

Sri Lanka: JVP leader assures business that it defends capitalism

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Anura Kumara Disanayake, leader of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and chief opposition whip in the Sri Lankan parliament, has called on big business to recognise his party as a viable alternative to the country's two establishment parties—the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP).

Disanayake made his appeal to a September 14 meeting of business leaders organised by the JVP at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall. The event was entitled “The Way Forward for Sri Lanka, We are Sri Lankan” and is part of the JVP's campaign for the next parliamentary elections, scheduled in 2020.

In the 2015 presidential elections, the JVP backed Maithripala Sirisena to oust former President Mahinda Rajapakse, then supported the UNP-SLFP “unity” coalition government that was subsequently formed. Hypocritically, the JVP is now attempting to distance itself from this same regime, accusing it of corruption and blaming it for the country's economic crisis.

Disanayake assured business leaders that they should not harbour “any doubts” about the JVP and its attitude towards the private sector. “We have ‘Our Vision’ but the [JVP's] policies will be determined by taking together your ideas and ours. The private sector is essential for the economy, as well as the state sector,” he declared.

The JVP was established in the 1960s based on an amalgam of Castroism, Stalinism and Sinhala chauvinism and advocating the “armed struggle.” It long ago abandoned its guerillaism and entered parliament to integrate into the Colombo political establishment. The JVP played a key role in assisting SLFP leaders Chandrika Kumaratunga and Mahinda Rajapakse to become Sri Lankan presidents.

JVP parliamentarians were part of Kumaratunga's coalition government in 2004 and held four ministerial positions. Disanayake himself became the minister of agriculture, livestock, land and irrigation. The party

backed the 30-year communalist war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and maintains close connections with Western diplomats, particularly the US embassy in Colombo.

Disanayake told the September 14 gathering that there were five major features of the Sri Lankan economic crisis. The first of these, he said, was Sri Lanka's debt, which has risen from 120 billion rupees in 1985 to 10,500 billion (\$US68.5 billion) in 2016 November. The second feature was the country's declining export earnings which were at 33 percent of GDP in 2000 but had dropped to 14 percent in 2014.

The third feature, Disanayake said, was the “collapse of state income”—from 23 percent of the GDP in 1996 to 11.3 percent in 2014—and the fourth and fifth features were the sharp fall in Sri Lankan production and the widening inequality of income distribution, respectively.

Disanayake drew no connection between these “features” and the ongoing crisis of global capitalism but insisted that the predicament facing Sri Lanka could only be solved by taking into account the country's location, its natural and human resources, and its history. He suggested that a future JVP government would adopt reactionary protectionist measures—only accepting foreign investment in selected industries and seeking loans for development purposes.

In reality, the crisis in Sri Lanka stems from the worsening breakdown of global capitalism and the government's economic agenda, including savage austerity measures, is dictated by the IMF, not by Colombo. The JVP has already signalled its support of the IMF's anti-working class measures as its “Our Vision” program promises tax breaks for international investors and calls for the commercialisation of state-owned enterprises.

Disanayake told the meeting that Sri Lanka did not have adequate resources to expand its export of goods but

that it could increase export earnings by capturing a larger share of the global guest worker market.

What is required, he continued, is the creation of a highly skilled army of labour with increased government expenditure on education, health and sport. This perspective, he insisted, was not aimed at securing “low income earning jobs like house maids” but at exporting more highly paid professionals to compete with other countries.

The JVP leader also warned his big business audience of the dangers of income disparity in Sri Lanka, pointing out that 43 percent of the population were living on just two dollars a day. These comments were aimed at assuring big business that the party would act to suppress any future social and political explosions produced by this social polarisation.

While the JVP has been addressing dozens of public meetings as part of its 2020 election campaign, it has kept silent about its assurances to big business. In fact, the JVP campaign—under the slogan of “Boost the village—Power for the country”—consists of populist denunciations of the corruption, fraud and bribe-taking of the previous Rajapakse government and the massive financial scandals of the current Sirisena-Wickremesinghe administration.

“Our country’s politics has become a profiteering business. Instead, we assure you [that a future JVP government] will transform politics into public service,” Dissanayake told one meeting. At another event he demagogically declared. “Let’s get together to form a government. We can assure you that under our government the rulers will receive no extra benefit other than people receive.”

Posturing as a “clean party,” the JVP’s anti-corruption rhetoric is an attempt to keep the growing popular opposition to the government’s attacks on social and democratic rights trapped within parliament channels. Dissanayake recently told *Ceylon Today* that his party was organising a broad front with “civil organisations including professionals, journalists, farmers and fishermen.”

The JVP leaders are hoping that workers, the poor and youth are suffering from political amnesia. Dissanayake’s party, which is infamous for its countless “fronts” with establishment parties and groups, is directly responsible the wide-ranging attacks on the social and democratic rights of masses by successive governments.

The JVP played a key role in the regime-change campaign in the 2015 election to remove Rajapakse as president and promote Sirisena’s so-called “good

governance movement.” This has nothing to do with ending corruption or lifting living standards but was part of Washington’s efforts to bring Colombo into line with US economic and military strategic operations against China.

Five days after Sirisena was elected, Dissanayake issued a statement calling for the establishment of a National Executive Council (NEC) to advise the Sri Lankan cabinet. Enlisting the support of other parties, the JVP insisted that the NEC should be “under the president and the prime minister.”

Dissanayake, together with leaders from the Tamil and Muslim parties as well as various NGOs and the pseudo lefts, joined this new entity, providing critical political support for four months and helping to consolidate the new pro-American regime.

In order to hoodwink workers and youth the JVP still falsely claims some allegiance to “Marxism” and “socialism.” Virtually every page of its newspaper *Niyamuwa* is adorned with quotes from Marx, Engels or Lenin.

The JVP also ludicrously claims that China, Vietnam, Laos, North Korea and Cuba are “socialist countries” that have developed “alternatives” to capitalism. These countries are capitalist economies. Ruled by the remnants of the old Stalinist bureaucracies, these regimes transformed have their countries into cheap labour sweatshops of international investors.

To claim that these countries are “socialist” is not just to sow political confusion but is also a message to big business and international capital that the JVP will likewise encourage investors by boosting profits and ruthlessly suppressing any opposition by workers to their exploitation.



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