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Fourth International in Sri Lanka

Statement of the Bureau regarding the NSSP

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The Executive Bureau of the Fourth International has issued this statement concerning its links with the NSSP (Nava Sama Samaja Party).

Earlier in 2020, the news became known that Vikramabahu 'Bahu' Karunaratne, the chairperson of one of the Fourth International organizations in Sri Lanka, the NSSP, would be a candidate in the elections of 5 August. Bahu contested the elections on the slate of the United National Party (UNP), under its electoral symbol, while calling for support to UNP leader Ranil Wickramasinghe, former prime-minister of Sri Lanka. In response to this news, the Bureau of the Fourth International asked the NSSP to explain why their central leader was running in the elections on the list of the historical party of bourgeois, right-wing politics in Sri Lanka.

The NSSP made clear that they as an organization supported Bahu's candidacy. In a document sent to the Bureau they justified this as a 'united front', made necessary by the threat of 'fascism' in Sri Lanka as represented by the camp of Gotabaya Rajapaksa. The Bureau could not accept this explanation as the united front is about common action of parts of the workers' movement. The UNP however is not a workers' party, but a party of the free-market, right-wing liberal section of the Sri Lanka bourgeoisie. In its competition with the openly Sinhala-chauvinist camp of Rajapaksa, the UNP has adopted a more 'liberal', human rights oriented discourse but in no way has this meant the party changed its class-character. When he was elected as Prime Minister of Sri Lanka in 2015, Ranil Wickramasinghe declared his goal was to 'make Sri Lanka the most open and competitive economy in South Asia'. In this, he was continuing his politics from his first term as a Prime Minister when in the early nineties the UNP played an important role in introducing neo-liberal reforms.

To make clear Bahu's candidacy was not supported by the Fourth International, the Bureau published a ['Statement on upcoming elections in Sri Lanka'](#) on 2 July. We received no answer from the NSSP when we informed them of this. Nor did they respond to a proposal that they would write a reply that could be translated and distributed to the International. On 17 July, we published a statement from Left Voice, the other organization in Sri Lanka associated with the Fourth International, in which they criticized Bahu's candidacy as a political capitulation; ['An invitation to carry forward the Nava Samasamaja tradition'](#). The NSSP did not reply to this statement, nor to the statement by Left Voice that we published on 20 August, after the elections: ['Triple Crises and the Parliamentary Election in Sri Lanka 2020'](#).

The 5 August elections ended in a near complete rout of the UNP. The UNP held on to a single seat only. But the lack of responses from NSSP indicates that even this failure has not made them reconsider their strategy of supporting a party of the bourgeois right.

The Bureau of the Fourth International has come to the conclusion that the NSSP has fundamentally broken with our core principles. Political independence of the working class is central to our project. The electoral campaign by Bahu and the NSSP clearly went against this principle. Bahu's statements simultaneously recognized UNP and Ranil Wickramasinghe as 'capitalist' while also calling on people to support them. In 2015 Bahu described the UNP as part of the 'democratic mainstream within the capitalist societal culture' and Ranil Wickramasinghe as 'a radical leader in a capitalist society', but still rejected an electoral alliance. The 5 August elections were the final step. Only a few days before these elections, Bahu declared that the UNP was a 'politically liberal democratic party', 'representing democratic aspects of capitalism', and that he had 'come to that stage because in this country there is threat of fascism', so 'socialists should be prepared to link with the liberal capitalist leaders and fight back for democracy so that the struggle today is for justice, fair play and democracy.' [1]

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Considering the central role of Bahu in the NSSP, his statements on the elections, the lack of signs of strong opposition from within the NSSP and the NSSP's silence towards the leadership of the Fourth International, we see no reason to hope that the organization will correct their grave error.

The Bureau of the Fourth International has decided to suspend all links with the NSSP and to ask the next International Committee to vote to confirm this suspension and that the NSSP no longer represents the Fourth International in Sri Lanka. The NSSP will be given the opportunity to respond at the IC meeting. The next World Congress will be asked to formally disaffiliate the NSSP.

The NSSP has made a fundamental break with our politics as outlined above. In recent years, members of the FI in Sri Lanka have been part of two different organizations: the NSSP and Left Voice (Vame Handa). This division was the result of political differences in several fields. The Fourth International continues its links with Left Voice as before.

2 October 2020

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[1] *Daily Mirror Online*, 1 August 2020 ['There is threat of fascism at present: -Vickramabahu'](#).