

Sri Lankan fake-left FSP offers to aid government amid crisis over cyclone devastation

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As Cyclone Ditwah caused floods and landslides ravaging Sri Lanka, intensifying its economic and social crisis, the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) has presented proposals to the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/National People's Power (JVP/NPP) government on how to avert disastrous political consequences.

Anger is growing among the masses as heavy flooding and landslides have killed 639 people, with another 203 missing. More than two million have been affected—mostly poor villagers and workers—who face the current ruination on top of the social devastation caused by the ruling JVP/NPP's continuing IMF-dictated austerity program.

Previously, the FSP had made limited public criticisms of the government, claiming these were aimed at bringing it to the “correct path.” But since the cyclone hit on November 28, all criticism has been halted. Instead, the FSP has mobilised its cadres for relief work among flood victims under the theme “Humanism amid Disaster.” This campaign was aimed at showing solidarity with the government while exploiting rising mass anger.

People began asking: “Wasn't there a way to avert these recurring disasters? Why didn't the government warn on time?” Cyclone Ditwah was not an isolated disaster; it followed similar disasters in Southeast Asian countries.

Even after two weeks, most people have not received basic relief and are uncertain about the future, despite the government announcing various relief packages.

The fake-left FSP has stepped in to offer political support to President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's government, covering up its responsibility for the disaster and the capitalist system that produced it.

FSP leaders have previously falsely characterised the right-wing, pro-US JVP/NPP government as an “expression of the people's expectations.” The ruling JVP, mired in Sinhala chauvinism since its inception in the late 1960s, has over the last three decades thoroughly integrated itself into the Colombo political establishment. It came to power last year with its electoral front, the NPP, by exploiting mass opposition against the traditional elite parties.

Formed in 2012 by a faction that split from the JVP, the FSP postures as socialist but, in fact, it has not broken from the JVP's communal and pro-capitalist politics. It has nothing to do with socialism.

On Monday, FSP education secretary Pubudu Jayagoda, at a press conference, announced the party's “short-term proposals” to the crisis. He added that the party would prepare “long-term proposals” in the future in consultation with “experts.”

In passing, Jayagoda stated that there had been “discussion” on global warming causing such disasters. Rich countries bear responsibility for carbon-dioxide emissions, with the US accounting for 25 percent, causing global warming, he said.

However, in line with the party's pragmatic and nationalist outlook, Jayagoda delivered proposals on how to patch up the situation in Sri Lanka.

He blamed “economic development” policies of past governments for damaging the ecological system, including unplanned activities such as river sand mining and the filling of low-lying lands that took place. He noted that the Disaster Management Institute was virtually scrapped by President Gotabhaya Rajapakse in 2019.

Jayagoda also questioned why Dissanayake had continued these same policies and IMF-dictated austerity, contributing to the current crisis.

Indeed, successive governments have followed such capitalist policies, contributing immensely to recurring disasters, including the present calamity.

However, for the FSP education secretary, these are merely the result of “wrong policies.” If they had followed “correct” policies, such disasters could supposedly have been averted. Thus, the responsibility of Sri Lankan and global capitalism is covered up.

Jayagoda's “short-term proposals” included: removal of VAT on essentials; suspension of the price-increasing mechanisms for electricity, oil and gas; a one-time super-gain tax on companies with high turnover; increased state investments; and scrapping the electricity and petroleum acts that proposed to transform state-owned Ceylon Electricity Board and Petroleum Corporation into companies.

These are not proposals to mobilise the working class and the poor masses to defend their social and living conditions, but to sow illusions that the government can be pressured to take these measures. Nor are these proposals compatible with the government's commitment to implementing IMF austerity.

On December 5, just a week after Ditwah hit the country, Dissanayake categorically assured parliament that his government

would not withdraw from the IMF program but work according to its “parameters”—that is, continue austerity, the restructure of state institutions, cut fiscal spending and repay foreign debts. He added that the government would seek \$US200 million more through the IMF’s Rapid Disbursement Program.

Dissanayake has announced various relief packages—many scheduled for release in the future—and it remains to be seen whether they will materialise. The past experience has been promises made to dissipate popular anger, but people were left alone to scramble to rebuild their lives. When the 2004 Asian tsunami killed more than 40,000 people in Sri Lanka, the majority of those affected did not receive adequate or any relief.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) insists that the working class and rural poor cannot find solutions for such disasters caused by cyclones within the capitalist system and national framework.

As WSWs wrote, “The combined impact of climate change—driven primarily by global warming—and the systematic dismantling of scientific and disaster-prevention infrastructure by successive governments” produce such disasters.

The current disaster has sharply brought home the fact that workers and youth need an internationalist and socialist solution for the disaster as well as to defend their democratic and social rights.

Jayagoda appealed to the government to dissolve its “Disaster Management Committee,” filled with state bureaucrats and the country’s richest CEOs. He proposed committees of “people’s participation” with trade union bureaucrats, civil-society figures and small and medium-scale businessmen. Such pro-IMF and pro-capitalist elements will not represent the “people” but will only assist the government in implementing its policies.

The FSP’s intervention is revealing. It acknowledges the obvious fact that the government is continuing former president Ranil Wickremesinghe’s IMF policies “even better than him.”

Yet the FSP continues to brand the JVP/NPP rule a “people’s government.” Speaking on a YouTube channel on November 7, FSP leader Kumar Gunaratnam declared: “This is a people’s government... we should not allow the old corrupt politicians again.”

This is a naked defense of the JVP/NPP government while offering flimsy criticisms to assist it in derailing mass opposition. The FSP’s service to capitalist rule is not limited to defending the ruling JVP/NPP. Whatever the political crisis for the ruling class, the FSP offered its services.

As the crisis of the Gotabhaya Rajapakse government intensified in 2020 due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, FSP leader Gunaratnam wrote to Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse on March 24, 2020. He promised support for the government’s efforts in “fighting COVID-19,” despite their “shortcomings.”

During the April–July 2022 mass uprising, the FSP, teaming up with trade union bureaucracy and capitalist parties, played its part to defend capitalist rule. It insisted: “The realistic solution [to the political crisis] is that all opposition parties in parliament establish an interim administration” to work with the “protest groups outside parliament” until an election “be held soon.” The FSP was prominent among these protest groups outside parliament.

The meaning was plain: the FSP was preparing to be a partner

with discredited capitalist parties in an “interim regime.” The JVP/NPP and the Samagi Jana Balawegaya also made the same proposal.

This manipulation—assisted by the FSP—allowed the discredited parliament to elect the notorious pro-IMF, pro-US figure Ranil Wickremesinghe as president, a figure with no popular support.

In his comments this week, Jayagoda also proposed using the cyclone crisis to renegotiate the existing debt-restructuring agreements with international creditors. He said the government failed to bargain hard with the IMF.

The FSP has said for the time being it is keeping its “Exit IMF” program aside. This program proposes avoiding the IMF by negotiating directly with creditors. It insists that no “illegitimate loans” be paid, and proposes to plead for a “fair haircut” and extended repayment timelines.

The core purpose of this program is to assure international finance capital that debts will be repaid. The FSP proposals reveal its pro-imperialist and pro-capitalist stance.

In contrast to the FSP’s craven policies, the SEP opposes the repayment of all foreign loans, both “legitimate” and “illegitimate.” Workers and the poor are not responsible for the massive debts, taken over decades for the benefit of the capitalist elite and the 26-year anti-Tamil communal war.

We oppose the JVP/NPP’s policy of slashing living conditions to continue repayments and IMF austerity. In the wake of the cyclone disaster, the billions of dollars saved by refusing to pay back foreign debts should be used to rebuild the lives of the affected masses and expand social welfare.

The SEP calls on workers and youth to reject the FSP’s pro-capitalist program and join our struggle to mobilise the working class independent of all capitalist parties. A major step towards the independent mobilisation of workers is to form action committees in every workplace independent from trade union bureaucracies and parties of political establishment. We have proposed that the rural masses build their own action committees in their respective areas.

The cyclone disaster has shown the significance of action committees in mobilising workers and poor in common efforts to save lives, defend living standards and go beyond.

We have also called for the building of a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Poor based on these action committees, uniting across ethnic lines, as a centre of struggle to fight for democratic and social rights based on international socialist policies and for a workers’ and peasants’ government.

Only an international socialist reorganisation of society can marshal the technological, scientific and material resources required to address global warming and protect human lives.



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