

Fake-left FSP hails election of new Sri Lankan president as an expression of “people's expectations”

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The fake-left Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) is sowing illusions in Sri Lanka's new right-wing, pro-imperialist government, which is led by the Sinhala chauvinist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP—People's Liberation Front) and its electoral front, National People's Power (NPP).

At a press conference held in Colombo on September 24, FSP General Secretary Kumar Gunaratnam hailed the election of Anura Kumara Disanayake, the leader of the JVP/NPP, as Sri Lanka's president. He called it an expression of “people's expectations,” and promoted the lie that the incoming government—which is committed to imposing savage IMF austerity measures—can be pressured to the left.

Gunaratnam added that the FSP would be willing to work with the JVP/NPP government under certain conditions.

The FSP leader breathed not a word about the close relations the JVP has forged with US imperialism and India, Washington's chief regional ally, and their plans to integrate Sri Lanka even more fully into their military-strategic offensive against China.

Gunaratnam also went out of his way to promote the JVP as a bulwark of “secularism,” although it is a party steeped in anti-Tamil Sinhala chauvinism.

Disanayake was catapulted to power—he won less than 4 percent of the vote in the previous presidential election in 2019—by exploiting the mass popular anger with the traditional ruling parties and the handful of corrupt families that have dominated them.

A second key element in his victory was the JVP's assiduous courting of Sri Lankan big business, the military security establishment, and Washington and New Delhi.

Thus only hours after the polls closed, Ranil Wickremesinghe, whose unsuccessful campaign to retain the presidency was based on his record in imposing brutal IMF austerity in the face of mass opposition and shrill warnings that a JVP-led government would crash the economy, made a 180 degree turn. He declared his confidence that the JVP would “steer Sri Lanka on a path of continued growth and stability” and demonstratively embraced Disanayake as “my president.”

For his part, US President Joe Biden sent Disanayake a congratulatory message in which he enthused about their working together “to advance peace, security, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.”

Pointing to the JVP's origins in the 1960s as a petty bourgeois movement that combined Maoism, Castroism and Sinhala populism, the Sri Lankan and international media have welcomed the outcome of Sri Lanka's Sept. 21 election with headlines terming Disanayake a “leftist,” “socialist” or even “Marxist” president.

Under such conditions the first task of any genuine socialist party is to issue the sharpest warning to the working class and oppressed masses as to the right-wing, pro-imperialist character of the incoming government, and the need for the working class to politically prepare the struggle

against it.

The Frontline Socialist Party is doing the exact opposite. It is working to promote illusions in the JVP/NPP, covering up its right-wing program to build Sri Lankan capitalism, declarations of fealty to the IMF and Washington, vile record of promoting anti-Tamil chauvinism, and decades-long efforts to integrate itself into the Sri Lankan capitalist political establishment.

The FSP emerged in 2012 from a split-off from the JVP, that was occasioned by fears within a section of its leadership, particularly those at the head of its youth movement, that the JVP was increasingly discredited due to its support for and participation in a series of right-wing governments and its enthusiastic support for Colombo's racist war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

However, the FSP, true to the JVP's origins as a middle-class nationalist formation, is bitterly hostile to the independent political mobilization of the working class. It contested the presidential election, through an alliance called People's Struggle Alliance (PSA), on a pro-capitalist program, claiming that the ruling class' assault on working people's social and democratic rights can be answered on a national and capitalist basis and within the framework of electoral politics.

The JVP, the FSP and the 2022 mass uprising

At the FSP press conference, Gunaratnam claimed that the months-long 2022 mass uprising that ousted then-President Gotabhaya Rajapakse and his government ended with “a certain amount of expectations” and that “those expectations have come out through the results of this election,” that is the coming to power of Disanayake and his JVP.

This is a monstrous distortion. The new government is not the incarnation of the “expectations” of the masses. Rather it is a right-wing capitalist government that has been brought to power, with the backing of Sri Lankan and global capital, to frustrate and crush those expectations.

The JVP, like the rest of the political establishment, declared that there was no alternative to seeking an IMF bailout that is conditional on imposing sweeping attacks on working people. It has pledged to enforce the IMF austerity program, including the sell-off of hundreds of public enterprises, the elimination of hundreds of thousands of government jobs, and the imposition of punishing regressive tariff and tax increases.

The JVP was hostile to the 2022 mass uprising, which saw millions of workers, youth and rural poor join strikes and protests against skyrocketing prices, acute shortages of essential goods, and decades of austerity. It played a pivotal role in ensuring that the “expectations” of the

masses were dashed, capitalist rule restabilized, and a brutal IMF austerity program initiated.

From the very beginning, the JVP's principal concern was how to safeguard capitalist rule. Speaking in parliament on April 7, 2022, as the mass uprising was growing rapidly all over the island, Dissanayake expressed concern about the "great anarchy" which "has emerged in the country." He appealed to his fellow right-wing bourgeois parliamentarians to work with the JVP to "find a way out to contain the situation of this country, bring it to some peaceful position, establish the stability in our country and resolve the crisis in the economy."

Ultimately, the JVP-led unions were forced to authorize limited strike action. But they did so with the aim of retaining control of the rank-and-file and ensuring that the mass movement did not become a working class challenge to the entire framework of capitalist politics, including its parliament and authoritarian executive presidency, and to bourgeois rule.

Objectively, the 2022 upsurge had an enormously revolutionary potential, with the masses raising slogans, such as "no to the 225" (a reference to all the members of parliament), that called into question the entire bourgeois order.

But it lacked a socialist-internationalist program and was ultimately brought under control and defused through the joint efforts of the trade unions, and all those forces, including the JVP/NPP and the FSP that promoted the call for "an interim" capitalist government that would include some or all of the opposition parties.

Only the Socialist Equality Party advanced a revolutionary socialist program. It called for the repudiation of the debts incurred by the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie and its state, the confiscation of the ill-gotten wealth of the ruling class, and the building of action committees and a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and the Rural Masses to take immediate measures to secure the basic needs of the population and develop a mass movement for a workers and peasants government.

As the mass upsurge developed, Dissanayake promised that were Rajapakse removed, his party would support whatever "mechanism" the ruling class devised to stabilize its rule, "whether it is a coalition, interim rule, beyond the constitution or one in which we [the NPP] will remain outside as observers ..." True to his word, the JVP joined the main bourgeois opposition party in parliament, the SJB (Samagi Jana Balawegaya/United People's Power), in acquiescing to Rajapakse's replacement as president by the pro-US stooge Wickremesinghe and the imposition by his government of a scorched-earth program of IMF austerity.

When mass opposition erupted within the working class to the IMF austerity measures, the JVP worked to suppress it. When compelled to sanction strikes, it worked to limit and isolate them. In 2024, with the approach of the elections, the JVP unions became even more explicitly hostile to worker job action, insisting that workers should await the election of a JVP government. In all this, the FSP played a foul, auxiliary role, working to confine worker job action to isolated collective bargaining struggles and vehemently opposing the fight to unite the various worker struggles, many of them arising directly out of the IMF "restructuring," into a working class political counteroffensive.

With JVP now assuming direct responsibility for administering the capitalist state amid a revolutionary crisis rooted in a global capitalist breakdown, the FSP is working to bolster illusions in the lies Dissanayake peddled in the election campaign about increasing social spending and "renegotiating" Colombo's agreement with the IMF.

Having tried to give Dissanayake and the JVP/NPP a "progressive coloring" with his claims that their victory expresses the "expectations" of the 2022 uprising, FSP General Secretary Gunaratnam went on to declare that "popular expectations" go beyond the "economic and political program presented by [the NPP] ... Therefore, we think that this government has a huge responsibility to fulfill those popular

expectations."

All of this is aimed at politically disarming the working class, at peddling the fatal illusion that the JVP/NPP can be pressured into fulfilling "popular expectations."

The truth is the working class will be propelled into bitter conflict with the JVP/NPP government and its IMF austerity agenda. Moreover, Dissanayake and the JVP/NPP, with their repeated avowals of the need to uphold "law and order," are readying to use the anti-democratic laws passed under Wickremesinghe and his predecessors to violently suppress popular opposition.

Given Gunaratnam's favorable response to the JVP's election victory, it is hardly surprising that a journalist asked what would be the FSP's response if they were invited to work with the incoming JVP/NPP government. To this Gunaratnam said the FSP is ready to work with the government if it joins the FSP in a "journey of rejecting the IMF." This is a reference to the FSP's phony "exit-IMF" policy, which is based on the canard that less onerous terms for repaying Sri Lanka's debts could be obtained were Colombo to negotiate with international creditor countries and financial institutions rather than the IMF.

The FSP's "exit-IMF" plan would lead to the same outcome as the program of the JVP/NPP government and its predecessor, the Wickremesinghe government—making the working people pay for the huge debts incurred by successive capitalist governments at the expense of the working class and oppressed masses.

The FSP covers for the JVP/NPP's anti-Tamil communalism

One other element of the FSP press conference warrants comment.

The JVP has a long and bloody record of communalist incitement. There can be no question that as working class opposition mounts it will seek to whip up anti-Tamil chauvinism with the aim of splitting the working class. Addressing an election meeting in Jaffna, the largest city in the Tamil-majority north early last month, Dissanayake warned the Tamils not to block the will of the Sinhala-majority south for an NPP government, declaring "what type of mentality could develop among southern people if you become opponents of change when people have lined up for change in the south."

Far from alerting the working class and rural toilers to the threat represented by the JVP's Sinhala communalism, Gunaratnam seized on right-wing comments from forces aligned with the SJB to portray the JVP/NPP in glowing colours and as proponents of secularism.

Appealing to the Sinhala-Buddhist communalist right, groups aligned with the SJB have accused the JVP/NPP of wanting to make Sri Lanka a "secular state." Gunaratnam denounced this "mud slinging," praised the concept of a secular state, and suggested the JVP/NPP is committed to implementing it. Studiously avoided in all this was any discussion of how the JVP has responded to the SJB's attacks and its long history of anti-Tamil chauvinism.

Far from upholding the separation of church and state, the JVP/NPP responded to the SJB's attacks by reiterating its support for Buddhism's exalted place in Sri Lanka's constitutional order and for the unitary Sinhala-dominated capitalist state.

Speaking before a meeting of the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress in the run-up to the election, senior JVP/NPP leader and now cabinet minister Vijitha Herath declared that a Dissanayake-led government would uphold the privileged position of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. "Article 9 of our constitution ... which says: 'the republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place,'" will, Herath declared, "not be changed in any manner."

Herath then went on to declare, “The second point is: We are a political movement that has done immense sacrifices for the country’s unitary state, territorial integrity and national security. Therefore, yesterday, today and tomorrow our stance remains the same. Protecting the unitary state is our bounden duty.”

The Socialist Equality Party warns workers and youth that when the working class comes into headlong conflict with the new JVP/NPP government, the FSP will play the same treacherous role as it did in the 2022 uprising, working to block any independent political movement of the working class.

In opposition to the FSP and its promotion of the JVP/NPP government and defence of bourgeois rule, the SEP, as explained in a WSWs perspective published on September 23, will “develop the struggle to unite and mobilize the working class as an independent political power, rallying the rural masses and other oppressed behind it, to meet the blows of the incoming JVP government and advance the fight against war, IMF austerity and for social equality—that is, revolutionary socialism.”



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