

Sri Lanka's JVP seeks to revive illusions in parliamentary democracy

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Amid Sri Lanka's unprecedented economic, social and political crisis, opposition Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) leader Anura Kumara Dissanayake sent a letter to President Ranil Wickremesinghe on August 12 rejecting his invitation for a discussion on the formation of an all-party government.

In his letter, Dissanayake lamented that the party's earlier proposal for an interim, all-party government had been ignored. Now, he wrote, an urgent election should be held to "create a new administration" with "a new mandate."

The JVP is not fundamentally opposed to the policies that the current government has to implement—the drastic austerity measures prescribed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Rather, the JVP's stance reflects deep fears in ruling circles that the Wickremesinghe government lacks legitimacy and will provoke a further outpouring of public opposition to the austerity agenda that it will be incapable of containing.

Wickremesinghe only became president after President Gotabaya Rajapakse fled the country in July and resigned after months of mass protests and strikes demanding he step down. Wickremesinghe, who is widely despised and is the only parliamentarian of his rump United National Party, was installed as president by a vote in the discredited parliament.

While Rajapakse was still in office, the JVP joined other opposition parties in campaigning for months for an "interim government" of all parliamentary parties to replace the tottering government. Now it is calling for an "urgent general election" in order to revive illusions in parliamentary democracy and to lend legitimacy to another capitalist government.

Like the JVP, all the major opposition parties are keeping their distance from the Wickremesinghe government. The Samagi Jana Balavegaya (SJB), Sri

Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), and the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) have all accepted Wickremesinghe's proposal for an all-party government "in principle," but have declined to directly join, and only offered support from outside.

By calling for an urgent election to install a new government with a new mandate, the JVP is simply proposing another mechanism to the ruling class to carry out the reactionary program of austerity and police state repression against any opposition.

Speaking in parliament on August 5, Dissanayake said in order not to face similar crisis in future in the country, "We should have a consistent program. We can implement such a program if we have a mandate. There will be some unpleasant decisions, some decisions that may have to conflict with the people."

What are these "unpleasant decisions" that "may have to conflict with the people"? These are nothing but the IMF austerity policies for mass sacking of public sector workers, privatisations, further inroads into essential services, such as public health and education, and further price rises by eliminating price subsidies.

Already working people are suffering extreme hardships, with many forced to limit their meals. Severe shortages and skyrocketing prices are continuing for essential items, including fuel and medicines. Power blackouts lasting hours every day are ongoing.

The JVP, however, is preoccupied with saving capitalism and bourgeois rule, not defending the working class and rural poor.

In a Swarnawahini talk show on July 11, Dissanayake said "We at the edge of a precipice. We need the help of whomever." It is not enough, he continued, to take new international loans and financial assistance, the

country has to change its “pattern of consumption... we cannot save dollars while enjoying everything.”

In a telling reference, Dissanayake cited the example of Greece, which faced a severe economic crisis beginning in 2010. “The Greek government ordered a person to spend 20 Euros a day. Only one bun, one Coca-Cola and one cigarette were allowed.”

The JVP is following the path of the pseudo-left Syriza regime in Greece which came to power in 2015 promising to oppose the austerity agenda of the IMF and European Central Bank but did the exact opposite, imposing immense hardships on workers in Greece.

The JVP was formed in 1966 as a petty-bourgeois radical organisation advocating the “armed struggle” based on a mixture of Sinhala populism, Maoism and Castroism, all of which it has long since abandoned. This Sinhala chauvinist party JVP is now completely integrated into the Colombo political establishment and helped prop up the bourgeois government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga in 2004, accepting four ministerial posts.

The JVP blames the political culture of corruption in Sri Lanka, not capitalism, for the current economic and social crisis. While significant layers of workers and youth participating in the mass protests have expressed their contempt for parliamentary democracy and all 225 members of parliament, the JVP is seeking to promote the illusion that an election and a new government would alleviate the widespread suffering of working people.

In doing so, the JVP is offering its services to the ruling class as a safety valve for mass anger and opposition. Its role is recognised in ruling circles, and not just in Sri Lanka.

The US ambassador to Colombo Julie Chung visited the JVP office and met with its leaders including Dissanayake in May. Speaking later, Chung said: “To me the JVP is a significant party. They have a growing presence. They resonate with the public during recent times... I thought it is my duty to really connect with the JVP leadership as person to person, not just as a party to the US Government.”

JVP leaders also recently met with Indian High Commissioner Gopal Baglay and New Zealand High Commissioner Michael Appleton.

Workers and youth should reject the myths promoted by the JVP that there is a solution to the social crisis

that they confront within the framework of parliament and capitalism.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) has repeatedly explained that there is no solution within the profit system and no national solution. The SEP has rejected an interim or all-party government and called on working people to take matters into their own hands by forming action committees independent of the trade unions and all bourgeois parties, including the JVP, in order to fight for their social and democratic rights.

The SEP has taken the political initiative in calling for a Democratic and Socialist Congress of workers and the rural masses based on these action committees to provide a political voice for working people in opposition to any capitalist government—interim, all-party or otherwise—and the program of austerity and repression.

The SEP has also outlined policies that to meet the pressing social needs of the masses, including the repudiation of all foreign debt, workers’ control over the production and distribution of essentials, and the seizure of the wealth of billionaires and major corporations.

The campaign for the congress will provide the basis for the political fight for a workers’ and peasants’ government to reorganise society along socialist lines as part of the struggle for socialism throughout South Asia and internationally.



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