

Sri Lankan pseudo-left FSP backs imperialist manoeuvring at the UNHRC

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2 October 2022

Nuwan Bopage, a key leader of the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) in Sri Lanka, addressed the ongoing UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) session in Geneva on September 12.

Bopage, representing the FSP-controlled Inter-University Student Federation (IUSF), took part to raise human rights violations in Sri Lanka under the government of President Ranil Wickremesinghe. The FSP jubilantly reported “comrade” Bopage’s intervention on its website.

The FSP intervention is tail-ending Washington’s use of Sri Lankan human rights violations as a pretext to pressure Colombo to line up with its strategic confrontation with China.

The UNHRC session is discussing its High Commissioner’s report on Sri Lanka and a resolution presented by several countries led by the US and UK. This resolution proposes an investigation into Sri Lanka’s “war crimes” and “economic crimes” and is scheduled to be put to the vote on October 6. The FSP has not criticised the resolution at any time or pointed to its underlying purpose.

The widely-despised Wickremesinghe was appointed as acting President by former President Gotabhaya Rajapakse as he fled the country on July 13 after huge mass protests demanding his resignation. Wickremesinghe was then installed as President by an anti-democratic vote of the discredited parliament on July 21.

Wickremesinghe immediately intensified the crackdown on anti-government protesters ordering police and the military to violently evict those who had occupied the presidential secretariat. Police attacks were also unleashed on IUSF-organised protests in August. On August 22, Wickremesinghe imposed 90-day detention orders on a IUSF convener and two other activists under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA).

The government is preparing to crush the widespread opposition of workers and rural masses to skyrocketing prices and shortages of essentials including fuel, food and medicines. It has signed a loan agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that will only intensify the acute social crisis facing millions.

The FSP opposes the independent political mobilisation of the working class against the repression of the Wickremesinghe regime and the IMF austerity agenda. Instead, it has turned to the UNHRC, giving tacit support to Washington’s cynical

“human rights” campaign and is cementing an alliance with Sri Lanka’s opposition parties that all support the IMF’s program.

In his brief address to the UNHRC, Bopage cited the Colombo government’s lack of “accountability” for war crimes, economic crimes and other human rights violations. To investigate and assure human rights in the country, he said the council should be “strengthening the existing measures and adopting new initiatives.”

The FSP is deliberately covering up for the US, which is exploiting the UNHRC to advance its geostrategic interests and is also directly responsible for numerous bloody war crimes.

There is no question that successive Sri Lankan governments are responsible for war crimes and gross abuses of democratic rights during Colombo’s 26-year communal war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that ended in May 2009.

During the final weeks of the war, then President Mahinda Rajapakse and his brother Gotabhaya Rajapakse, who was defence secretary, presided over the killing of at least 40,000 Tamil civilians, according to UN estimates, and the disappearance of hundreds more.

After the war, Washington sponsored several resolutions to pressure Mahinda Rajapakse to break relations with Beijing. Washington was deeply hostile to his government’s ties with and dependence on funds and arms from China and wanted to bring Sri Lanka under the US strategic sway.

Failing these efforts, Washington sponsored a regime-change operation in 2015 with the support of Wickremesinghe and former President Chandrika Kumaratunga to oust Mahinda and install Maithripala Sirisena as president. The Sirisena-Wickremesinghe regime shifted the Sri Lankan foreign policy markedly towards Washington.

After Gotabhaya Rajapakse came to power in 2019, the US and UK sponsored another tough resolution on Sri Lanka that was passed in March last year. This resolution is currently being discussing in the UNHRC. Though Rajapakse is no longer in power, the US is seeking to block any return of the Rajapakses. Although the pro-US Wickremesinghe is president, he depends on Rajapakse’s party—the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna—for political survival.

The FSP leaders were members of the Sinhala chauvinist

Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) which fully backed the communal war. As the JVP became widely discredited among workers and particularly youth, they broke away and formed the FSP in 2012. Despite its socialistic phrase mongering, the FSP backed the US engineered regime-change operation in 2015 that brought to power Sirisena, who was complicit in all the war crimes of the Rajapakse government.

The FSP turn to the UNHRC is significant. It underlines this party's further rightward shift into the Colombo political establishment in response to the sharp upsurge of working class struggles in Sri Lanka and internationally.

Since April millions of workers and poor have been involved in huge protests and strikes in response to the social devastation produced by the global capitalist crisis. Like the ruling class, the trade unions and various pseudo-left groups were terrified by this popular uprising.

FSP collaborated closely with the trade union fronts to divert this mass opposition into one-day general strikes in April and May and to subordinate it to the demand for an interim capitalist regime that was also being pushed by the opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) and JVP. The JVP and FSP unions were part of these trade union fronts.

By blocking any independent movement of the working class against the Rajapakse regime, the FSP and the trade unions paved the way for Wickremesinghe to come to power. Now the FSP is lining up with the opposition parties to mount a phony campaign to defend democratic rights.

In August, the FSP took part in a seminar called by the Trade Unions and Mass Movement (TUMO). The FSP trade unions are part of TUMO. Among the invitees to the event were the representatives of the imperialist powers including the UK, Canada and Australia as well as of the opposition parties—the SJB, JVP, Sri Lanka Muslim Congress and Tamil National Alliance.

FSP Education Secretary Pubudu Jayagoda voiced the party's full support to this reactionary line-up, declaring: "The FSP promises that we will give our maximum support to bring all forces against this repression into a common platform."

On September 16, the FSP participated in an event organised by the IUSF to which the SJB and JVP were invited. The recently-formed Uttara Lanka Sabhagaya also attended. This outfit includes Sinhala chauvinist groups led by Wimal Weerawansa and Udaya Gammanpila who were ministers of the former Rajapakse regime.

SJB chairman and MP, General Sarath Fonseka, addressed the meeting supposedly in a personal capacity. Fonseka was Army Commander during the final years of the war, overseeing the brutal offensives in the last months that killed tens of thousands of civilians. Jubilant about the gathering, he praised the IUSF and the FSP and called on professionals and businessmen to build the movement. "There are about 90 percent in the police are with us. In the military 98 percent are with us," he declared.

Such are the rightwing forces being embraced by the FSP.

FSP leader Pubudu Jayagoda declared: "New leaders are in the making. All are uniting. This platform is the example. All these political parties, trade unions and mass organisations have united." He added: "This mass force will not only secure the release of student leaders but a mass power will be built to send this anti-people, anti-social lot to the prison."

The FSP claims to be building a "mass movement" to oust the repressive Wickremesinghe regime. In reality, it is promoting capitalist parties that have a similar record of repression and austerity. Both the SJB and JVP are committed to the IMF's austerity agenda. A government of these parties would be just as ruthless as Wickremesinghe in attacking the democratic and social rights of working people.

This fake left group represents upper middle class sections of society. Its hostility to mobilise the working class on socialist policies flows from its commitment to the profit system.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) urges workers and youth to reject the FSP's so-called mass movement. It is a political trap to corral working people behind the political establishment that only opens the door for dictatorial rule. The working class can only defend its democratic and social rights by uniting with the international working class and fighting for socialism.

The working class should take matters into its own hands. The SEP calls on workers to form action committees, independent of trade unions and all capitalist parties and their hangers on, in every workplace, plantation and neighbourhood. We call upon the rural masses, who are facing similar attacks on their living conditions, to build action committees and to rally in this struggle.

The attacks on democratic and social rights are rooted in the crisis of capitalism. That is why the SEP calls on workers and youth to fight for socialist policies as the only answer to defend these rights—including the nationalisation of the banks, large companies and plantations under workers' democratic control, and the repudiation of all foreign debts.

Against the reactionary political manoeuvres of the ruling class, the SEP has initiated a campaign for a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses. The SEP has proposed this congress, based on democratically elected delegates from action committees, to develop the fight for socialist policies to address the pressing needs of the masses and take forward struggle for a workers' and peasants' government as part of the struggle for socialism internationally.

We urge workers and youth to join the SEP to fight for this revolutionary program.



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