

# Sri Lanka: Pseudo-left NSSP celebrates alliances with capitalist parties

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The Sri Lankan pseudo-left Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) used a meeting to mark 39 years since its founding to celebrate its opportunist history. Its leader Wickremabahu Karunaratne declared that his party would continue to back the present pro-US government so as to “defend democracy” and hailed the NSSP’s long record of similar alliances with bourgeois parties.

The NSSP was formed in 1978 by Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) leaders who had stayed in the party after it entered a coalition government with the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) in 1964 and again in 1970, with disastrous consequences for the working class. Karunaratne split from the LSSP after its sweeping electoral defeat in 1977 but never broke with its treacherous program of class collaboration—that is, the subordination of workers and youth to one or other faction of the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie.

Karunaratne declared at the anniversary meeting: “We are going forward after a democratic revolution,” adding that the NSSP wanted to “isolate reactionary forces and gain victories for progressive forces” through its “united front with the democratic movement.”

The NSSP leader’s “democratic revolution” is the ousting of former President Mahinda Rajapakse and his replacement by Maithripala Sirisena in the January 2015 election. Far from being “democratic” or “a revolution,” Rajapakse’s ouster was a regime-change operation orchestrated behind the scenes by Washington with the assistance of former President Chandrika Kumaratunga and United National Party (UNP) leader Ranil Wickremesinghe.

The NSSP, along with other pseudo-left groups, trade unions, non-government organisations and academics, acted as cheerleaders in denouncing Rajapakse’s anti-democratic regime and covering up the equally anti-democratic record of Sirisena and the UNP.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) was the only party that exposed the bogus character of the NSSP’s “democratic” demagoguery and fought for the political independence of the working class, warning that both Rajapakse and Sirisena would deepen the assault on living conditions. The SEP pointed out that Washington was not backing Sirisena out of concern for democratic rights but because it was hostile to Rajapakse’s ties with Beijing and was seeking to integrate Sri Lanka into its aggressive preparations for war against China.

Two years on, the fake-lefts have intensified their campaign to defend the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government as it implements the austerity demands of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and faces growing opposition among workers, students and the poor. Karunaratne opposes these struggles, declaring that the workers and poor involved are helping Rajapakse to build “fascist forces.” He insists that the priority must be to defend the government.

In reality, by subordinating the working class to the capitalist

government of Sirisena and Wickremesinghe, the NSSP is blocking the development of an independent political movement of workers on the basis of a socialist perspective. In doing so, the fake lefts, including the NSSP, United Socialist Party (USP) and Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), are directly assisting Rajapakse, who is now seeking to exploit the growing social discontent by whipping up Sinhala chauvinism in order to return to power.

Karunaratne attempts to disguise his support for the Colombo government as a “united front with the democratic movement” and declares that “this is the example given by Lenin and Trotsky.” The Marxist tactic of the “united front” has nothing in common with the NSSP’s de facto political alliance with Sirisena and Wickremesinghe.

Lenin and Trotsky always insisted the political independence of the party and the working class was paramount in any united front. The purpose of a united front was to take concrete actions to defend the working class and its organisations.

There should be no mixing of slogans and programs, and the party had to have the right and responsibility to trenchantly criticise its temporary partners.

The NSSP does the exact opposite. It shamelessly promoted Sirisena and Wickremesinghe in the 2015 presidential and general elections and has continued to do so in the face of growing anger in the working class. As a result, Karunaratne was included in the government’s top advisory body and was given a regular column in the state-owned press to denounce critics and hail the “democratic revolution.”

At the anniversary meeting, Karunaratne boasted that the NSSP had diligently followed the “united front program” and, as a result, had made “many gains” in overcoming the problems facing the masses. In fact, the history of the NSSP’s “united fronts” with the SLFP and the UNP is a record of one disaster after another for the working class.

Emerging from the LSSP in 1978, the NSSP subordinated workers to the SLFP and denounced the new UNP government of President J.R. Jayawardene for its anti-democratic actions and vicious anti-Tamil provocations that precipitated the country’s communal war in 1983. As the war with the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) plunged the country into crisis, Jayawardene appealed to the opposition parties for a “round table conference.”

Despite the Jayawardene government’s harassment of the NSSP, Karunaratne told last month’s meeting that he “accepted his [Jayawardene] invitation without any hesitation, when he called us for discussions in 1985, to find a democratic solution to the ethnic problem.” The NSSP played a critical role in promoting this “democratic” charade and allowing Jayawardene time to prepare a bloody crackdown against growing social unrest among rural Sinhala youth.

While N SSP was painting the government in bright democratic colours, Jayewardene and Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi signed the Indo-Lanka Accord in July 1987 to send Indian “peace-keeping” troops to disarm the LTTE and suppress the Tamil people.

While the Indian military was suppressing the Tamil population to the North and East of the island, the government was able to unleash the Sri Lankan security forces against the working class and its organisations. In 1987–88, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) operated in tandem with the military, murdering workers, union leaders and political opponents who opposed its communal campaign against the Accord.

The Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), the SEP’s forerunner, called for a genuine united front of workers’ parties and organisations against the murderous attacks of the military and JVP gunmen. Significantly, the N SSP rejected the call and insisted that the RCL join its so-called United Socialist Alliance (USA), which included the Sri Lanka Mahajana Party (SLMP) of Chandrika Kumaratunga.

The RCL rejected the proposal, pointing out that the USA was not only a political bloc with the bourgeois SLMP but was working in cahoots with the very state forces that were also terrorising the working class. Karunaratne bragged about erecting “camps to fight the [JVP] enemy.” The USA formed a group called “People’s Revolutionary Red Army (PRRA)” that received arms from the government and collaborated with the state forces.

After working together with the JVP to suppress the working class, the UNP government turned on the JVP and launched a ruthless campaign of state terror, not only murdering JVP leaders and members, but slaughtering around 60,000 rural youth. Having promoted the UNP as “democratic” and worked alongside the military, the N SSP also bears responsibility for this massacre.

As opposition grew to the UNP’s autocratic government, the N SSP switched to backing Kumaratunga, whose SLMP had rejoined the SLFP’s ranks. At the anniversary meeting, Karunaratne recalled joining Rajapakse, an up-and-coming SLFP leader, to organise a “human rights” march in 1990 to the “sacred god city” of Kataragama, giving his career a much-needed boost.

In the 1994 elections, the N SSP condemned the UNP’s dictatorial methods and backed the election of the SLFP-led Peoples’ Alliance and its presidential candidate Kumaratunga. Opposition to Kumaratunga grew as she broke her promises of “peace” and “democracy” and intensified the war against the LTTE. The N SSP first turned to the JVP, the organisation that had murdered its leaders in the 1980s, and then to the UNP, which, by the early 2000s, was promoting itself as the party of “peace.”

Rajapakse replaced Kumaratunga as SLFP leader, won the presidency in 2005 and restarted the war against the LTTE in 2006. At the same time, the government launched a vicious campaign of abduction and murder. Hundreds of Tamils, media critics and political opponents were “disappeared” or openly murdered.

Karunaratne and USP leader Siritunga Jayasuriya formed the “Platform for Freedom” with Ranil Wickremesinghe, falsely painting him as a great democrat. As a minister in the UNP governments of the 1980s, Wickremesinghe was responsible for the war and state terror during 1988–89. As prime minister between 2001 and 2004, he led a wholesale attack on the social rights and living conditions of working people.

At last month’s meeting, the N SSP leader declared that he decided to support the UNP leader because “Rajapakse was going towards

fascism” and “after observing the way that Ranil was fighting.” He triumphantly boasted “we won the battle” by bringing to power Sirisena, who had been a senior minister in the “fascist” Rajapakse government until November 2014.

Karunaratne functions as an unscrupulous apologist for the “democratic” Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government as it uses the military, police and courts to suppress struggles of workers and the poor. Last month, the government deployed navy soldiers and police against Hambantota port workers fighting to defend jobs. Karunaratne justified this attack by claiming those workers were recruited by Rajapakse and privatisation of the port was an action to solve the debt problem of the country.

At the same time, Karunaratne has not uttered a word as the government has forged closer political and military ties with Washington as it prepares for war against China. The silence is not accidental. The N SSP and the pseudo-left organisations internationally have increasingly become pro-war and pro-imperialist supporters of US-led interventions and wars—in Libya, Syria and the regime-change operation in Ukraine.

It is time to draw the necessary conclusions from the long and treacherous record of the N SSP and other fake-left organisations. The working class can only defend its living standards and fight the growing danger of war by breaking from all factions of the capitalist class and their apologists such as the N SSP. Successive SLFP and UNP governments are responsible for the island’s protracted 30-year civil war and the deepening assault on the democratic rights and living conditions of the working class and the poor.

Above all, what is required is the building of a revolutionary party based on the struggle for socialist internationalism and the political independence of the working class. We urge workers and youth to study the record of the SEP, which has consistently opposed all the parties of the bourgeoisie and fought for a workers’ and peasants’ government to establish a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam as part of the struggle for socialism throughout the region and internationally.



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