

Two years of JVP/NPP rule in Sri Lanka

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It is now two years since the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front)/National People's Power (JVP/NPP) came to power in Sri Lanka. On September 21, 2024, JVP/NPP leader Anura Kumara Disanayake won the presidential election with roughly 42 percent of the vote—a more than 12-fold increase from the 3.1 percent he had polled in the previous presidential contest in 2019. In the subsequent parliamentary election, held two months later in mid-November, the JVP/NPP, which had held just three seats in the outgoing parliament, captured a more than two-thirds majority.

Two days before the presidential election, the *World Socialist Web Site* denounced the JVP/NPP presidential campaign as “a trap for the Sri Lankan working class.” The JVP, it warned, was “a capitalist party, steeped in Sinhala chauvinism, and bitterly hostile to the working class” that had “long ago abandoned its socialist pretensions and over the past three decades ... completely integrated itself into the political establishment.”

Just two days after the election, on September 23, 2024, the WSWs warned: “Trading on its image as an ‘outsider,’ the JVP made limited promises of increased social spending, while railing against the manifest corruption of the traditional political elite...”

“All of this was utterly disingenuous. The JVP is publicly committed to working within ‘the parameters’ of the IMF bailout negotiated by [former president] Wickremesinghe.”

The political analysis and warnings made by the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) have been starkly vindicated during the past two years. Jettisoning its election promises, the JVP/NPP government has ruthlessly escalated International Monetary Fund-dictated austerity, aligned itself with US imperialism and its allies, and unleashed state repression against workers and students who have increasingly come into struggle against the government's attacks on their living conditions and cuts to education and other public services.

The JVP/NPP got elected by exploiting mass popular anger against the island's traditional parties—the United National Party (UNP), Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), their now larger offshoots, respectively the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) and the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), and the Tamil and Muslim bourgeois parties. All these parties, either by heading successive governments or supporting them, have attacked the social and democratic rights of the island's workers and toilers for decades.

Amid an unprecedented crisis of Sri Lanka capitalism and the collapse of popular support for its traditional governing parties, substantial sections of the ruling class turned to the JVP/NPP, which had never before held office, calculating that it could best enforce the socially incendiary austerity dictates of the IMF.

Two years earlier in 2022, bourgeois rule in Sri Lanka had been roiled by a mass uprising of workers, youth and rural poor, fueled by the unbearable economic and social conditions triggered by the Covid pandemic, the NATO-instigated war on Russia and the government's default on the national debt. After more than three months of mass protests and strikes, President Gotabaya Rajapakse was forced to resign and flee the country.

The JVP/NPP proved—from the standpoint of the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie and world imperialism—its fitness for higher office by the role it played in derailing and suppressing the 2022 uprising. Working in concert with the main big business opposition party, the SJB, and with the assistance of the fake-left Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) and union bureaucracies, it politically harnessed the mass movement to the existing social and political order, calling for an interim capitalist government based on the cabal of right-wing parties in parliament.

When the ruling class moved to impose the inveterate right-winger and pro-US imperialist stooge Ranil Wickremesinghe as interim president by a vote of the very MPs whose sacking the masses had been demanding, the JVP/NPP helped legitimize this anti-democratic maneuver by standing Disanayake as a candidate.

Taking advantage of the confusion among working people over the speed and ease with which their “victory” over the hated Rajapakse had been stolen from them, Wickremesinghe moved quickly to use repression to clear the streets and to negotiate, as the opposition had been demanding, an IMF “bailout.”

But the lull proved very temporary. With Wickremesinghe and his government facing mounting popular opposition and still facing the challenge of imposing the bulk of the spending cuts, tax increases, and privatization measures demanded by the IMF, powerful sections of the ruling class came to view the bringing to power of the JVP/NPP as their least-worst option in ramming through savage austerity and further integrating Colombo with the predatory agenda of US imperialism and its principal South Asian ally, India.

An instrument for imposing savage IMF austerity

Immediately after coming to power, the Disanayake government jettisoned its election promise to renegotiate the IMF bailout agreement and instead pledged to global capital that it would implement it in full.

The budgets of the past two years, presented by President Disanayake in his capacity as Finance Minister, have marked a dramatic intensification of the war on working people's living conditions.

These budgets have included savage attacks on workers' incomes and conditions. They have provided only minimal wage increases, which in no way make up for the massive decline in real wages since 2022; continued to increase the tax burden on working people; begun the restructuring/privatisation of 400 State-Owned Enterprises—a process that is meant to eliminate hundreds of thousands of jobs; and established industrial zones under a new investment act formulated to “protect investments” and ensure profit repatriation for foreign capital.

Abandoning any remnants of its past anti-imperialist rhetoric the JVP government has integrated Colombo even more closely into US military-strategic offensive against China and strengthened ties with Israel.

The government's pro-imperialist policies are exposed in its attitude towards the criminal US-Israel war on Iran. It has expressed “deep

concern” over the threat to regional stability and called for “de-escalation,” but has pointedly refused to name the aggressors—the US and Israel—or the victim of this unprovoked war of aggression—Iran.

It took the same stance over Israel’s US-backed genocidal assault on the Gaza Palestinians, calling for de-escalation and restraint, without naming the US or Israel, let alone condemning them for monumental war crimes.

The JVP/NPP made a series of election promises to the oppressed Tamil minority that predictably have proven to be a cruel hoax. These included: release of political prisoners detained during and in the immediate aftermath of the three-decade civil war, return of military-occupied lands in the war-ravaged north and east to their original owners and providing information about the disappeared (who mostly were killed by security forces).

With the aim of garnering Tamil votes, the JVP/NPP attempted in the run-up to the 2024 elections to somewhat distance itself from its long record of Sinhala chauvinism, which included providing full-throated support for the communal war throughout.

Continuation of this reactionary communal politics is clearly demonstrated in the JVP/NPP government’s steps for formal registration of the Tissa Vihaharaya, a Buddhist temple, illegally built by the military on lands seized during the war from displaced Tamil families, and the dropping of its election promises to the Tamil people.

When Dissanayake claims his government stands for “national unity” and “reconciliation,” he is using euphemisms for continued Sinhala majoritarian rule. The JVP/NPP government is vehemently opposed to any probe into the war crimes perpetrated by the military during the civil war and continues the military occupation in the north and east.

As workers have begun to resist the government’s austerity measures, it has moved swiftly to suppress opposition through police-state methods, invoking essential service orders against strikes and protests and deploying the police and military.

Growing disillusionment with the JVP-led government was first expressed in the local council election held in May 2025. Its vote fell by around 18 percentage points as compared with parliamentary election six months earlier. Fearing a further erosion of support, the JVP/NPP government has anti-democratically postponed provincial council elections.

A main prop of the government is the trade union bureaucracies. The JVP unions continue to enforce the effective ban on industrial actions they imposed in the run-up to the presidential elections as part of their party’s efforts to convince the bourgeoisie it could be entrusted with the reins of power. The other unions, meanwhile, seek to prevent, and when that proves impossible, stifle all worker action. None call for the repudiation of the IMF austerity program and the debts incurred, at the expense of working people, by successive capitalist governments, let alone call for mass industrial and political action by the working class to enforce these demands.

In early 2025, about 100,000 health workers attempted to fight cuts to their allowances, but union leaders called only limited one-day strikes, then abandoned any action altogether citing government appeals. Similarly, in August of last year postal workers struck work for one week in defiance of essential service legislation, but the union bureaucrats quickly surrendered when the government called on the military and police to break the action, ordering workers to return to work with not one of their 19 demands met.

However, opposition to IMF austerity and its JVP/NPP state enforcers continues to grow. In the recent period, thousands of farmers have held protests demanding a higher guaranteed paddy price, subsidies and other facilities for cultivation. Early in September, around 5,000 university teachers engaged in a two-day strike, and there have been strikes and protests by railway and Sevanagala Sugar factory workers and by students opposing the government’s education cuts.

As a result of its record of ruthless assault on social and democratic rights of the working people, youth and rural poor, the JVP/NPP government is facing growing popular anger. According to the latest Verité Research “Mood of the Nation” poll, the government’s approval rating has sharply dropped to roughly 50 percent in July, down from a post-election high of 65 percent last February.

In an attempt to reverse the erosion of its support among workers and the rural poor the JVP/NPP has started a series of public meetings to mark the second anniversary of its coming to power. By the end of October, Dissanayake is to have addressed meetings under the slogan, “Two years of our government—Prosperous nation” in every one of the country’s 25 districts.

Unable to point to any improvement in the living conditions of the masses, Dissanayake is doubling-down on the JVP/NPP’s attempts to blame the crisis of Sri Lanka and world capitalism on the “corruption” of the handful of elite families who since independence have led the now deeply discredited traditional governing parties. Prior to the coming to power of the JVP/NPP, Dissanayake thunders, “Sri Lanka operated as a ‘Black State’ ,” but now this is supposedly changing because of the government’s “war on corruption” and enforcement of the “rule of law.”

According to World Bank estimates, close to 22 percent of the population is mired in poverty, while 10 percent of the population lives just above the poverty line. About 39 percent of households have inadequate diets, while nearly one-third of children under five suffer from malnutrition. Public sector wages have declined by 33 percent since 2022. A recent research report, based on International Labour Organization data, placed Sri Lanka 120th among 130 countries with lowest minimum wages, below Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and India.

The bourgeoisie, for its part, can celebrate Sri Lanka as a “prosperous nation” under JVP/NPP rule. Top companies are continuously recording higher profits. John Keells Holdings, the country’s largest listed conglomerate, closed the financial year in March 2026 with a 143 percent increase in pre-tax profit. Commercial Bank, Sri Lanka’s largest private bank, reported a June-quarter 2026 profit of 17.49 billion rupees, up nearly 8 percent year-on-year.

The opposition parties all support the IMF austerity program. Their calls “not to put burdens on the masses” are a transparent fraud.

The fake-left FSP, which hailed the election of the JVP/NPP government in late 2024 as an “expression of people’s expectations”, is now criticising the government for continuing the program of its predecessors. But it continues to promote the JVP/NPP as a progressive alternative to the traditional parties of the bourgeoisie, rather than indict it as an instrument to ruthlessly enforce its rule, and urges that pressure be brought on government to follow the “correct path.”

The working class and rural toilers are on a collision course with the JVP/NPP government. Under the IMF program, it has pledged to dramatically intensify austerity and worker-exploitation so as to generate a large budgetary surplus, and by 2028 resume debt payments of \$5 billion per year. Moreover, it must do so under conditions of intensifying global economic crisis due to trade war, massive imbalances and the developing global war.

The working class must be armed with a revolutionary strategy

The 2022 uprising revealed the enormous social power of the working class, which increasingly came to the fore and dominated the mass movement that toppled Rajapakse. But its fundamental lesson is the urgency of building a revolutionary leadership in the working class based on the Trotskyist program of permanent revolution to spearhead the fight

to establish the working class' political independence and hegemony, so it can rally all the oppressed against Sri Lankan capitalism and, in conjunction with workers around the globe, world imperialism.

Only through the development of such a vanguard party, can the working class impose its own socialist solution to the capitalist crisis—one that rejects its subordination to the profit imperatives of domestic and global capital.

The program and perspective on which to build such a party and mobilize the working class and oppressed toilers was elaborated in the main resolution, "The strategy and program of the SEP in the fight against the JVP government and capitalism," unanimously adopted at the party's 4th national congress last month.

It reviews the JVP's evolution from a nationalist petty-bourgeois radical organization into a party of bourgeois rule and social counter-revolution. Exposing the claim that the JVP had once been "Marxist" or "socialist" and only later degenerated, the SEP resolution documents that from the outset the RCL/SEP was hostile to the working class. Based on an eclectic mixture of Stalinism, Maoist-Castroite guerrillaism and Sinhala populism, it advocated the subordination of the working class to the so-called "patriotic" bourgeoisie, belittled workers' economic struggles as "struggles for cups of porridge," and issued chauvinist diatribes against Tamil workers. By the 1980s, it was already functioning as an auxiliary of the bourgeoisie and its state in its full-throated support for the anti-Tamil war and defence of the unitary state.

Based on the RCL-SEP's fight for permanent revolution against the JVP, the congress resolution outlines a program of revolutionary struggle for the working class in opposition to all the parties and institutions of the bourgeoisie, including the pro-capitalist trade union apparatuses.

The SEP proposes the formation of action committees, democratically elected by workers in every workplace, plantation, and major economic centre, as the basis for mobilising workers' social power, opposing IMF austerity and building workers' independent political strength.

The SEP emphasises that there is no progressive solution for the working people within the framework of the capitalist system or the nation-state. We call for the establishment of a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses based on independent action committees of workers and rural poor to formulate a program of socialist policies and develop the fight for a workers' and peasants' government.

The SEP stresses the international character of the struggle, noting that Sri Lankan workers must unite with the international working class by coordinating their action committees with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and build it as the coordinating centre of a global fightback by workers.

The two-year record of JVP/NPP rule has comprehensively confirmed the political analysis and warnings issued by the WSWs and the SEP. Join the SEP and build it as the mass revolutionary party to lead the struggles ahead for a workers and peasants government as part of the struggle for international socialism.



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