

The twists and turns of the JVP

Fri, 13/04/2012 - 06:49

The Janath? Vimukthi Peramu?a, JVP, is a product of the decay of the Stalinist movement after the split between Beijing and Moscow in the early Sixties. Its founder, Rohana Wijeweera, was influenced by both Mao and Guevara and developed a strategy in which a new party, the Communist Party of Sri Lanka (Bolshevik) would mobilise the youth of the majority Sinhalese community via this militarised political front organisation.

The name, which means National Liberation Movement, expressed Wijeweera's belief that imperialism was planning to re-assert control via an Indian invasion supported by the ?Indian Tamils?, that is the descendants of those transported from India by the British to work the tea plantations.

The JVP was presented as the revolutionary alternative to the ?old left?, the Lanka Sama Samaj Party, LSSP, (Fourth International) and the Communist Party, that had entered into coalition government with Sirimavo Bandaranaike of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, SLFP, in 1964.

By 1971, Wijeweera was ready to implement his strategy. The rising began on April 5th (to honour the Paris Commune of 1871) but was crushed with ferocious barbarity by the Bandaranaike government, leaving as many as 20,000, mostly youthful, fighters dead, and as many interned.

The terrible defeat prompted a revision of the JVP's strategy. It criticised its previous positions as ?Menshevik?. The new General Secretary, Lionel Bopage, supported the right of self-determination of the Tamils and the party oriented towards the urban working class as well as the rural masses. In the late Seventies, it collaborated, briefly, with the Neva Sama Samaj Party, NSSP, the re-formed Fourth International section and other Left forces but then turned against them in the general strike of 1980, thus assisting the government in breaking the strike.

In 1983, the JVP participated in communal riots that led to the UNP government banning all the Left parties. The JVP responded by turning to guerrilla warfare against the ?threat? of Indian occupation and against the Left who supported the Tamils' rights. Some 60,000 died in their campaign, which only ended when state forces liquidated virtually the entire JVP leadership, reputedly only one survived.

Once again, a new leadership adopted a new strategy; a turn to electoral politics and alliances and renewal of working class organisations. During the Nineties, this slowly revived the party's fortunes. Once again, Sinhala chauvinism was the principal policy against a UNP government that was prepared to strike a deal with the bourgeois Tamil forces and India against the separatism of the Tamil Tigers.

In the elections of 2001, the JVP won 16 seats. In April 2004, it won 39 as part of an alliance with President Chandrika Kumaratunga's SLFP. In the Presidential election of 2005, it backed Mahinda Rajapaksa of the SLFP on an anti-Tamil programme. When Rajapaksa won that election, the JVP were rewarded with four cabinet posts and enthusiastically supported the most barbaric offensive against the North and East, which were under the control of the Tamil Tigers.

Bizarre as it might seem, there were many within the party, including in the politburo, who still saw participation in government as a prelude to revolution. Despite the Sinhala chauvinism, collaboration with Rajapaksa was not popular with working class JVP supporters. To retain their support, the party began to distance itself and, in April 2008, instructed its parliamentary fraction to vote against the Budget in order to force a general election.

However, 10 JVP MP's disobeyed and kept Rajapaksa in office. This overt split led the party to support the Head of the Army, Sarath Fonseka, when he proposed to stand against Rajapaksa in the Presidential election of 2009. This was completely thwarted by the arrest and imprisonment of their new found ally. The final act in the drama was the annihilation of the JVP in the parliamentary elections of April 2010 when they lost 70% of their seats.

It was against this background that members of the politburo led the split in the JVP that resulted in some 5,000 leaving to form the Movement for People's Struggle, MPS.

Source URL: <https://fifthinternational.org/content/twists-and-turns-jvp>