

Statement on Sri Lankan Elections - And on 'Bahu', leader of the NNSP, running as an UNP candidate

Wednesday 22 July 2020, by [Radical Socialist \(India\)](#) (Date first published: 16 July 2020).

Radical Socialist sees the candidature of Vickrambahu Karunaratne ('Bahu'), leader of the Nava Sama Samaj Party of Sri Lanka, and one of the two organisations affiliated to the Fourth International in Sri Lanka, as an UNP candidate, as an unambiguous crossing of the class line. This is however not something that happened without any prior warning.

The entire history of Sri Lankan Trotskyism is a history of periodic impressive political development as well as gross backsliding. The original Lanka Sama Samaj Party (LSSP) was the country's first revolutionary party, and its historic leaders, like Leslie Goonawardene and Colvin R. de Silva, played major roles in the freedom struggle and in the mass movements afterwards. Yet in the name of Sri Lankan exceptional situation they forged a coalition with the bourgeois and Sinhala chauvinist Sri Lanka Freedom Party. At that time, the Fourth International expelled them, despite their being one of the major sections. But the problem of electoralism, and later also of the minority question, which took such a burning character in Sri Lanka, were not fully examined even by the radical left-wing. The LSSP(R), which had emerged from the LSSP, fragmented. Another current, the Vama Samasamaja current, arose within the LSSP, was expelled, and founded the Nava Sama Samaj Party.

From the 1990s, when the NNSP became a Section of the Fourth International, Indian Revolutionary Marxists have seen periodic twists and turns, very often articulated by the same comrade Bahu. The key issue continued, in part, to be electoral illusions. In the 1990s, the United Socialist Alliance had already included the Sri Lanka Mahajana Pakshaya of Chandrika Kumaratunga (daughter of Sirimavo Bandaranayake and eventually President of Sri Lanka). As such, they were then de facto allied to Mahendra (Mahinda) Rajapaksha as well). When Rajapaksha headed a brutal and authoritarian regime from 2005, Bahu called it fascist, and saw the electoral defeat of Rajapaksha in 2015 as a democratic revolution. While in the 1990s the NNSP had allied with bourgeois parties like the SLMP to defeat the UNP, now Bahu has become a UNP candidate to defeat the SLFP.

Already, in the name of not allowing the Rajapakshas to reverse the so-called democratic revolution, Bahu had called for compromise with the regime. According to Vame Handa leaders he had called workers who had protested against the budget of the Ranil Wickremesinghe government as racist extremists or fascistic centralists. At the same time, his interview with Frontline shows him moving away from a firm commitment to Tamil rights. All this has culminated in the outright desire to stand on a UNP ticket.

This is a total betrayal of class independence and the building of a class struggle oriented mass party. This is not even any 1930s style Popular Frontism. It must be recognised that while the SLFP and its successor organisations have been Sinhala chauvinists, the UNP has also been extreme right-wing in its politics. Unless the lessons of the repeated political collapses in Sri Lanka are learnt, not only Sri Lankan Marxists, but those elsewhere in South Asia, who have learned also from the

achievements of the Sri Lankan Marxists, may suffer politically. There is a need to examine, not merely in terms of mid 20th century history, but in terms of today's class struggle, why the politics of electoralism, and of alliances with bourgeois parties (under the disguise that they are petty bourgeois parties, or 'democratic' parties, etc) can only lead to damages for the Trotskyist forces. We urge the Fourth International leadership to take it up as a burning political and educational issue, and take firm action. Collaborating with bourgeois oppositions is hardly restricted to Sri Lanka, and serious political discussions will benefit revolutionaries in India, at least.

Radical Socialist, 16 July 2020

P.S.

- "Radical Socialist Statement on Sri Lankan Elections". Radical Socialist . Published on Sunday, 19 July 2020 03:40 :
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