

Sri Lankan JVP postures as a saviour of “democracy”

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The Sinhala-nationalist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) has initiated a campaign on the theme: “The conspiracy is defeated—Line up for real people’s victory.”

The JVP’s latest crusade was announced after the country’s Supreme Court ruled on December 13 that President Maithripala Sirisena’s dissolution of parliament on November 9 was unconstitutional. The campaign’s purpose is to keep workers, youth and the poor tied to the bourgeois parliamentary system.

Addressing a December 14 public meeting in Colombo, JVP leader Anura Kumara Disanayake said the key political task was to “punish the conspirators, abolish the executive presidency and go for an election to seek a new mandate.”

Earlier, the JVP had presented the 20th amendment to the constitution as a private member’s motion to parliament. The amendment calls for the abolition of Sri Lanka’s executive presidency.

On October 26, Sirisena, in a political coup, sacked Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, replacing him with former President Mahinda Rajapakse. The next day parliament was prorogued to give Rajapakse time to secure a parliamentary majority. When that manoeuvre failed, Sirisena dissolved parliament.

The Supreme Court, however, temporarily halted the dissolution on November 11 and then, on December 13, ruled that Sirisena’s termination of parliament was unconstitutional. Responding to economic and diplomatic pressure from the US, the European Union and other major powers, Sirisena reinstated Wickremesinghe as prime minister and approved a new cabinet.

The bitter infighting between the Sirisena-Rajapakse camp and the Wickremesinghe-led United National Party (UNP) erupted amid escalating protests and industrial action by workers against International Monetary Fund-dictated austerity attacks on their social and living conditions.

From the outset, the JVP’s response to Sirisena’s October 26 political coup, and its aftermath, has been aimed at hoodwinking the masses into believing that the only way forward is to save parliamentary democracy. Once again, the JVP has demonstrated that it is no more than an appendage of the ruling establishment.

On October 26, Disanayake told a press conference that his party was not “supporting any faction in this dogfight” but within a day he changed his tune. The JVP wrote to the parliamentary speaker calling on him to urgently reconvene the parliament. This request directly echoed Wickremesinghe’s demands and those made in an October 28 US State Department statement, which said: “We call on the President, in consultation with the Speaker, to immediately reconvene parliament.”

The JVP then lined up with the UNP and the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and other groups to file petitions in the Supreme Court opposing the dissolution of parliament. After the court temporarily overturned the dissolution, the JVP moved parliamentary no-confidence motions on November 14 and 16 against Rajapakse.

The JVP, along with the UNP and TNA, then presented a petition to the appeal court calling on it to declare the Rajapakse government illegal. Six JVP MPs were also among 122 parliamentarians who submitted affidavits to Sirisena stating their no confidence in Rajapakse as prime minister. In other words, the JVP consistently backed Wickremesinghe and the UNP camp.

Later questioned by the *Mawbima* newspaper about the party’s political positions, JVP leader Lal Kantha declared: “In politics the priorities change with the times. At that moment [when Wickremesinghe was sacked and Rajapakse appointed], the principal task was to defeat the reactionary forces who tried to take power in a coup...”

Kantha’s response is typical of the JVP, which has for years attempted to justify its support for one or another capitalist party by claiming it is necessary to back the

“lesser evil” because workers and the poor face catastrophic consequences.

Addressing the December 14 meeting, Dissanayake demagogically declared that the executive presidency should be abolished because “all those who sat in the president’s chair” ended as autocrats and thieves.

Dissanayake must think that the population suffers from amnesia. He failed to mention the fact that the JVP politically endorsed most of the past presidents he accused of being autocrats and thieves.

During the 1994 presidential election, the JVP withdrew its candidate in order to support Sri Lanka Freedom Party candidate Chandrika Kumaratunga, who fraudulently promised to abolish the executive presidency. In 2001, the JVP backed Kumaratunga and her minority government. In 2004, it endorsed her sacking of the Wickremesinghe government and, after joining her political alliance, was rewarded with four ministerial positions.

In 2005, the JVP swung its support behind Rajapakse, ensuring that he became president. It backed his use of the presidential executive powers to resume Colombo’s communalist war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. For the 2010 presidential election campaign, the JVP switched again, aligning itself with the UNP and its candidate General Sarath Fonseka.

The JVP also played a key role in the campaign that elevated Sirisena into the presidency in 2015, claiming this was necessary in order to defeat the “Rajapakse dictatorship.”

As Dissanayake declared in an interview with the *Hindu* in November last year: “[W]hether we liked it or not, the reality was that the [only political] front able to defeat Rajapakse was a UNP-led coalition.” In fact, the JVP’s political manoeuvre was directly in line with Washington’s geo-strategic agenda against China. The US and India, its regional ally, wanted Rajapakse removed as president because of his close relations with Beijing.

Dissanayake and the JVP attempt to cover up their sordid alliances with Sri Lanka’s main parliamentary parties by demagogically denouncing the privatisation of education, transport, health and other basic social services carried out by the very governments that they helped bring to power.

Dissanayake told the Colombo meeting that the JVP, in alliance with various intellectuals, is developing a political program to “solve” the country’s problems. The intellectuals include university academics, such as Harini Amarasuriya, Michael Fernando and Liyanage

Amarakeerthi, who have rallied behind the JVP over the past year. Whilst not members of the JVP, these elements have publicly associated themselves with the organisation, claiming to be seeking “a corruption free, genuine democratic society.” That these academics have endorsed this politically corrupted party and see it as an “alternative” is significant. Many of these “intellectuals” supported Kumaratunga’s rise to power in 1994 and then Sirisena’s in 2015.

Workers and youth must reject the desperate efforts of the JVP and its academic apologists to promote illusions in parliamentary democracy. The JVP, which is falsely labelled a “Marxist party” by the Sri Lankan and international media has nothing to do with socialism or Marxism. Emerging in late 1960s, this party, which bases itself on a toxic mixture of Maoism, Castroism and Sinhala communalism, has become part of the political establishment and a major prop of capitalist rule.

The fear of the every faction of the ruling class and their long-time supporters, such as the JVP, is the deepening crisis of the Sri Lankan capitalist class and the resurgence of international working class struggle, which is beginning to challenge the existing order. Behind the JVP’s demagogic posturing about parliamentary and presidential reform, the ruling elite is preparing dictatorial forms of rule to impose a new round of ruthless social attacks on the working class and the poor.

The only progressive alternative for workers and youth is to fight for international socialism as part of the struggle for a workers’ and peasants’ government in Sri Lanka. This is the perspective for which the Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality fight.



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