

JVP campaigns for pro-US opposition candidate in Sri Lankan presidential election

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The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) is part of the line-up of opposition parties in this Thursday's Sri Lankan presidential election backing the common opposition candidate Maithripala Sirisena.

The JVP had its origins as a petty-bourgeois movement among rural youth in the 1960s, advocating the "armed struggle" based on an eclectic mixture of Maoism, Castroism and Sinhala populism. It has long since abandoned its socialist phrase-mongering and anti-imperialist demagoguery and integrated itself into the Colombo establishment.

In the lead-up to the election, the JVP went to the Supreme Court to challenge Rajapakse's right to stand for a third term. The government had rammed through a constitutional amendment, which, along with measures strengthening his presidential powers, removed the two-term limit on the presidency. When the court dismissed the challenge, the JVP declared that it would not stand a candidate, as the election was "illegal."

As soon as the election was formally announced, however, Sirisena, a senior cabinet minister and general secretary of the ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), deserted to the opposition and declared he would challenge Rajapakse. The move had been prepared behind-the-scenes for weeks, if not months, in advance, with the public support of the United National Party (UNP) and several other opposition parties.

While the JVP did not openly join the UNP and its allies, it nevertheless indicated its support for Sirisena by declaring that it would campaign to oust Rajapakse. To this end, the JVP is holding meetings, campaigning house-to-house and putting up posters, boasting that "it is working actively more than any other party to defeat Rajapakse rule."

The JVP senses that there will be new opportunities. It has already hinted that it would be prepared to take

part in the government of national unity proposed by Sirisena if he wins. In an interview in the *Daily Mirror* on December 1, JVP leader Anura Kumara Dissanayake declared: "Everyone should work together to topple this dictatorship... [even if] we would not be a majority in a government that would form if the opposition wins."

By backing Sirisena, the JVP has joined in the scheme supported by Washington to replace Rajapakse with a president more amenable to US strategic interests in the region. The key figures in engineering Sirisena's candidacy were UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe and former Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga. The UNP is well-known for its pro-US orientation. Kumaratunga has close connections with ex-US President Bill Clinton and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, via the Clinton Foundation.

Washington opposes Rajapakse's political, economic and military cooperation with Beijing and his efforts to balance between the US and China. It wants Sri Lanka firmly behind the US "pivot to Asia," which is aimed at encircling China militarily and undermining its influence throughout the region. Sirisena has indicated in his manifesto that he will pursue a pro-US foreign policy. Just as the US seeks to hide its intrigues behind a bogus "human rights" campaign, so Sirisena is campaigning on the slogan "For democracy against the dictatorship of Rajapakse!"

The JVP has joined the Sirisena bandwagon with its slogan: "Defeat dictatorial rule! Let us line up for democracy!" In his *Daily Mirror* interview, JVP leader Dissanayake said the party opposes Rajapakse because "Sri Lanka currently faces five main crises in the economy, deterioration of democracy, issues concerning communal harmony, failure to ensure good

governance and the risk of being isolated in the international arena.”

Certainly the Rajapakse government uses police-state measures to suppress criticism and opposition, particularly in the working class. However, Sirisena, who was a minister in the same government less than two months ago, and all the parties supporting him, have a long record of anti-democratic measures. The JVP campaigned for Rajapakse in the 2005 presidential election, and fully backed his resumption of the war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and his ruthless suppression of democratic rights, particularly of the Tamil minority.

The US, along with all the opposition parties in Sri Lanka, supported the war against the LTTE and turned a blind eye to the army’s atrocities. Following the LTTE’s defeat in 2009, however, Washington began to raise the issue of war crimes as a means of pressuring Rajapakse to distance himself from Beijing. The JVP’s references to the need for democracy, “communal harmony” and “good government” are all taken from Washington’s “human rights” campaign.

The JVP has its own record of vicious anti-democratic measures. In the late 1980s, as it mounted a “patriotic” campaign against the 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord and the introduction of Indian “peace-keepers” to disarm the LTTE, the JVP launched fascistic attacks, killing hundreds of workers, the poor and political opponents. Having used the JVP to assist in dividing and suppressing the working class, the UNP government turned on the JVP and its social base among the rural poor. Between 1989 and 1991, military-backed death squads slaughtered an estimated 60,000 rural youth. Now the JVP is embracing Sirisena, along with the UNP, and promoting them as the champions of democracy.

JVP leader Dissanayake’s warning about the “risk of being isolated in the international arena” is completely in tune with the anti-China rhetoric of Sirisena and the UNP. The UNP charges Rajapakse with turning Sri Lanka into a “satellite” of China and has vowed to scrap some projects started with Chinese investment. Sirisena links the Rajapakse government’s corruption to Chinese investment in Sri Lanka.

In aligning itself with US imperialism against China, the JVP is once again demonstrating its utterly opportunist character. It has had a fraternal relationship

with the Chinese Communist Party and continues to tout China’s transformation into a cheap labour platform for global corporations as the model for Sri Lanka. But relations with Beijing have become fraught as the JVP has increasingly accommodated to the US.

In 2001, the JVP junked its anti-imperialist phrasemongering and wrote directly to US President George W. Bush to offer its support for the “war on terrorism” and the US-led invasion of Afghanistan. Having joined the Kumaratunga government in 2004, JVP leader Somawansa Amarasinghe and parliamentarian Vijitha Herath met with US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, Christina Rocca, to again express support for the “war on terror.” At the same time, they appealed to Washington for its backing for a renewed communal war against the LTTE.

The JVP’s claims that Sirisena offers a democratic alternative to Rajapakse are a total fraud. Neither faction of the ruling class offers any solution to the growing dangers of war. Moreover they are united in their determination to impose the burdens of the deepening economic crisis onto working people. The SEP calls on workers and youth to reject them both and to support its candidate Pani Wijesiriwardena, who is the only one fighting for a socialist alternative to the agenda of war and austerity.



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