Sri Lanka: JVP pledges to defend big business interests

W. A. Sunil
14 March 2014

The opposition Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) has issued a "new policy framework," entitled "Our Vision," to coincide with its campaign for the Western and Southern Provincial Council elections in Sri Lanka on March 29. The document seeks to exploit widespread discontent with President Mahinda Rajapakse and his government, while reassuring big business and international investors that the JVP will defend their interests.

The document represents a further lurch to the right by the JVP, which was established in the 1960s on an eclectic mixture of Sinhala populism, Maoism and Castroism. Like its counterparts around the world, the JVP is now thoroughly integrated into the political establishment and has all but dispensed with its socialist phrase-mongering and anti-imperialist demagogy.

The JVP first presented the document for approval to the representatives of big business at the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce and to various Buddhist and Christian leaders. "Our Vision" was then released at a party conference on February 2. At the same conference, the JVP parliamentary group leader, Anura Kumara Dissanayake, who is known for his connections in ruling circles, was installed as the new party leader.

The changes are a desperate attempt to reverse the party's declining support. In recent years, the JVP has suffered two debilitating splits and a precipitous fall in its electoral vote. Well aware of its value as a lightning rod for social discontent, sections of the Colombo media attempted to give it a boost, hailing Dissanayake as a "capable man" and the JVP as a bold opposition.

"Our Vision" presents the JVP as fighting for justice and democratic rights. It boasts that the party will establish "equality, democracy, justice, individual freedom and security and co-existence" in the country. It will champion a new constitution to protect the "sovereignty of people" and establish a "parliamentary governance system" that will be elected every five years and "abolish the executive presidency."

These claims are completely bogus. The JVP has never defended the democratic rights of working people. From the outset, it was mired in anti-Tamil communalism, pitting impoverished Sinhala rural youth against Tamil-speaking plantation workers. It formally opposed the 1978 constitution that established the autocratic executive presidency, but it tacitly backed the right-wing United National Party in the 1977 election, helping it secure the landside it needed to change the constitution.

The JVP was always the most chauvinist supporter of the civil war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and backed the anti-democratic methods used to suppress any opposition. It bitterly rejected the UNP government's 1987 Accord with India to send Indian army "peacekeepers" into northern Sri Lanka to disarm the LTTE in exchange for limited concessions to the Tamil elites. The JVP whipped up a reactionary patriotic campaign under the banner "motherland first" and used its armed gangs to murder hundreds of workers, youth and political opponents who refused to support its protests. Every year, the JVP holds a ceremony to hail these fascistic attacks as a heroic struggle.

The JVP's claims to oppose the executive presidency have been repeatedly exposed. In 2003, the JVP urged President Chandrika Kumaratunga to use her executive powers to dismiss the three key ministers in the UNP government so as to scuttle peace talks with the LTTE. In 2004, the JVP joined a coalition government headed by Kumaratunga and accepted four cabinet posts.

While it now postures as an opponent of Rajapakse and his anti-democratic methods, the JVP campaigned for him in the 2005 presidential election and pushed for him to restart the communal war against the LTTE. Once the war began, the JVP declared that the executive presidency was

© World Socialist Web Site

useful to prosecute the war effort. It also voted repeatedly to renew draconian emergency powers. At the same time, the JVP suppressed the struggles of workers to defend wages and working conditions, all in the name of supporting the war and putting the "Motherland first."

The chief purpose of "Our Vision" is to make an appeal to big business. Behind the phrase-mongering about "democracy" and "justice," the JVP is promoting itself as a reliable defender of the needs of investors under the banner of a "modernised and industrialised country."

Its platform states: "The base of a New Socialist economy could be prepared only by broadening production process and undergoing an appropriate industrialisation… Industrialisation under a New Socialist policy should be carried out on the basis of adopting the appropriate technology and permanent development." It calls for industries to be developed, and agriculture and fishing to be industrialised. To "prevent the unwanted wastage of time and energy," the JVP advocates the "management methods, administrative methods adopted by various developed nations around the world."

No one should be fooled. The JVP's model is China, where capitalism has been well and truly restored, starting in 1978 and intensifying following the brutal crushing of workers and youth in the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre.

The previous JVP leader, Somawansa Amarasinghe, reiterated this message last September at a press conference: "Vietnam that was engaged in a 30-year war with the USA, the world power then, is gaining a speedy economic development. China is attempting to be the world's economic power. The secret behind all these developments is Socialism. We endeavour to give this to the country [Sri Lanka]".

In other words, the JVP supports the transformation of Sri Lanka into a fully-fledged police state, as in China and Vietnam, to protect investors against any opposition by workers. Its program promises: "Private sectors will made part of the production based economy." It continues: "A five year tax holiday and other incentives will be provided to private sector companies participating in the production economy."

In an interview on February 7 with the *Daily FT*, a Sri Lankan business newspaper, Dissanayake, the new leader, declared: "We have recognised the need to adopt new strategies to suit the modern world. We are ready for a change. This is not about toppling governments."

Dissanayake was even more candid in the *Ceylon Today*: "The main feature of a revolutionary party is renewing oneself and the party from time to time. Like a clay which can be moulded to fit the situation. We have changed as a party over time, from revolutionary politics to mainstream democracy as the political situation changed."

In another media interview, the JVP's candidate for chief minister of the Western Province, K. D. Lal Kantha, said his party considered "at present the engine of growth is the private sector" and promised to "provide all facilities" to investors. This economic program is no different from that of the Rajapakse government, or the opposition UNP, or indeed capitalist parties around the world.

The JVP declares its foreign policy to be "anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism." Another sham! The party welcomed the Bush administration's bogus "war on terrorism" and supported the US-led invasion of Afghanistan. It is a pro-imperialist party that has cultivated close relations with the Colombo diplomatic missions of the major powers, particularly that of the US.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is standing a slate of candidates for the Colombo district in the Western Provincial Council election. We fight for the political independence of the working class from all the capitalist parties, including the JVP, as well as their pseudo-left appendages, such as the Nava Sama Samaja Party and the United Socialist Party. We warn that the JVP's "new socialism" has nothing to do with socialism, but is a plan to transform Sri Lanka into a cheap labour platform through the ruthless suppression of the working class.

The SEP's socialist and internationalist perspective is based on uniting workers around their common class interests and the rejection of all forms of nationalism, communalism and chauvinism. We fight for a workers' and peasants' government that will implement socialist policies. We urge workers, youths and intellectuals to study our election manifesto, take part in our election campaign and make a decision to join our party.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site