

NSSP leader backs US cover-up of Sri Lankan war crimes

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Wickremabahu Karunaratne, the leader of the pseudo-left Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), is in the forefront of justifying the collusion of the United States with the Sri Lankan ruling elites in covering up their war crimes during the 26-year communal war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). In doing so, the NSSP leader has again demonstrated that he is firmly in the imperialist camp.

Washington and Colombo worked together to pass a resolution at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) session on October 1 on human right abuses in Sri Lanka. The US supported the convening of a “domestic inquiry” with “international help” that will enable President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe to sweep the many atrocities under the carpet.

A UN experts committee estimated that at least 40,000 Tamil civilians were killed by the Sri Lankan military during the final months of the war in 2009. The army deliberately targeted hospitals, aid centres and its own self-declared no-fire zones.

Previously the US called for an international investigation as a means of pressuring former President Mahinda Rajapakse to end his close ties with China. However in January, Washington engineered a regime-change operation via a presidential election that ousted Rajapakse and installed Sirisena and laid the basis for a pro-US United National Party (UNP)-led government to come to office in the August general election.

Washington’s shift involves no contradiction whatsoever. In both cases, the US used the phony banner of “human rights” to advance its geo-political interests.

In a column published in the state-owned *Daily News* on October 3, NSSP leader Karunaratne absurdly hailed the US change as proof that Washington was responding to popular sentiment in Sri Lanka. “Global powers were enthusiastic for an international war crimes investigation,” he wrote. “However, now together with the Lankan Government, they favour a purely domestic process. Clearly the mass uprising

in Lanka has opened the eyes of global powers.”

This stands reality on its head. What Karunaratne calls a “mass uprising” or a “democratic revolution” is the January presidential election that the US orchestrated. The Obama administration did so with the assistance of the NSSP, which helped corral public hostility to Rajapakse behind Sirisena—Washington’s chosen candidate. As for “human rights,” the US firstly exploited the issue to put pressure on Rajapakse then, having installed its chosen candidate, was quite content to drop the matter, leaving it up to the new government.

One can trace how the NSSP’s positions abjectly follow in the footsteps of Washington, at every point justifying the US actions.

* In March 2013, as it was intensifying the pressure on Rajapakse, the US sponsored a resolution at UNHRC sessions calling on Colombo to implement the proposals made by its Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC). Rajapakse appointed the LLRC to deflect mounting international criticism of his government’s human rights record and whitewash its crimes. He simply ignored the commission’s limited recommendations.

Writing in the *Daily Mirror* at the time, Karunaratne supported the US resolution, warning that any failure to implement the LLRC proposals could lead to international sanctions. At the same time, he praised UNP leader Wickremesinghe as a defender of democracy and supported the declaration of the UNP-led Vipakshaye Virodhaya (VV), or protest of opposition, that it was ready to help the government to implement the LLRC recommendations.

* In 2014, the US toughened its stand against Rajapakse and sponsored another UNHRC resolution which called for an international investigation. Karunaratne enthusiastically supported Washington’s stance, even saying that he would fly to Geneva to add his voice to the call for an international inquiry.

The resolution passed but, not wanting to alienate the Rajapakse government, India abstained. Karunaratne was furious, declaring in *Ceylon Today*: “The step taken by the

Indian government has exposed the close relationship between the Rajapakse regime and the present Indian rulers. In effect, Mahinda behaves like a subordinate ruler of India.”

Now that a pro-US government has been installed in office, the NSSP leader is enthusing that Washington is backing a “political solution” to the island’s ethnic divisions. This term is used in Colombo to refer to a power-sharing arrangement between the country’s Sinhala and Tamil elites. It has nothing to do with meeting the democratic aspirations of the Tamil minority, or the working class—Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim.

India, Washington’s strategic partner, has long advocated a “political solution” as the means of ending communal conflict that has been a destabilising factor in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The various bourgeois Tamil organisations, such as the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and UK-based Global Tamil Forum, with which the NSSP has close ties, also back a “political solution” as the means of advancing the interests of the Tamil elites.

In this context, NSSP leader Karunaratne now claims that the US has fallen into line—with a policy that it has backed all along! “[The global powers] had to admit that though they supported [the] Mahinda [Rajapakse] regime there wasn’t the slightest prospect of a political solution, whereas there is now at least a reasonable prospect for it.”

The US and its allies have not backed Rajapakse since 2009, when the defeat of the LTTE was imminent, and their thoughts turned to the political situation in Colombo after the war. Having marginalised China through Rajapakse’s removal, Washington is now encouraging Sirisena and Wickremesinghe to reach a deal with the Tamil bourgeoisie in order to stabilise the political situation.

The ruling UNP is already seeking to provide some sort of accommodation to the TNA, as has done in the past. In 1987, the UNP government enacted the 13th amendment to the constitution as part of the Indo-Lanka Accord to disarm and suppress the LTTE. The 13th amendment established a provincial council system that was supposed to give local autonomy to the Tamil minority but was never implemented in the war zones of the North and East.

Now some form of devolution is back on the agenda as a means of enlisting the support of the TNA, which has already given its indirect backing to the government. The TNA joined the National Executive Council established by Wickremesinghe and Sirisena after January’s election. Sirisena also helped TNA leader R. Sambandan to assume the post of parliamentary opposition leader.

The chief purpose of the moves toward a “political solution” is to consolidate the Sri Lankan ruling elites in the face of a mounting social and economic crisis. The political

establishment is acutely aware that implementing the austerity demands of the International Monetary Fund will provoke widespread opposition and resistance by working people. The island’s two longstanding bourgeois parties—the UNP and Sri Lanka Freedom Party—have formed a national unity government to take on the working class.

Once again, the NSSP voices the deepest needs of imperialism, as well as the island’s ruling classes, for a bloc against workers, young people and the rural poor. The chief obstacle to a “political solution” is the communal politics exploited by establishment politicians for decades to divide the working class and shore up their rule.

NSSP leader Karunaratne calls for a campaign “outside the government [of] trade unions, civil organisations and social democratic political groups... to press the government forward. The need of the hour is the backing of the mass organisations... that will lead to a unity with power sharing.”

The working class should reject this political trap which aims at subordinating it to the political establishment as the government steps up the onslaught on living standards. Workers need to forge their own unity around common class interests and mobilise independently of all factions of the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie in the fight for a workers’ and peasants’ government to implement socialist policies.

That is the perspective for which the Socialist Equality Party fights—a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam as part of a United Socialist States of South Asia—and to which the NSSP is fundamentally opposed.



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