

SEP (Sri Lanka) launches two books on the rightward evolution of the JVP

Our reporters
9 April 2024

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka held a meeting to launch two books on the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), which is vying for political power in the country in upcoming elections.

The meeting, held last Thursday at the Public Library auditorium in Colombo, was attended by about 80 party members, supporters, workers, students and youth.

The first book was the fourth Sinhala language edition of *Politics and Class Nature of Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* written by the late Keerthi Balasuriya, founding general secretary of the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), forerunner of the SEP.

The second was *The Right-wing Trajectory of Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna: A Marxist Analysis*, a collection of *World Socialist Web Site* articles on the politics of the JVP written by K. Ratnayake, the WSWS national editor in Sri Lanka. It was published in both Sinhala and Tamil languages.

Prior to the meeting, SEP and IYSSE members and supporters campaigned among the workers and students in universities and workplaces, distributing thousands of Sinhala and Tamil leaflets about the book launch and its political significance.

SEP Political Committee member Wilani Peiris, who chaired the meeting, said the two books presented a devastating exposure of the politics of the JVP from its inception. “When the JVP was formed in the late 1960s, it was based on a toxic mixture of Maoism, Castroism and Sinhala populism and postured as an opponent of imperialism,” she said.

She explained that the JVP emerged following the betrayal of Trotskyism in Sri Lanka by the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), which entered a bourgeois coalition government with the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) in 1964.

“Opportunist leaders of the international Pabloite movement, who directed this betrayal, rejected Trotskyism and the revolutionary role of the working class and promoted the ‘theory’ that Stalinism could be pushed to the left,” the speaker said.

She explained that the JVP’s program was anti-working class from its inception. “This party launched an adventurist rebellion in 1971, which was ruthlessly suppressed by the SLFP-LSSP-Stalinist CP coalition government. During this operation, police killed two RCL members and the party’s publications were banned.

“In the 1988-89 period, when JVP was launching fascist attacks in the name of opposing the Indo-Lanka accord, three RCL

members were killed by its gunmen.” Quoting from Balasuriya’s book, Peiris showed how the RCL, based on Marxism, fought to educate workers and youth on the class nature of the JVP.

IYSSE leader and SEP Political Committee member Sakuntha explained that when the JVP controlled the Inter-University Student Federation prior to 2012, they postured as champions of free education, as heroes in the fight against privatization.

“Now they are saying that the private sector should be involved in education under government regulation,” he said. “Now they say that the public service should be made smaller. That means the workers in the public sector should be laid off.

“Is this any different from [President] Wickremesinghe’s program? There is no difference. They are thus exposing their true selves. They masqueraded as anti-imperialists and leftists to deceive the public. Now they have abandoned all that and are showing their ugly capitalist faces.”

He explained, “Anura Kumara Disanayake, leader of the JVP, demands that already suffering working people change their consuming habits to ‘dedicate’ themselves to solving the economic problems of the country. In this manner, Disanayake suggests that workers and youth should shoulder the burden of the capitalist crisis.”

Final speaker K. Ratnayake began by outlining the critical international situation and warning that US imperialism, in its military drive to reassert its global domination, was dragging mankind into a catastrophic third world war. This military drive has found its expression in the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and the Zionist Israeli regime’s war of extermination against the Palestinians in Gaza with the full backing of Washington.

He said that hundreds of thousands of workers and young people had protested against Israel’s war in Gaza. Workers were also engaged in struggle to defend their social and democratic rights. Only the International Committee of the Fourth International and its sections, including the SEP in Sri Lanka, were providing a perspective to prevent the danger of war by building a unified movement of the international working class based on socialism.

The speaker explained that Sri Lanka had experienced one of the sharpest expressions of the global crisis of capitalism: “Exactly two years ago, a mass uprising erupted in Sri Lanka which lasted to July, involving millions of workers and rural poor.

“Why did such a massive movement end in failure? The government tried to take repressive measures and failed. The

opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya [SJB] and the JVP called for an interim government to promote illusions in parliament. Trade unions, supported by the fake left Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), subordinated the workers to this call by the SJB and JVP and betrayed the mass struggle,” he said.

As a result, the ruling class could conspire to elevate Wickremesinghe as president to begin implementing the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) brutal austerity measures. “Now the struggles of workers, youth and the poor are reemerging against the government’s attacks on social and democratic rights,” Ratnayake stated.

Explaining the JVP’s evolution, the speaker referred to Balasuriya’s work, explaining that its ten chapters were written to defend and develop the standpoint of the Trotskyist-Marxist program for the independent mobilisation of the working class against capitalism.

“At the time, the JVP glorified Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, Mao-Zedong and peasant guerrillaism. This organisation had nothing to do with Marxism,” he said.

Balasuriya’s work was published in 1970. Proving its assessment, just a few months later, the JVP launched an adventurist armed struggle in which around 15,000 rural youth were slaughtered by the SLFP-LSSP-CP coalition government. The JVP leaders were imprisoned.

Amid mass opposition to this repression, the JVP political prisoners were released from jail by the right-wing United National Party regime of J.R. Jayawardene, which came to power in 1977.

Ratnayake explained that the rightward turn of the JVP coincided with the globalisation of the world economy. “This sharp shift in the world economy undermined all nationalist programs. Not only the JVP, but all organisations based on nationalist programs rapidly turned to the right and abandoned their radical rhetoric.”

The Jayawardene government pursued open market economic policies seeking to transform the country into a cheap labour platform for international capital. To suppress working class resistance to its attack on basic social rights, the right-wing regime stoked anti-Tamil racialism that led to war in 1983 against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The JVP was an ardent supporter of this bloody war, from its inception to its end in May 2009, Ratnayake explained.

Exploiting the JVP’s fascistic violence against political opponents and workers, the UNP government, beginning in 1989, launched a brutal repression to suppress widespread social unrest among rural youth, massacring 60,000 and killing JVP leaders and members.

Ratnayake explained that the remaining JVP members reassembled the party in 1994 with the help of a section of the ruling class and rapidly integrated itself into the political establishment as a parliamentary party. It joined the coalition government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga in 2004, accepting four ministerial posts. Thoroughly discredited, the JVP organised the National People’s Power (NPP) in 2015 as an electoral front to resurrect its political fortunes.

“Its rightward turn has taken the sharpest form as the Sri Lankan

ruling class faces an unprecedented economic and political crisis that erupted into the open in 2022. The NPP/JVP leaders are in an all-out campaign to convince the capitalist class in Sri Lanka and the international powers, including the US, that their party is the only alternative to save capitalist rule,” the speaker said.

The JVP has cultivated close relations with all the foreign diplomats in Colombo to demonstrate that it is a respectable party that can be counted upon. US Ambassador Julie Chung has met the JVP/NPP leaders three times.

“The JVP/NPP leaders met with IMF Mission for Sri Lanka, led by its chief Peter Breuer, twice and discussed its austerity demands. If it comes to power, the JVP/NPP will implement the IMF’s brutal austerity no less ruthlessly than Wickremesinghe,” Ratnayake emphasised.

“The ruling parties as well as the opposition, including the JVP, are now engaging in an election campaign seeking to channel seething anger among workers, poor and young people into illusions in parliament. This is a conspiracy because any future regime that comes to power will not only implement the austerity agenda but will take dictatorial measures to suppress working people.

“The SEP emphasises that there is no solution for the working class within the capitalist system. Workers cannot place their faith in any of the capitalist parties, or the trade unions, whose program is war, austerity and dictatorship. Instead, the working class must intervene as an independent force with a socialist program. To this end, we are calling on workers and the rural masses to build their own democratically-elected action committees to fight for their fundamental social and democratic rights.

“We have proposed the building of a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses based on delegates elected from those action committees, as the basis for a fight to establish workers’ power and to begin the socialist reorganisation of society. Workers in Sri Lanka must unite their struggles with those of the international working class. This is the revolutionary way forward for workers and youth.”

Ratnayake called on workers and youth to join the SEP.



To contact the WWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact