

Sri Lanka: Government May Day rallies promote lies, austerity and autocratic rule

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Amid growing anger and frustration among workers and the oppressed over its 18-month rule, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/National People's Power (JVP/NPP) held May Day rallies last week falsely posturing as defenders of the masses.

Last year, the JVP/NPP held its principal May Day rally at central Colombo's Galle Face Green, seeking to capitalise on popular illusions that still existed. This year, however, it dispersed its rallies, holding 21 at the district-level in an effort to disguise its growing unpopularity over its implementation of drastic International Monetary Fund (IMF) austerity measures.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake addressed rallies at Maharagama near Colombo and the town of Nuwara Eliya in island's main plantation district. He made no reference to the profound crisis of global capitalism that the Trump administration has compounded by launching war on Iran in its efforts to shore up US hegemony.

Instead Dissanayake boasted: "We made two types of decisions: decisions for the people and decisions aimed at reducing the privileges of the ruling class." He repeatedly declared that his administration was "a workers' government," saying that "all the decisions that have been taken in the past year and a half have been for the benefit of the working class."

His claims are a lie that will fool very few people. Dissanayake heads a capitalist government desperate to prove to the IMF that it implemented the terms of the \$3 billion emergency loan reached in the wake of the country's 2022 default. It has carried out sweeping attacks on workers and the poor, including higher taxes, cuts to price subsidies and accelerated the wholesale restructuring of state-owned enterprises.

New burdens have been imposed on the masses since the onset of the criminal US-led war on Iran. Amid the

disruption to global energy supplies, the government has boosted the prices of fuel, gas and electricity which is feeding into rising prices for all essentials. Everything the JVP/NPP has done has been to defend the profits of the corporate elite and foreign investors, and to ensure the repayment of foreign debt at the direct expense of working people.

The government has repeatedly blamed corruption, not capitalism, for the country's economic crisis. Dissanayake's speech was concentrated on the anti-corruption and anti-drug campaigns, particularly targeting past government leaders and officials.

"I assure you 2026 will go down in Sri Lanka's history as the year when corrupt individuals, fraudsters, and thieves were sent to prison," he declared. In remarks that prompted accusations of government interference with the courts, he said: "There are ten cases before the courts this May alone. Yesterday, a date was fixed for a verdict. That verdict will be delivered in May."

In reality, corruption is endemic to capitalist rule in Sri Lanka and internationally. The JVP is exploiting the issue to promote the illusion that the dramatically worsening social crisis can be solved through "clean government," while concealing the real source of workers' hardships—the profit system itself.

While outlining limited housing, education and infrastructure projects, Dissanayake ominously declared that the government "cannot be shaken for decades." The remark points to the growing authoritarian tendencies. Faced with mounting social opposition, the JVP/NPP leadership is increasingly presenting its rule as permanent and unchallengeable.

JVP general secretary Tilvin Silva made the same point explicitly at the Kalutara district May Day rally, declaring that the JVP/NPP would continue to govern

until the country was “rebuilt” and its long-term goals achieved.

Referring to the isolated protests and limited criticism of opposition parties, Silva issued a thinly veiled threat directed not so much at opposition politicians but at the working class itself. “All we have to tell them is that there will be no other governments after this government.” He made a similar remark at last year’s May Day rally.

The remarks are a warning of the increasingly authoritarian and anti-democratic character of the JVP/NPP government. The JVP has a long history of political violence and anti-working-class attacks. During the late 1980s, it carried out a fascist campaign sending its gunmen to kill workers, trade unionists and political opponents—all in the name of defending the motherland after the signing of Indo-Lanka Accord granting limited privileges to the island’s Tamil elites.

The JVP/NPP came to power in 2024 in the wake of the huge political crisis that followed the 2022 default. A mass uprising of millions compelled President Gotabaya Rajapakse to flee the country and resign. His successor Ranil Wickremesinghe signed the IMF loan deal and engendered mass opposition as he attempted to implement its austerity measures.

In a desperate attempt to stabilize bourgeois rule, significant sections of the ruling class backed the JVP/NPP which had never been in power. The JVP traded on the mass hostility to all the traditional capitalist parties as well as its petty bourgeois radical past to win the 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections.

It immediately ditched its election promises to renegotiate the IMF loan, and agreed to implement its austerity measures to the letter. Last month, the government signed a staff-level agreement to implement the remaining austerity measures, together with new burdens resulting from the war on Iran and the global crisis.

In October 2024, a senior NPP leader declared that strikes under the JVP/NPP government would become “a thing of the past,” insisting workers should merely “discuss” grievances with the government. As the onslaught against the working class has deepened, the government has increasingly resorted to police state measures against strikes and protests by workers.

The government has invoked essential services laws to criminalise strikes across key sectors, while introducing the Protection of the State from Terrorism Act (PSTA), vastly expanding state repressive powers. It also invoked essential services orders covering 15 services to curb industrial actions by workers, which continued until March.

On May 7, the government obtained parliamentary approval for the extension of draconian Emergency Regulations imposed in early December 2025 following Cyclone Ditwah. The government’s continued resort to emergency measures expresses deep fears of a repeat of the 2022 uprising as workers face intolerable conditions.

Referring to 2022, Dissanayake warned parliament on March 11 of the dangers to Sri Lanka posed by the US war on Iran: “After an economic collapse, nothing remains intact; everything comes to a standstill. Therefore, we all have a bitter recent experience of how destructive the collapse of an economy can be to the social fabric.”

The working class needs to prepare to defend its democratic and social rights based on its own methods. Workers should break politically from all capitalist parties and build their own independent action committees as the basis for a struggle for a workers’ and peasants’ government to implement socialist policies as part of the fight for international socialism.

We urge workers and youth to watch the International May Day Rally organised by the International Committee of the Fourth International and the *World Socialist Web Site*.



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