

# NSSP leader contests Sri Lankan elections on United National Party slate

**Vilani Peiris—leader of the SEP slate for Colombo district**  
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Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) leader Wickremabahu Karunaratne is running in the Sri Lankan general elections on the United National Party's slate for Kaluthara district in the Western Province. The election, which has been postponed several times because of the COVID-19 pandemic, is scheduled to be held on August 5.

During its 42-year history, the pseudo-left NSSP has aligned itself with the country's two main bourgeois parties—the UNP and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). Over the past two decades, it has consistently supported the UNP.

The right-wing UNP, which has ruled the country for almost half of the 72 years since Sri Lanka gained formal independence in 1948, has a long record of anti-working class repression. The NSSP's decision to run on the UNP slate is a further expression of the political degeneration of this middle-class formation and other pseudo-left formations internationally.

In a brief email announcing his election candidacy on May 16, Karunaratne declared that he had worked with UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe since 2008 to build a movement “for justice, fair play and democracy.” The “good governance government,” he said, “was a result of that campaign,” adding that his decision to contest this year's election was in order “to continue the democratic measures which were held-up halfway in 2019.”

The “good governance” government is a reference to the administration of former President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, which came to power following a regime-change operation orchestrated by the US in January 2015 to oust Mahinda Rajapakse as president. Washington had no political differences with Rajapakse's anti-democratic regime but was hostile to his orientation towards Beijing.

The bogus “good governance” banner was peddled by the NSSP and other pseudo-left groups, along with various civil society organisations and the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), in order to divert widespread political opposition to Rajapakse into bringing Sirisena to power. A Sirisena-led regime, it was claimed, would defend democracy and improve living conditions.

Karunaratne was a cheerleader for this campaign, painting the US-inspired regime-change as a “democratic revolution.” It was, in fact, a counterrevolutionary operation.

The cash-strapped Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government quickly dispensed with its democratic posturing and implemented its austerity program, fuelling workers' and students' resistance. It responded by unleashing the military and police and used draconian

emergency laws to suppress the mass opposition.

NSSP leader Karunaratne opposed these mass struggles, backed the government repression, and supported Colombo's moves to tie the Sri Lankan military to the US-led preparations for war against China. So much for Karunaratne's “good governance” operation!

While the increasingly discredited government was torn apart by a growing wave of workers strikes and struggles, the NSSP, clung on to the UNP. Together with other “lefts” and the TNA, last year it supported Sajith Premadasa, the UNP's presidential candidate, promoting him as “lesser evil.”

This paved the way for Gotabhaya Rajapakse to portray himself as the only opposition to the UNP and exploit the mass hostility to win the presidential election. After a tussle for leadership, Premadasa and a majority of the UNP broke from the party to form the Samagi Jana Balavegaya (SJB). Wickremesinghe was reluctant to handover the UNP leadership to Premadasa. Karunaratne, a long-time ally of Wickremesinghe remains loyal to the former prime minister.

Karunaratne, whose role in this year's general election is to continue whitewashing the blood-soaked UNP, participates in regular meetings at the party's headquarters.

In a June 10 note about one such meeting, Karunaratne declared: “The UNP from the outset worked on the basis of the unity of nationalities and it cannot be suppressed by the severe racism... Sama Samaja [Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP)] power was built in Sri Lanka because it [LSSP] worked with the UNP against communalism.”

This, he wrote, consisted of a front with the Sri Lanka Mahajana Party ([SLMP] a breakaway faction of SLFP), the NSSP, LSSP and Stalinist Communist Party in the late 1980s with former President J. R. Jayawardene and supported the 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord.

Karunaratne also referred to an alliance with President R. Premadasa's UNP government, which unleashed a ruthless massacre of rural youth in 1988–1990. Premadasa, he declared “was outraged by this [the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna's (JVP) murderous activities] and held an all-party conference, with everybody's agreement unleashed severe repression.”

Karunaratne is lying through his teeth. His attempt to paint the right-wing UNP as a democratic organisation that “worked to build the unity of nationalities” is outrageous.

In the same year that Sri Lanka gained formal independence, the UNP regime abolished the citizenship rights of hundreds of

thousands of Indian-origin estate workers. This reactionary measure was implemented to divide and weaken the powerful working class movement which supported the revolutionary perspective of Trotskyism. This set the stage for a vicious anti-Tamil campaign.

In 1964, the LSSP betrayed the principles of socialist internationalism and joined the bourgeois SLFP government of Sirima Bandaranaike in order to dissipate a mass working-class movement and defend capitalist rule. This betrayal had disastrous consequences for workers in Sri Lanka and internationally. Karunaratne, then a member the LSSP, backed this betrayal.

In the ensuing years, successive UNP and SLFP governments whipped up anti-Tamil racism, giving the Sinhala language and the Buddhist religion priority in the country's constitution. Politically exploiting the LSSP's betrayal, the UNP came to power in 1977. It established an autocratic executive presidency and in 1980 sacked 100,000 striking public sector workers opposing its austerity program. In 1983, the UNP under President Jayawardene, after a series of racist provocations unleashed the almost 30-year war against the separatist Liberation Tamil Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

In 1985, the crisis-ridden Jayawardene regime called a round-table conference, inviting the LSSP, CP and NSSP. This meeting, in which Karunaratne says he participated "without hesitation," paved the way for the 1987 July Indo-Lanka Accord, between New Delhi and Colombo. The accord was to bring the Indian army into the North and East in order to disarm the LTTE, in return granting limited provincial council powers to the Tamil elite.

While the Indian army carried out murderous attacks, killing civilians in the North and the East, the Sri Lankan military was unleashed on the masses in the south of the country. Amid rural unrest, the JVP inflamed a racist anti-Indian campaign attacking and killing political opponents and workers.

The Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), the predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), proposed a united front of the working-class organisations to confront the UNP-JVP attacks. The NSSP leadership rejected this proposal, forming an alliance instead with the SLMP and siding with the UNP government. The JVP attacks were then exploited by the Premadasa government to brutally suppress the rural unrest, killing about 60,000 youth. NSSP leader Karunaratne supported these massacres and worked with the paramilitary outfits.

When the US launched its so-called "war on terror" in September 2001, the UNP, with the support of sections of Sri Lankan bourgeoisie, aligned itself with Washington and approached the LTTE for "peace talks." The US and European powers backed the move and the separatist organisation willingly joined. While the NSSP perfunctorily claimed to oppose the "war on terror," it lined up with the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie and the so-called "peace" operation.

The NSSP leader claims to have worked with the UNP in a "joint action committee" since 2008. This is one of the fronts formed by the UNP with the NSSP and the United Socialist Party (USP), another fake left group, to exploit the crisis of President Mahinda Rajapakse's regime. The UNP established a so-called "platform of freedom" with these groups in early 2009 after the

killing of *Sunday Leader* editor Lasantha Wickrematunga.

Since 2013, the NSSP and other fake left groups began openly supporting the US, hypocritically using human rights violations in Sri Lanka to pressurise the Mahinda Rajapakse administration to distance itself from Beijing. Washington with the support of European powers moved resolutions in the UN Human Rights Council calling for an investigation into war crimes in Sri Lanka.

Karunaratne claimed that the US was supporting the defence of human rights and democracy. The US actions, which were part of its efforts to pressure Rajapakse regime, culminated in the 2015 regime-change operation.

Last year the NSSP participated in the all-party conference called by President Sirisena when an Islamic fundamentalist group with the backing of ISIS launched its Easter Sunday bombing attack in Sri Lanka. The conference unanimously supported imposing emergency laws and deploying military throughout the country.

Significantly, NSSP chief Karunaratne has joined forces with the UNP while it has offered its unreserved support for Rajapakse's military-dominated measures in response to the coronavirus pandemic. On April 27, the UNP and other parliamentary opposition parties sent a letter to Rajapakse calling on him to reconvene the parliament and promising their support.

In an interview to the *Daily Mirror* on May 4, Wickremesinghe declared: "As far as we are concerned, we are willing to help the government because this is not a time to play adversarial politics. So we have to see how the different parties can work together with the government."

While the UNP and other opposition parties have tactical differences, all agree that autocratic methods of rule are necessary. Their common concern is an upsurge of the Sri Lankan and international working class. The right-wing stampede of the NSSP and other pseudo-left formations are driven by the same fears.

The NSSP is a stinking political corpse. Its opportunist politics, which have been disastrous for the working class, have been aimed preventing the working class being won to the socialist and internationalist program advanced by the SEP/RCL. The way forward for workers, youth and the poor is to join and build the SEP, the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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