

Sri Lankan President Dissanayake's JVP/NPP wins a landslide victory in parliamentary elections

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Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Disanayake's ruling Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna-led (JVP) National People's Power (NPP) alliance secured a landslide victory in Thursday's national parliamentary election.

With 159 seats, the JVP/NPP will have a two-thirds majority in the incoming 225-member parliament, giving it the legal power to make good on its pledge to amend the constitution unhindered by any parliamentary opposition.

The Sri Lankan and international press characterize the JVP/NPP as "left-wing" or "socialist," and frequently term Disanayake, who heads both the JVP and NPP, as a "Marxist." These are lies. The JVP, which set up the NPP as a broader front in 2019, is a right-wing, pro-imperialist party, which has been steeped in Sri Lankan nationalism and Sinhala chauvinism since its emergence in the 1960s.

In the 2019 presidential election, Disanayake won just 3.1 percent of the vote, and in the last parliamentary election, held in August 2020 amid the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the JVP/NPP won only 3 seats and 445,958 votes.

Yet in September, Disanayake was swept into the presidency. He and the JVP/NPP exploited a tidal wave of popular anger against the traditional political establishment, whose ruinous capitalist policies have plunged the country into a devastating, ongoing socio-economic crisis.

No sooner did Disanayake assume office, than he used the sweeping powers of the executive presidency to call a snap election for November 14. In doing so, he urged Sri Lankans to elect a "strong" JVP-NPP government. This he argued was needed to root out corruption and pursue the JVP/NPP's plans for a "national renaissance." In reality, Disanayake and his JVP/NPP wanted to strengthen their hand against Sri Lanka's workers and toilers before imposing the savage austerity measures dictated by the IMF.

Sri Lankan voters traditionally reward the party of the victor of the presidential election with increased support in the subsequent parliamentary election.

Nevertheless, the increase in the support for the JVP/NPP between the presidential and parliamentary polls is marked. In Thursday's parliamentary election, the JVP/NPP received 6,863,186 votes—that is over 1.2 million more votes than Disanayake polled in winning the presidency. Amid an overall 10 percentage point decline in voter participation, the JVP/NPP share of the popular vote rose from 42.3 percent to 61.6 percent.

The NPP won at least a plurality of votes in 21 of the country's 22 electoral districts. In Batticaloa district in the east, the NPP came

second to the Tamil nationalist Ilangai Tamil Arasu Katchchi (ITAK).

The election results constitute an historic repudiation of the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie's traditional parties of government, which have fractured in recent years under the weight of increasing class and geopolitical tensions, and of the handful of families that have dominated them since independence.

Among the opposition parties, only the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) will have a significant number of MPs in the new parliament. With 18 percent of the vote, the SJB won 40 seats.

The National Democratic Front—the latest political vehicle of Ranil Wickremesinghe, who assumed the presidency in July 2022 after a mass popular uprising chased Gotabaya Rajapakse from power and spearheaded the implementation of IMF austerity until his defeat in the September 21 presidential election—garnered just 4 percent of the vote and 5 seats.

Both the SJB and NDF have their roots in the now all but defunct United National Party (UNP)—the right-wing, traditionally pro-US party that in 1983 launched the three-decade long anti-Tamil civil war.

From 2005 to 2022, the Rajapakse family/clique was at the center of Sri Lankan political life, with Mahinda Rajapakse serving as president from 2005 to 2015 and then his brother Gotabaya from 2019 to 2022. In Thursday's election the Rajapakse-led SLPP was limited to just 3 seats and a 3.14 percent vote share.

During the parliamentary election campaign virtually all the opposition parties, including the SJB, SLPP and Tamil and Muslim bourgeois parties, proclaimed their readiness to work "constructively" with the supposedly leftist JVP/NPP government.

In addition to the collapse in their popular support among working people, the current disarray and crisis among the traditional parties arises from the fact that powerful sections of Sri Lankan ruling class, Washington and New Delhi have concluded that at this conjuncture the "anti-establishment" JVP/NPP is the best vehicle for pushing through IMF austerity in the face of mass popular opposition.

Disanayake and the JVP/NPP, for their part, have spent years trying to win ruling class support, including through frequent meetings with the US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Julie Chung. The JVP/NPP president was quick to send a congratulatory message to the fascist US President-elect Donald Trump and to promise to work with his administration.

As it did during the presidential election, the JVP/NPP talked out of both sides of its mouth during the parliamentary election—only its lies were even more shameless.

Disanayake and the JVP/NPP have continued to claim that they

will protect the poorest sections of the population from the ravages of IMF austerity, even as they have assured the IMF that they will enforce its full program of austerity measures. These include: the privatisation/restructuring of over 400 state-owned enterprises, the destruction of hundreds of thousands of public sector jobs, further tax and rate-hikes and more cuts to vital public services like free healthcare and education.

Similarly, Dissanayake and JVP/NPP have continued to claim they will institute “democratic” reforms, even as they jettison their pledges to repeal the anti-terrorism laws and abolish the executive presidency, and announce that once they form a “strong government” strikes will be a thing of the past.

The JVP/NPP has been assisted in camouflaging its preparations for a frontal assault on the social and democratic rights of working people by the corporate media, which has painted the new government in bright colours, and by the trade unions. The latter responded to the government’s announcement that it was canceling a pay hike for 1.4 million government workers without even a whimper of protest, let alone the organization of protests and strikes.

The fake-left parties have also worked to promote the JVP/NPP government as “progressive” and susceptible to pressure from the left. The Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), having praised Dissanayake’s election as an “expression of people’s expectations,” contested the general elections under a broader front, the People’s Struggle Alliance (PSA). Indicative of its bankrupt orientation of diverting social anger into pressuring the right-wing communalist JVP/NPP government, the FSP-PSA’s principal campaign slogan was “change the opposition.”

Another element in the JVP’s victory that bears scrutiny was the sharp increase in its vote in the Tamil-majority districts. The JVP has a long and foul record of anti-Tamil incitement and violence and this has been a key factor in the close relations it has forged over decades with parts of the military-security apparatus. In the presidential elections, Tamil voters shunned the JVP/NPP, with it winning only 10 percent of the votes or less in majority Tamil districts.

But in Thursday’s election, it came first, in all but one Tamil-majority district. In Jaffna in the North, it took 25 percent of the votes; in Trincomalee in the East 42 percent, and in the Nuwara Eliya, central plantation district 42 percent.

Several factors contributed to this. These include: anger with the traditional Tamil parties, which have supported IMF austerity and one right-wing government in Colombo after another; misplaced hopes in the JVP’s promises—patently made to woo votes—to release political prisoners and return lands occupied by the military, and, last but not least, apprehensions about how Tamils will be treated if they do not “get on side” with the JVP.

While campaigning in Jaffa for the presidential election, Dissanayake explicitly warned the people of the “north,” i.e., the Tamil minority, that they would not want to be perceived as blocking the will of the Sinhalese-majority.

The Sri Lankan and international media have responded with enthusiasm to the JVP/NPP’s victory. An editorial in the Colombo-based *Daily FT* said: “In the eyes of the general public, the previous administration lacked legitimacy which seriously undermined its critical economic reform agenda. A Government which has a strong public mandate would be better positioned to get through the essential yet politically unpopular economic policies.”

There is an immense contradiction between what workers and youth expect from the JVP/NPP government, based on its “anti-establishment” image and false promises, and the pro-big business,

pro-imperialist agenda it will implement on behalf of Sri Lankan and global capital.

The JVP/NPP election victory has taken place under conditions where US imperialism, desperate to restore its world hegemony, is pursuing a policy of global war. The US-NATO instigated war with Russia, the imperialist backed-Israeli genocide in Gaza and broadening Middle Eastern war, and Washington’s military-strategic offensive against China are three fronts of this war.

The US and India, its principal South Asian ally, are determined to integrate the entire Indian Ocean Region, and especially Sri Lanka due to its proximity to key shipping lanes, into the anti-China war drive. Dissanayake has repeatedly signaled, including with his welcome last month to the head of the US Pacific Fleet, that he will continue ex-President Wickremesinghe’s moves to transform Sri Lanka into a geo-strategic bulwark against China. This is being done without any popular consultation or support.

The stage is thus set for convulsive struggles.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) warns the working class, youth and rural toilers that the JVP/NPP is a right-wing, Sinhala chauvinist capitalist party, historically based on the petty bourgeoisie, and more akin to fascism than anything to do with socialism.

The JVP/NPP will invoke its election victories to denounce any and all working class opposition to its policies as “illegitimate,” although it has no popular mandate for implementing the scorched-earth austerity measures of the IMF. Faced with mass opposition, it will employ the military-state apparatus and battery of repressive laws put in place by its predecessors to unleash police-state repression. And, true to its vile record and the reactionary “traditions” of the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie, the JVP/NPP government will whip up anti-Tamil Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism in an attempt to divide and weaken the working class.

The SEP intervened in the general and presidential elections to politically prepare the working class and oppressed mass for the impending head-on conflict with the JVP/NPP government. What is required is the development of an independent political movement of the working class, based on the building of a network of action committees, and aimed at rallying the rural poor in a joint struggle against bourgeois rule and for the establishment of a workers and peasants government in the form of a Sri Lanka-Eelam United Socialist Republic. This must be part of a broader struggle for socialism in South Asia and internationally.



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