

JVP/NPP leader in Sri Lanka pledges to impose IMF austerity

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11 September 2024

At a meeting of the Business Forum on September 4, Anura Kumara Disanayake, Sri Lankan presidential candidate of the National People's Power (NPP) led by Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), warned President Ranil Wickremesinghe to "stop trying to scare the people," by saying that the country's economy would collapse if he (Disanayake) came to power.

Wickremesinghe, also a presidential candidate, blamed Disanayake for the recent fall of the Colombo stock market, claiming investors feared that the JVP/NPP leader would discontinue the present economic program. Wickremesinghe's economic policy is to implement the harsh austerity measures dictated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The Business Forum is a group of small businessmen and industrialists organised by the NPP. In a lengthy speech, Disanayake pledged that a government under him would continue with the IMF agenda and protect all local and international investors.

In recent months, JVP/NPP leaders sometimes declared they would "renegotiate" the hated IMF program. This was purely to hoodwink workers and poor who are bitterly opposed to the austerity measures that have made deep inroads into living conditions through increased prices for essentials, tariffs and the near collapse of the public health service.

Disanayake's speech to the Business Forum put to rest any doubt that the JVP/NPP would deviate even slightly from the IMF's demands. His comments make a mockery of the description in the local and international media of the JVP as a Marxist party. It is determined to demonstrate that it is a reliable and ruthless political tool for implementing the agenda of the capitalist class.

A government of the NPP, Disanayake said, "will do nothing to destabilise the economy" and will aim

instead to stabilise, strengthen and move the economy forward. He emphatically rejected any attempt to withdraw from the IMF agreement, saying it is not "in the best interests of the people" and we "guarantee that we will not take such a step."

Disanayake accepted the IMF's targets of a budget surplus of 2.3 percent of GDP from 2025, and the reduction of the public debt-to-GDP ratio to below 98 percent by 2032, saying only that his government would discuss with the IMF ways to achieve its "given parameters."

The JVP/NPP is not only reassuring big business in Sri Lanka, but the IMF and international finance capital that it represents. Disanayake criticised Wickremesinghe and opposition Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) leader, Sajith Premadasa, from the right for making rival promises to increase public servant's wages that clearly cannot be kept within the IMF's austerity program.

Privatisation will continue, Disanayake pledged, except in a key sector such as energy due to "national security." He reassured his business audience that the JVP/NPP considers the private sector to be the "main engine of our economy." It has been "locked" by corruption, bribes and outdated laws. "We will remove them. You do enterprises, we provide facilities for them," he said.

To the applause of the crowd, the NPP presidential candidate declared: "For the first time, your interest is our interest, our interest is yours. We both are coinciding for the first time."

He lamented the state of the Sri Lankan economy, saying in 1951 South Korea was behind Sri Lanka but now it has expanded 50-fold compared to Sri Lanka. In 44 years, Sri Lanka has \$22 billion in foreign direct investment, but Vietnam received \$43 billion last year

alone. The JVP/NPP, he declared, would bring the country to that level.

The JVP/NPP claims that all of Sri Lanka's economic problems are the result of fraud and corruption. By ending "political culture of corruption," the country can be put on a sound footing with a "revival economy" based on production. Its election manifesto fancifully declares, "Rich Country! Beautiful Life!"

No reference is made to the immense global economic crisis that engulfed Sri Lanka in 2022 and forced it to default on its debts. There will be no economic paradise for working people if Dissanayake or any of the other capitalist candidates come to power. The JVP/NPP will be ruthless in heaping new economic burdens on workers and the poor and suppressing any opposition.

The JVP/NPP has already signalled it will crack down on working class struggles. Leading figure K.D. Lal Kantha declared on July 1: "We can't launch strikes as they are in conflict with masses. We have a chance to elect a government of a new model in the presidential election. Strikes are harmful to this effort."

Another leader, Nalinda Jayatissa, in an interview on July 19, made clear that class collaboration would be its watchword, stating: "After NPP/JVP forms a government, the party and the government would become one, while trade unions and managements would work together."

The JVP/NPP played a key role during the mass uprising in April-July 2022 in diverting it into safe parliamentary channels to save capitalist rule. While masses were thronging the streets in the hundreds of thousands, Dissanayake speaking in parliament on April 7 declared his party was ready to consider any proposal for an interim government as long as President Gotabhaya Rajapakse resigned.

While he now inveighs against Wickremesinghe, Dissanayake and the JVP/NPP joined hands with the SJB, with the backing of the trade unions and the fake left Frontline Socialist Party, to promote the slogan of an "interim government." That paved the way, when Rajapakse finally fled the country, for the undemocratic installation of the deeply unpopular, pro-US and pro-IMF Wickremesinghe as president.

Over the past two years, the JVP/NPP has also ensured that Wickremesinghe remained in office by

diverting the mass opposition to the government's savage austerity measures into limited and futile strikes and protests to pressure the regime to make concessions.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) candidate, Pani Wijesiriwardena, is warning the working class of the enormous dangers they face and the need to mobilise its political and industrial strength to defend social and democratic rights in opposition to all capitalist parties. Amid the deep international economic crisis, for the workers and poor there is no solution within the capitalist system and no national solutions.

The SEP calls for the building of action committees of workers in every workplace, independent of all capitalist parties and trade union bureaucracies. We are also calling on the rural masses to build action committees in their areas and to rally with the working class in struggle.

We propose the convening of a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and the Rural Masses, comprised of delegates of these action committees to discuss, decide and mobilise for the fight against the onslaught of the capitalist class and international finance capital, uniting with our international class brothers and sisters.

The SEP calls for the repudiation of all foreign debt, rejects the IMF's austerity agenda entirely and fights for socialist policies. This struggle will open the way for establishing a workers' and peasants' government and the implementation of socialist and internationalist policies.



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