

Sri Lanka's JVP makes bid for power to “save the country”

Pradeep Ramanyake, K. Ratnayake
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The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)-led National People's Power (NPP) coalition in Sri Lanka is holding a series of meetings around the country calling for general elections and appealing to people to vote it into power.

The NPP claims it is not like the other corrupt capitalist parties that have ruled Sri Lanka since formal independence in 1948, but is a clean organisation that can “save the country from the economic, social and cultural abyss.”

This is a political travesty. The JVP/NPP wants to “save the country” by implementing the harsh austerity program of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). However, when addressing public platforms, it hoodwinks the people by making no mention of its intention to save Sri Lankan capitalism by following the IMF's diktats.

On a *Swarnavahini* TV talk show on October 17, JVP leader Anura Kumara Disanayake stated that, as Sri Lanka had defaulted on foreign loans, “going to the IMF has become inevitable.” He said that in implementing the IMF program, “society must bear a certain cost.” His argument was that “the rule of an exemplary group,” namely his party, was needed to ensure “people will bear the cost,” namely huge job losses, spiralling inflation and the destruction of elementary social services.

The JVP emerged in the late 1960s in the wake of the great betrayal of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), which entered the bourgeois government of Prime Minister Sirima Bandaranaike in 1964. The LSSP's naked abandonment of socialist internationalism opened the door for the emergence of radical petty bourgeois groups rooted in communal politics. The JVP was based on a toxic mixture of Maoism and Castroism that combined socialistic phrase mongering and promotion of the “armed struggle” with Sinhala patriotism.

Like similar groups internationally, the JVP, over the past four decades, has given up its guns and jungle fatigues for comfortable parliamentary seats and integrated itself into the Colombo political establishment. It formed the NPP in 2015 with disparate academics, professionals, JVP-controlled trade unions and other organisations to contest the general elections in August that year. Since then, it has widened its base among this upper middle-class milieu and a layer of local businessmen.

Although the JVP/NPP criticises other parties as corrupt, the

JVP has a history of aligning with and supporting these same capitalist parties. Its reactionary nationalist perspective came to the fore in its support for the 26-year long bloody anti-Tamil communal war to entrench the domination of the Sinhala elites. Widely discredited among working people, the JVP is desperately trying to hide its past by using the NPP as a political front.

The JVP and the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), the main parliamentary opposition party, are concerned that widely despised President Ranil Wickremesinghe will not be able to contain growing mass opposition to the IMF's harsh austerity measures and are calling for new elections.

Wickremesinghe was installed anti-democratically as president by the discredited parliament, after his predecessor Gotabhaya Rajapakse fled the country on July 13 amid huge protests that began in April against unbearable living and social conditions.

The uprising involving millions of workers and poor was betrayed by the trade unions, including those controlled by the JVP and pseudo-left groups such as the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP). They directed workers behind JVP and SJB demands for an interim capitalist government and the subsequent holding of general elections.

However, a new wave of class struggle is emerging in the tea estates and public sector for higher wages, improved working conditions and in opposition to privatisation. The rural poor are protesting against rapidly deteriorating living conditions. The NPP is seeking to exploit this seething anger, with several thousand attending its meetings in various electorates.

On December 4, speaking at Mahara in the suburbs of Colombo, Disanayake said that the economy has collapsed due to open market economic policies, the taking of huge foreign loans and selling of national assets. He asked: “What should be done now?” His answers, however, provided no solutions to the social misery facing millions.

Disanayake called for a new constitution that would abolish the executive presidency and confer all powers to parliament. Police will be made free of political interference, allowing them to act according to the law, he said.

A future NPP government will appoint only a 25-member cabinet and 25 state ministers, Disanayake promised, touting

the qualifications of the academics on stage. “Fraud and corruption can be eliminated only by the NPP. We don’t have corrupt people,” he said.

The NPP is shamelessly sowing illusions that the huge social crisis facing working people can be resolved through parliament by stamping out corruption. It is not corruption that has created the economic crisis—though there is plenty of that with governments that the JVP has joined or supported—but the capitalist system itself, which the JVP and all the parliamentary parties defend to the hilt.

Dissanayake also promised to boost Sri Lanka’s world recognition and establish better diplomatic relations, “making Sri Lanka shine in the world.” Then only clean investors and wealthy entrepreneurs can be attracted to the island, he declared.

In recent months, JVP leaders have been conducting a diplomatic offensive to promote themselves to various powers as a viable alternative government that will implement the demands of imperialism and global capital.

In July, US ambassador to Colombo Julie Chung met with JVP leaders and offered effusive praise, declaring it to be “a significant party,” with “a growing presence” that “resonate[s] with the public during recent times.” She said she found the meeting “really refreshing and honest,” and concluded, “I think we have a good understanding.”

The JVP held discussions with the High Commissioners of India, Australia, the UK and New Zealand. Speaking in parliament, Dissanayake praised Bangladesh’s Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her “exemplary” diplomatic manoeuvring with major countries, indicating the JVP’s willingness to do the same.

Dissanayake announced at the Mahara meeting that the NPP will hold a forum with ex-generals and retired senior police officers on January 4. Workers and rural toilers must take this as a warning that the NPP will resort to military and police repression when it meets opposition to the austerity program it is committed to implement.

On January 24, the NPP will hold a meeting with the big business. Dissanayake stated: “A country is shining in the world if its economy is strong.” This is nothing less than a declaration that the NPP will implement the dictates of finance capital.

Speaking in parliament on November 22, Dissanayake declared that economic recovery will only take place by implementing austerity policies. “People must bear and make certain sacrifices. This can be done only under a government with a people’s mandate,” he insisted.

Speaking on a talk show in July, Dissanayake said it is not enough to keep taking foreign loans. Rather the country had to change its “pattern of consumption... we cannot save dollars while enjoying everything.”

As an example, Dissanayake held up the pseudo-left Syriza that came to power in Greece in 2015 promising to end

austerity only to implement the demands of finance capital for deep cuts to living standards. “The Greek government ordered a person to spend 20 euros a day. Only one bun, one Coca-Cola and one cigarette were allowed,” he said, indicating that the JVP would adopt similar measures.

Speaking in parliament, Dissanayake also foreshadowed the JVP’s willingness to sell off state-owned enterprises and retrench public sector workers. “There is a criticism that out of one rupee of income of the treasury 58 cents is spent for the payment of salaries and pensions,” he complained, adding that ministers filled the state administration with their supporters. “Economic reforms must be done,” he said. “We are not saying everything must be done by the state.”

Workers, the poor and young people are looking for an alternative to end the present social calamity, but the NPP/JVP—like every other capitalist party—is committed above all to saving capitalism and bourgeois rule.

As the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) has explained, there is no solution for working people within the profit system which has created the enormous economic and social calamity in Sri Lanka and internationally. The economy must be reorganised for the benefit of the majority of society by seizing control of the means of production and distribution from the hands of a tiny wealthy elite and placing them under the democratic control of workers.

That is why the SEP calls for the development of a genuine mass movement of the working class independent of all capitalist parties and the trade unions. This requires the building of independent action committees by workers in every workplace and neighborhood. Action committees must be built in rural areas among the oppressed rural masses.

The SEP is calling for the convening of a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and the Rural Masses based on delegates from these action committees. It would serve as a strategic centre for mobilising workers and the rural masses to fight the government’s austerity policies. What is needed is a workers’ and peasants’ government to implement socialist policies as part of the struggle for international socialism.

We urge workers, youth and intellectuals to join the SEP and fight for this revolutionary program.



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