

The JVP's fraudulent attempt to capitalise on Sri Lanka's political crisis

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The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), a nationalist opposition party, is seeking to exploit widespread hostility to Sri Lanka's two major parties, amid a deep-going political crisis triggered by the sudden ousting of Ranil Wickremesinghe as prime minister last Friday and the installation of former President Mahinda Rajapakse in his place.

The JVP's bogus posture of opposition to the competing factions of the ruling elite is aimed at channelling widespread anger among ordinary people behind the crumbling parliamentary establishment.

On October 26, President Maithripala Sirisena of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) sacked Wickremesinghe of the United National Party (UNP). This ended the "unity" government established in 2015 by the two main bourgeois parties that have ruled Sri Lanka since formal independence was granted in 1948.

In 2015, Sirisena broke with then President Rajapakse, who is also of the SLFP, to contest that year's presidential election in league with Wickremesinghe. The move was part of a regime-change operation coordinated with former President Chandrika Kumaratunga and orchestrated by Washington.

Washington was hostile to the Rajapakse government's deepening ties with China, amid a US confrontation with Beijing throughout the Asia-Pacific. These political machinations, and Sirisena's election, were hailed as a victory for democracy by all the middle-class pseudo-left groups and the trade unions, along with a layer of intellectuals and academics. The JVP tacitly backed Sirisena.

The new government sought to establish its "democratic credentials" by establishing a Executive Council shortly after it was installed. The JVP endorsed this sham, participating in the council alongside the

UNP.

In return, the JVP was promoted as an official organiser of the parliamentary opposition after the August 2015 general election, in which the UNP obtained the highest number of seats and Wickremesinghe was re-appointed prime minister.

The JVP vehemently opposed the Socialist Equality Party's warnings of the anti-democratic character of the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government, which imposed sweeping austerity measures and deployed the police and military against striking workers and students.

The JVP's current claims to be defending democracy against last week's political coup are hypocritical and aimed at preventing the working class from intervening in the deepening political crisis, on the basis of its own independent perspective.

This was underscored by a letter the JVP sent to the Parliamentary Speaker on October 29, demanding that he "convene Parliament immediately," which it described as "the highest institution" of the country, representing the "supreme power of the people."

"It is not good for the country's democracy that Parliament is being excluded from the discourse," the letter warned, adding that the political crisis will "indirectly facilitate the foreign forces that are hostile to the country."

The document demonstrated the JVP's desperate attempts to prop-up the crisis-ridden parliamentary set-up, of which it is a part, which has always advanced the interests of the corporate elite against the working class. The JVP is concerned that the deepening crisis is further discrediting the entire political establishment, and exacerbating mass hostility to all the official parties.

Significantly, the call for the convocation of

parliament echoed the position of Wickremesinghe and the US State Department. The UNP leader wants parliament called so he can demonstrate majority support for his prime ministership. Washington has lined up behind this demand, because it fears that Rajapakse will again orient toward China. The reference to “foreign forces” highlighted the JVP’s attempts to divert social anger in the reactionary channels of Sinhala patriotism.

When it was founded in 1966, the JVP used the petty-bourgeois nostrums of Maoism and Castroism to mislead a generation of rural youth, resulting in a catastrophic armed uprising in 1971 that was drowned in blood by the military. That the party now worships the capitalist parliament as “the supreme power of the people” is a graphic demonstration of the right-wing trajectory of all of the former petty-bourgeois radical groupings.

The JVP has long functioned as an open defender of capitalist rule. The party played a key role in sabotaging a general strike of the working class in July 1980 against President J.R. Jayawardene’s turn to open market policies.

The JVP was among the most vociferous supporters of the brutal war carried out by successive Colombo governments against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam from 1983 to 2009. In the late 1980s, it carried out a vicious campaign against opposition groups, journalists, Tamils and working class organisations, which included the murder of three members of the SEP’s predecessor, the Revolutionary Communist League.

In the 1990s, after the JVP was legalised, it withdrew its presidential candidate in 1994 to support the SLFP’s Chandrika Kumaratunga, presenting her bogus promise to replace Jayawardene’s anti-democratic 1978 constitution as step forward for civil liberties.

When Kumaratunga faced the prospect of losing a parliamentary majority during her second term, the JVP provided the votes her government required and entered her cabinet. They thus took direct responsibility for the government’s prosecution of the civil war and pro-market measures.

In the 2005 presidential election, the JVP entered into an agreement with Rajapakse to guarantee his victory, paving the way for an escalation of the war and sweeping attacks on democratic rights.

This, in part, is the sordid history of the JVP.

Today, bourgeois democracy is breaking down amid the ongoing global capitalist crisis ushered in by the 2008 financial crash. The turmoil in Colombo is a sharp expression of this international tendency. Regardless of how the current civil war within the ruling elite is resolved, it marks a turn to more authoritarian forms of rule in order to intensify the attack on the conditions of the working class and poor.

This is why the SEP calls on the working class to break from all factions of the political establishment, including the JVP.

The working class must fight for a socialist and internationalist political perspective, and rally to it the rural poor and youth of all backgrounds, Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim. In opposition to the official parliamentary mechanisms, workers must build their own class institutions, including Action Committees, aimed at establishing a workers’ and peasants’ government to implement socialist policies as part of a unified federation of socialist republics of South Asia.



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