

Sri Lanka: Has the NSSP broken with the programme of the Fourth International?

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Budget 2016

This question is posed to us by the activities and ideologies expressed by Comrade Vickramabahu Karunaratne, General Secretary of the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), Sri Lankan section of the Fourth International. His views on the present capitalist Ranil-Maithree government publicized through the mass media has started a debate among Left groups. The latest development is his view on the budget proposals of the government. In presenting the budget for 2016, Finance Minister Ravi Karunanayake brought some anti-worker proposals, while offering huge concessions to local & foreign investors. Budget proposals include:

- Amalgamation of Employment Provident Fund & Employees Trust Fund (terminal benefits of semi govt. & private sector workers) amounting to LKR1.7 trillion (USD118 billion) and removal of its control from the Central Bank.
- Abolishment of eight-hour work system.
- Extending the working period from 6 months to one year for permanency of employment.
- Establishment of new Company to manage Free Trade Zones above the Board of Investment.
- Removal of concessional loan schemes offered by the Banks.
- Increase of taxes for vehicles.
- Removal of fertilizer subsidy to the farmers.
- Proposals to bring amendments to existing Labour laws.
- Huge concessions to investors.
- Abolishment of pension from government servants.

There was a big protest against these proposals by workers and peasants. Trade Unions decided to go on a protest token strike on 15th December 2015 demanding removal of anti-worker budget proposals. On 14th December, the Prime Minister was forced to make a special statement in

parliament promising to make amendments to some budget proposals.

At this point Comrade Vickramabahu has labeled workers who protest against this budget as racist extremists or fascistic centralists. [1] Further he praised the Prime Minister for the manner in which he handled objections to the budget. He endorses the economic strategy of the current capitalist Government. His argument is that the economic policy of the present government is not a neo-liberal policy. It is a 'social market' policy which was introduced by Bismarck in Germany. According to him, the government may not confront with workers and masses but is ready to settle matters amicably. [2] Further he advised workers to settle issues through negotiations, without going to strike.

It is true that Bismarck made concessions. He introduced health care schemes, pension etc to the public. But Ranil withdraws what we have achieved through struggles in the past. He removed pension from government servants. Free education and health facilities curtailed. Workers money in the EPF & ETF robbed.

According to the earlier ideas of Comrade Vickramabahu, this is not a period to give more concessions to public. Global capitalist system is in such a crisis for last decades. We have seen withdrawing of concessions given to public in most European countries also. Greece & Spain are good examples. The previous president Mahinda Rajapaksa tried to rob the EPF in 2011. That attempt was defeated by a workers' uprising, sacrificing the life of Roshen Chanaka. Now Ranil is attempting to do the same. Both Mahinda and Ranil privatized government institutions. The difference is Ranil has united capitalists irrespective of their ethnicity. Now the Sinhala, Tamil & Muslim capitalists, whether they are UNP or SLFP or TNA are united together and ready to exploit Sinhala, Tamil & Muslim workers. Mahinda wanted to establish a Sinhala Buddhist administration. Therefore other non- Sinhala and non-Buddhist masses were compelled to gather around Ranil.

In his article Comrade Vickramabahu states that working-class leaders to day in Lanka have no other option but to discuss and arrive at a reasonable compromise. If not, what can we do? We have no strength or organization to install a proletarian regime. Most certainly we cannot reverse the democratic revolution and bring back vicious fascistic Mahinda group to power.

Who is responsible for this deterioration of the Left? Is the NSSP also not responsible?. In the recent past instead of mobilizing workers towards leftist perspective, the NSSP leader was in a campaign (Vipakshe Virodaya/Samagi Balawegaya) to bring Ranil, leader of the capitalist UNP, into power. Actually this is a betrayal of the Left movement. After the presidential election Comrade Vickramabahu jumped in to the National Executive Council, the policy making body of the national government. Therefore he is also responsible for all anti- worker activities of this National Government. During this period, was he able to convince the government to increase the salary of private sector employees by a single Rupee, defend the freedom of association of the workers, and abolish the manpower working system? No. Now Com. Vickramabahu has advised workers & unions to come to compromise with employers.

National Question

From the inception of the party in 1977, the NSSP defended the self-determination rights of the Tamil-speaking people. Because of this position there were death threats against Comrade Vickramabahu and other party members. The NSSP was the only party who fought for this until 2015. However he had changed that stance now, in line with his alliance with Ranil.

In an interview with *Frontline* magazine of India [3], Comrade Vickramabahu replies as follows:

Q : *What is your stand on federalism?*

A: I am not sure whether the TNA [Tamil National Alliance] has understood the concept fully. But, the bottom line is greater autonomy to provinces. This can be done under the framework of a unitary state. Look how India is managing its affairs. It is not a federal country but more powers have been given to States.

How can the Left defend the centralised and undemocratic unitary state of Sri Lanka? The anti-Sinhala-chauvinist Left has defended the restructuring of Sri Lanka into a federal system with maximum devolution of powers to the Tamil-speaking majority North and East for many decades, as the best way of safeguarding the unity of the Sinhala and Tamil masses instead of pushing the Tamil nation into separation. Comrade Vickramabahu has reneged on this historical position of the NSSP, while making empty references to self-determination.

Fascistic regime

Com. Vickramabahu describes the previous Mahinda regime as a fascistic government. This argument is completely misleading the workers. It is true that there were abductions and killings by paramilitary groups led by Mahinda Government.

We also know several party members were killed by the forces of UNP regime during 88-89 under the leadership of Ranil & Premadasa. All the activists had to go on campaign against state terror. Comrades Bahu & Vasu travelled in vans covered with bullet-proof steel plates. But Bahu never tried to analyse the Premadasa regime as a 'fascistic' regime. If the Mahinda regime is a fascistic regime what happened to those fascistic forces after January 8th? Why didn't they try to capture power by force without letting Maithree to come to power through an election? We believe that Com. Vickramabahu has brought this fascistic theory just to justify his right turn to support Ranil.

Democratic revolution

Bahu argues that there was a democratic revolution on January 8th, 2015 and the responsibility of the workers is to protect this government from the 'fascistic' Mahinda. It is correct that we had to defeat Mahinda. There is no debate that Mahinda and other corrupt leaders of the previous government should be prosecuted and jailed for their killings, other illegal and anti-democratic activities. At the same time corruptions and illegal activities of this present government also have to be dealt with. We know both won't happen under this government.

Mahinda is very well aware that nothing will happen to him or leaders of the previous government. The majority of MPs of the so-called fascistic regime are ministers & MPs of the present government also. So what happened to their 'fascistic' politics?

As a party of the Fourth International, the NSSP can't defend a capitalist government which acts according to the tune of IMF, World Bank, WTO. The goal of the Fourth International is to establish socialism. We can't expect socialism to be introduced by a capitalist regime. The duty of the Fourth International and its sections is to educate workers, peasants and other masses toward that end.

If Comrade Vickramabahu thinks that there was a democratic revolution on January 8th 2015, he rejects the permanent revolution theory of Trotsky which he taught us for last 38 years. He accepts the Stalinist two stages of revolution theory now. Then he can't be in the Fourth International. If the Fourth International accepts his position, the leader of the socialist revolution in Sri Lanka in 2017,

(after 100 years of the great October Revolution in 1917) will be Ranil and not Vickramabahu.

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P.S.

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Footnotes

[1] http://epaper.dailynews.lk/art.asp?id=2015/12/05/pg05_0&pt=p&h=

[2] [http://epaper.dailynews.lk/art.asp?id=2015/12/19/pg05_1&pt=p&h=\)](http://epaper.dailynews.lk/art.asp?id=2015/12/19/pg05_1&pt=p&h=)

[3] <http://www.frontline.in/world-affairs/people-are-becoming-conscious-of-the-futility-of-the-politics-of-racism/article7599469.ece>