

Sri Lankan university student union prepares another reactionary alliance with opposition parties

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Under the pretext of jointly fighting the repressive policies of the Wickremesinghe government and its attacks on social and democratic rights, the Inter-University Student Federation (IUSF) leadership has been holding high-level discussions with Sri Lanka's capitalist opposition parties and the trade union bureaucracies.

Since early February, IUSF leaders have met with the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) and the National People's Power (NPP)—the electoral front of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)—as well as several splinter groups from the ruling Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) and the pseudo-left United Socialist Party (USP). On Sunday, IUSF convener Madhushan Chandrajith said that the organisation also planned to hold discussions with the New Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party, a Maoist group, and several trade unions.

The IUSF is controlled by the fake-left Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), an offshoot of the JVP. It was formed just over a decade ago as the JVP was being rejected by increasing numbers of workers and youth because of its support for successive Sri Lankan governments and their bloody 26-year anti-Tamil communal war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Current FSP leaders, then JVP members, fully backed Colombo's anti-working class and communalist policies. The establishment of the FSP was not a political break with JVP's policies but a continuation of the same agenda, garbed in pseudo-left nationalist rhetoric.

The IUSF, which had been a student front for the JVP, shifted its allegiance to the newly formed FSP. Like the JVP, the IUSF leadership employs the same bureaucratic and anti-democratic methods to retain control of the organisation.

After meeting with the SJB and its parliament opposition leader Sajith Premadasa on February 5, IUSF convener Chandrajith told the media: "We discussed [with the opposition leader] about the recently enacted Online Safety Act [OSA], the impending Anti-Terrorism Bill, [police] Operation Justice and the problems in universities."

The IUSF proposed to the opposition parties and their trade unions that they "unite and fight against the government's repression and the crisis we are facing as a society," he said.

Presenting these corrupt and thoroughly discredited formations as champions of democratic rights, Chandrajith declared they all had a "definite task in defeating the government's attacks... Although the government had approved these new acts in parliament, we will defeat them in struggle in the street with the masses."

Chandrajith made similar remarks to the media on February 15, after discussions with Dullas Alahapperuma, leader of Freedom People's Congress, an SLPP splinter group. The IUSF has not provided any details about what really transpired in any of its closed-door discussions with these bourgeois parties and the unions.

In the face of rising opposition to its International Monetary Fund (IMF) austerity measures the Wickremesinghe government is implementing a series of wide-ranging repressive measures.

The recently enacted OSA gives it the ability to shut down social media platforms, suppress freedom of speech, and prosecute anyone criticising the government. Its Anti-Terrorism Bill, which will soon be presented to parliament, will replace the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) with even harsher measures.

At the same time, the government has unleashed Operation Justice, which it claims is a war on drugs and crime but is instead a nationwide police terror campaign against the working class and the poor.

The IUSF attempts to convince workers and students that the discredited opposition parties and pro-capitalist trade unions will fight the government is a reactionary and dangerous lie. As their political history shows, these formations are tried and tested representatives of the Sri Lankan capitalist class.

The SJB is an offshoot of Wickremesinghe's right-wing United National Party (UNP). Its leadership, who were ministers and MPs in previous UNP-led governments, are directly responsible for the bloody anti-Tamil communal war, developing and implementing previous draconian laws.

Over the past three decades the JVP has been transformed into a political party of the bourgeois establishment, aligning itself, in government or in opposition, with every Colombo regime and their communalist war against the LTTE and supporting all their repressive measures.

Notwithstanding their rhetorical denunciations of the

Wickremesinghe government, the JVP, SJB and the SLPP splinter groups are all committed to IMF austerity and will implement its brutal program and the anti-democratic laws no less ruthlessly than the current administration.

Likewise, the pseudo-left USP has previously established reactionary political alliances with Wickremesinghe, who is a deeply hated figure in the working class for his long record of anti-democratic attacks. Similarly, the trade union bureaucracies have and continue to play a major role in blocking a unified working-class movement against past and present Colombo regimes.

We warn students and the workers that the FSP and IUSF are preparing another political disaster, just as they did during the April–July 2022 mass uprising against former President Rajapakse and his government.

In 2022, the FSP and the leadership of its various front groups, including the IUSF, joined the Galle Face Green Occupation as part of the mass uprising against the government. It supported the “no politics” censorship imposed by the occupation leadership in an attempt to block any discussion of revolutionary socialist politics.

As the government crisis deepened in the weeks that followed, the FSP and the IUSF backed SJB and JVP calls for an interim regime of parliament parties to stabilise Sri Lankan parliamentary rule.

FSP-controlled trade unions joined their counterparts affiliated to the JVP, SJB and other unions to limit multi-million strong general strikes to one-day actions on April 28 and May 6 while politically disarming the working class by tying them to the campaign for an interim regime.

After President Rajapakse was forced to flee the country, the discredited parliament, relying on the treachery of the trade union leadership, supported by various fake left groups, including the FSP, elevated Wickremesinghe into the presidency, paving the way for the breakup and suppression of the mass movement.

The pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist orientation of the FSP and its IUSF was further demonstrated in the subsequent months. When the IUSF former convener Wasantha Mudalige and two other activists were detained under the PTA, the FSP and IUSF held a public rally at Hyde Park on September 16, 2022 demanding the government release the detainees.

The above-mentioned parliamentary parties and even some ruling party MPs joined the protest. One of those addressing the event was SJB chairman Sarath Fonseka, former Sri Lankan Army commander who led the final bloody operations of Colombo’s communal war against the LTTE.

IUSF and the FSP leaders also appealed to the Colombo diplomats of the major imperialist countries, including the US and UK, to call for the detainees’ release. Lawyer and FSP leader Nuwan Bopage addressed the UN Human Rights Council to call for Mudalige’s release.

In recent months, thousands of Sri Lankan workers have taken industrial action against the government’s IMF-dictated privatisation program and other regressive measures. Massive hikes in value added taxes, electricity and water tariffs have further driven up the cost of essentials and budget cuts have deepened the

crisis in public health and education, creating an intolerable situation for workers, students and the poor.

This has led to strikes and protests of hundreds of thousands of employees in health, education, railways, electricity, telecom and ports, and seen rising anger among poverty-stricken university students.

The FSP and IUSF latest campaign to “unite” capitalist parties and trade union bureaucracies is a sinister exercise in again trying to subordinate workers and youth to Sri Lanka’s parliamentary setup and its capitalist parties.

When the writer of this article asked Chandrajith for details on the IUSF’s orientation to these parties, he replied: “We will have campaigns together with the trade unions affiliated to these parties, progressives and artists.”

After it was pointed out the parliamentary parties had supported the PTA and other repressive laws, he replied: “Then with whom do you suggest students should align? Before doing anything else, we must defeat the repression. We are working for that.”

Chandrajith’s response makes clear that the IUSF and FSP oppose the mobilisation of the working class to fight the government attacks and are attempting to tie workers and youth to the existing capitalist order. His claim about settling things with the government by a “fight in the street,” is simply hot air to derail students from fighting for the mobilisation working class on a revolutionary socialist program.

Students genuinely determined to fight government attacks have joined those protest marches in thousands, facing brutal police attacks and arrests, but this, contrary to the IUSF claims, has not forced the government to change its brutal social agenda.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) urges students to reject the IUSF/FSP perspective, which is a blind alley designed to keep them trapped within the framework of the profit system, and to prevent a concerted struggle against the social disasters it creates for working people.

The IYSSE calls on students to turn to the working class, the only genuine revolutionary force that can provide leadership to all oppressed masses in the struggle defend all democratic and social rights. This fight involves a struggle against capitalism in every country.

Yet another alliance with capitalist parties and the trade bureaucracies will only perpetuate the profit system and governments that ruthlessly defend the wealthy few at the expense of working people.

We urge students to join the struggle to mobilise workers, independent of every faction of the capitalist class, trade unions and pro-capitalist fake left groups, in the fight for a workers’ and peasants’ government based on a socialist and internationalist program.

We call on university students to organise branches of the IYSSE in their respective universities and join the struggle for socialism.



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