

Sri Lankan political crisis: Pseudo-left NSSP promotes UNP campaign

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Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) leader Wickremabahu Karunaratne is in the forefront of the United National Party (UNP) campaign to regain government after President Maithripala Sirisena sacked UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe as prime minister on October 26.

After dismissing Wickremesinghe, Sirisena appointed former President Mahinda Rajapakse as prime minister. He also prorogued the parliament until November 16 to buy time to cajole and bribe MPs so as to secure a parliamentary majority. Rajapakse's presidency from 2005 until 2015 was notorious for its anti-democratic authoritarian methods.

Wickremesinghe, however, has refused to vacate the prime minister's official residence and demanded the immediate reconvening of parliament, where he still commands a majority. The US and its allies are backing this campaign. Responding to pressure from the major powers, Sirisena has now announced that parliament will reopen two days earlier on November 14.

Sirisena and Rajapakse, as well as Wickremesinghe, all falsely proclaim their support for "parliamentary democracy." However, the bitter in-fighting is to secure state power for their respective factions of the ruling class. All of them are committed to stepped up attacks on the social rights and living conditions of the working class and the poor.

Pseudo-left organisations, including the NSSP, along with sections of the media and academia, are demanding the immediate reconvening of the parliament as the "solution" to the political crisis. They fear that the ongoing conflicts in the ruling elite are exposing to millions of working people the rottenness of capitalist rule and its parliamentary façade.

NSSP leader Karunaratne, a long-time associate of Wickremesinghe, is playing a key role in promoting the UNP's campaign and sowing illusions in parliamentary democracy. Karunaratne is speaking at UNP meetings,

holding press conferences, helping to organise protest pickets, and writing to the media.

Addressing a UNP meeting on October 30, Karunaratne declared: "I came here because democracy is here. To stop the crime against Ranil Wickremesinghe, he must be reinstated [as prime minister] and the thieves who usurped power chased away."

Attempting to present Wickremesinghe as a fighter for working people, Karunaratne said: "Who is speaking on behalf of people of this country? Who is speaking on behalf of the proletariat? Who is speaking for Tamils, Muslims as one people? This has now been shown to the whole world."

What blatant lies! Wickremesinghe, who was elected to parliament in 1977, became a cabinet minister in the hated right-wing government of President J. R. Jayawardene.

The Jayawardene regime ruthlessly initiated "open market" economic policies that gutted jobs and the social rights of workers and the poor, then provoked a devastating 30-year war to suppress the Tamil population.

Whether in government or opposition, Wickremesinghe has never wavered in his defence of big business and the capitalist system.

Over the past four years, the so-called "national unity government" of Sirisena and Wickremesinghe has systematically deepened the anti-working class attacks of the Rajapakse regime and implemented the dictates of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

NSSP leader Karunaratne's promotion of Wickremesinghe is an endorsement of the IMF's austerity measures and a desperate attempt to prevent the development of an independent movement of the working class by chaining workers to the pro-US, right-wing UNP.

Karunaratne's support for Wickremesinghe and the UNP serves the geo-political needs of US imperialism and its allies.

During the January 2015 presidential election, Karunaratne, along with various pseudo-lefts and academics, supported the regime-change operation that brought Sirisena to power and his alliance with Wickremesinghe's UNP. Karunaratne ludicrously claimed the back-room operation was a "democratic revolution."

The installation of the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe administration was orchestrated by Washington, with political support from India. The US had no differences with Rajapakse's anti-democratic rule, but in line with its geo-strategic calculations, wanted him ousted because of his close relationship with Beijing.

The US and other major powers have responded to the dismissal of Wickremesinghe by supporting the ex-prime minister and maximising their political pressure on Sirisena. Washington considers Rajapakse to be pro-Chinese and does not want him to make a political comeback.

Last week the US put on hold nearly \$US500 million in development assistance to Sri Lanka and Japan announced holding off a \$1.4 billion "soft loan" for a light-rail project. The EU has also indicated that it would reconsider current GSP-tax concessions on Sri Lankan exports. Economic sanctions could also be imposed on Sri Lanka.

Karunaratne is attempting to give his pro-UNP campaign a radical colouration. At a press conference last Wednesday he claimed that the people were ready to act against those who ignore the parliament and proposed a "general strike and a people's riot." His comments came a day after a large crowd attended a UNP meeting opposing Sirisena's dismissal of Wickremesinghe.

The NSSP leader further elaborated on this theme in a letter published in yesterday's weekly *Irida Lakbima*. Referring to the proroguing of parliament, he declared: "Democracy has been folded into a system of making laws and gazetting them according to the whims and fancies [of Sirisena and Rajapakse]. It needs to be considered whether a general strike can be called against this."

Karunaratne claimed that a "strike, at least in the public sector, would cause a collapse of [government] rule," and defeat dictatorship. "Hitlers only become powerful when the people are silent in the face of lies. If people embrace untruths because of laziness then any insane man can easily drag the country towards a dictatorship," he wrote.

What a sinister campaign!

Working people are being asked to take action to defend

one right-wing faction of the ruling class, which has a history of blatantly violating social and democratic rights, against another, similarly ruthless, faction.

Karunaratne's comparisons of Rajapakse with Hitler and fascism are in order to cover-up Wickremesinghe's own anti-democratic record.

The bitter historical experiences of the international working class have shown that the coming to power of dictatorships and fascism is because of the betrayal of the working class by opportunist leaderships, including Stalinist, social democratic and "lefts" like NSSP.

For the working class, there are no differences between the Sirisena-Rajapakse and Wickremesinghe camps. Whatever party or alliance grabs state power will unleash even more ruthless attacks on social and democratic rights of the workers and poor.

As the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) statement on the Sri Lankan political crisis explains: "Sirisena's unconstitutional action in sacking Wickremesinghe is the culmination of a protracted decay of parliamentary rule since Sri Lanka was given so-called 'independence' in 1948. The political coup is an acute expression in Sri Lanka of the worsening global economic crisis, sharpening geo-political tensions, particularly between the US and China, and the resurgence of class struggles internationally."

Workers, youth and socialist-minded intellectuals must reject the NSSP leader's reactionary efforts. The working class can only defend its class interests by politically fighting every faction of the Sri Lanka ruling elite in the struggle for a workers' and peasants' government based on international socialist policies.

Only the SEP, and its youth wing, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, fights on the basis of this program in Sri Lanka.

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