

Sri Lanka: JVP presidential candidate vows to strengthen capitalist state

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The National People's Power (NPP) formation led by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) has named JVP leader Anura Kumara Dissanayake as its candidate in the forthcoming December presidential election in Sri Lanka. The announcement was made at a rally last month in Colombo's Galle Face Green.

The JVP has not run its own candidate in a presidential election since 1999. Over the past 20 years it has actively supported candidates from the main bourgeois parties—the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) in 2005, and the so-called common candidates of the pro-US United National Party (UNP)-led front in 2010 and 2015.

The right-wing Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), which is led by former President Mahinda Rajapakse, last month announced that it would be fielding the ex-president's brother and former Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse as its candidate. Wracked by infighting, the ruling United National Party (UNP) of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has yet to declare its candidate.

The NPP is an alliance of 28 organisations, which includes the JVP and its affiliated trade unions, the Revolutionary Socialist Party a small JVP splinter group, the People's Pioneer Artists, the Jaffna-based Active Left Unity and Women for Rights. The National Intellectual Organisation (NIO), which consists of various academics and professionals, has played a key role in organising the NPP.

In 2015, the JVP and the various formations and individuals that now make up the NPP, supported US-backed Maithripala Sirisena in the presidential elections. They rallied behind Sirisena in an attempt to divert the mass opposition to the crimes committed by the Rajapakse government in its war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the escalating nationwide attacks on democratic rights and living conditions.

The JVP and its supporters gave credence to claims by Sirisena and his UNP backers that they would establish “good governance” and improve living conditions for Sri Lankan workers and the poor.

Sirisena and the UNP-led government quickly dropped those promises, slavishly implementing the International Monetary Fund's policies and stepping up its assault on democratic

rights. These attacks have produced a wave of social opposition over the past two years with strikes by key sections of the working class as well as protests by students and the rural poor. The deepening social opposition has produced sharp factional conflicts within the government and a political crisis for the entire ruling class.

Some of those previously promoting Sirisena are now rallying behind the JVP and the NPP in an attempt to politically derail the mass opposition and prevent the development of an independent movement of the working class that challenges capitalist rule. The NPP, in fact, has been concocted to cover up the JVP's real political history and falsely claim that its electoral front represents “people power.”

While the large attendance at last month's Galle Face Green rally indicated the depth of popular anger and discontent with Sirisena and the UNP-led government, those seeking a genuine political alternative would have found nothing but nationalist demagoguery and empty promises.

JVP parliamentarian Dissanayake, like all other Sri Lankan bourgeois politicians, was led onto the platform by traditional drummers and repeatedly declared that he would not betray the people's hopes. His speech, which was dominated by nationalist rhetoric demagoguery, failed to mention any other political party let alone refer to “capitalism” or the “capitalist class.”

Attempting to present himself as a man of the people, Dissanayake declared: “[W]e have an understanding regarding the feelings and pains of the ordinary man and those in the higher echelons, and on the basis of that understanding this struggle will end with a victory.”

The NPP, he continued, aimed to “get rid of [the previous] outdated, failed and destructive path” and “bring the people pleasure, happiness and prosperity.” There would be a “new path” created for the Sri Lankan economy by “bringing our human resources to the world's most developed level.” This, he continued, would “bring economic benefits to the door step of the peasants, fishermen and people in the plantations.”

Dissanayake claimed there would be no discrimination on the basis of language, religion, gender. National unity, he said, would be established among different religious and ethnic groups, thus ensuring public security. “Our country”—i.e., a

Sinhala-Buddhist supremacist unitary state—would be “a dignified, proud and solid state” on the world arena.

Dissanayake failed to explain how this “prosperity” would be created. His rhetoric, however, was a pledge to the capitalist class that the NPP will impose law, order and discipline to harness Sri Lanka’s “human resources” for even greater exploitation by international capital.

Dissanayake’s claim that the NPP stands for democracy and “national unity” is a fantastic lie.

Along with its filthy historical support for Colombo’s communalist war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the JVP recently provided uncritical backing for Colombo’s state of emergency and the anti-Muslim campaign that followed the bloody April 21 Easter Sunday terrorist attack in Sri Lanka.

JVP members of parliament demanded the Muslim community and its parties reveal the whereabouts of “Islamic extremists,” effectively blaming the whole community for the terrorist attacks. The JVP was fully aware that the defence hierarchy, along with the president, prime minister and opposition leader had been warned by Indian intelligence of the impending terrorist bombings.

Addressing the Galle Face Green rally, JVP general secretary Tilwin Silva attempted to give the NPP a radical face. The electoral front, he claimed, represents leftists, the democratic camp and progressives. This movement “will not just be limited to the election but will continue until people will become victorious.”

The NPP-JVP program, which was prepared by the NIO in January, claims “to overcome the existing neo-liberal market economy and its inhuman impact... [by] taking into account the positive elements of national and international policy approaches.” These claims are a fraud.

Mired in a deepening world crisis and escalating geopolitical tensions there is no nationalist path for Sri Lanka or any other country. The real fear of the JVP and its academics is the rising opposition of the Sri Lankan and international working class.

Like their counterparts internationally, every Sri Lankan bourgeois party is moving towards police-state forms of rule in order to suppress the working class. The central debate in this year’s presidential election campaign is which faction of the ruling elite is the most suitable for this job.

As JVP propaganda secretary Vijitha Herath explained at a media briefing, the main theme of the JVP presidential candidate is “financial discipline, administrative discipline and people’s security.”

The JVP and its NPP is not a means through which the working class can fight these dangers but a barricade to block any independent political movement of the working class and pave way for a police-state dictatorship. If the JVP comes to power it would ruthlessly act like all other bourgeois formations.

Contrary to media claims, the JVP and its presidential

campaign has nothing to do with Marxism or socialism. It originated in the mid-1960s as a petty-bourgeois radical movement based on a toxic mixture of Stalinism, Maoism and Sinhala patriotism. After the Sri Lanka Freedom Party-Lanka Sama Samaja Party and the Stalinist Communist Party coalition government crushed its 1971 adventurist insurrection, killing about 15,000 youth and jailing its leaders, the JVP in 1978 made a definite shift towards bourgeois parliamentary politics.

In 1980, when state sector workers took national strike action against the then UNP regime’s attacks on living conditions through its open market economic policy, the JVP-led unions black-legged on the industrial action, declaring that “it was not a suitable time to strike.”

Along with the JVP’s decades-long support for Colombo’s communalist war, the party also launched fascistic attacks on workers and political opponents, killing hundreds during its so-called campaign against “the Indo-Lanka Accord” in 1987–1990. Those killed included three members of Revolutionary Communist League—the forerunner of Socialist Equality Party. During this time the UNP government launched a genocidal attack against the JVP killing most of its leaders and around 60,000 rural youth.

Like their petty-bourgeois counterparts internationally, the JVP is a party of Sri Lanka’s bourgeois establishment and an appendage of international capital.

Dissanayake’s three-decade political career encapsulates this transformation. He and three other JVP leaders accepted cabinet positions in a SLFP-led coalition government with former President Chandrika Kumaratunga in 2004 and helped implement IMF demands. It also functioned as an external partner of the Rajapakse government from 2005 to end of 2008. The JVP has cultivated close relations with the US and other western powers via their Colombo diplomats during this time.

In 2005, JVP leaders met with visiting US Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca, praised President Bush’s “war on terrorism” and requested US support for Colombo’s war against the LTTE. Recently US Ambassador Alaina Teplitz admitted that it was routine to meet with JVP leaders and the officials of other Sri Lankan parties. With these credentials, the JVP has high hopes that it will be regarded as a politically suitable party and an able defender of capitalist rule.

Sri Lankan workers and youth must decisively reject the JVP and its NPP electoral front and instead study the history and principled struggle for socialist internationalism waged by the Socialist Equality Party and fight for its program in the revolutionary struggles that lie ahead.



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