption and her removal became a cause celebre among layers of lawyers and liberals who have thrown their support behind Sirisena. However, none of these champions of democracy has expressed the slightest concern that Peiris was sacked using the same autocratic presidential powers that they condemned Rajapakse for using.

While backing the bourgeois Sirisena government, Karunaratne has launched a thinly-veiled attack on the Socialist Equality Party (SEP). “Those who are engrossed in ultra-left activities have been dumped in the rubbish heap by this groundswell,” he declared recently. They were able to collect only a few votes “thus demonstrating the ineffectiveness of their activities within the mass struggle.”

In fact, the SEP was the only party in the election campaign that fought to mobilise the working class independently of all factions of the bourgeoisie—both Rajapakse and Sirisena camps—on the basis of an internationalist and socialist perspective. What Karunaratna regards as his great triumphs is his integration into the structures of the new bourgeois government and his success in hoodwinking working people into voting for it as a progressive step forward. The NSSP has a long history going back to the late 1970s of functioning as apologists for bourgeois parties and governments with disastrous consequences for the working class.

The SEP alone exposed Rajapakse’s police state methods of rule and warned that a Sirisena government would inevitably use similar measures to impose its pro-market agenda of austerity on working people. The SEP candidate also explained that Sri Lanka was now being drawn directly into the maelstrom of geo-political rivalry that was leading to a new world war. We insisted that the only means for halting the drive to war and attacks on living standards was through the unification of the working class internationally to abolish the bankrupt capitalist system.

The coming to power of Syriza in Greece demonstrates that, under conditions of a worsening breakdown of capitalism, new political mechanisms are required by the ruling classes to block an independent movement of the working class and impose the agenda of war and austerity. The entry of Karunaratna into the NEC demonstrates that this is an international phenomenon. Workers and youth should draw the necessary political conclusions and join the SEP and build it as the necessary revolutionary leadership for the struggles ahead.



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