

Condemn Peradeniya University's ban on IYSSE lecture opposing IMF austerity in Sri Lanka!

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE-Sri Lanka)
3 January 2025

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE-Sri Lanka) strongly condemns the cancellation by the vice chancellor of Peradeniya University of a lecture titled “How to Fight Against the IMF Austerity Program?”

The lecture, sponsored by the Political Science Student's Association (PSSA) of the Department of Political Science, was scheduled for 3:30 p.m. yesterday. The PSSA had obtained prior approval from the department head, Professor Upul Abeyratne, and arranged for the lecture to be held in Room 86 of the Political Science Department.

However, the senior treasurer of the PSSA, Senior Lecturer Sumudu Walakulu, informed the IYSSE convener of the cancellation. Walakulu explained: “I have received a message from the Acting Vice Chancellor, through the Dean, Faculty of Arts and the Head Political Science, to revise the topic of the speech and advertise accordingly so as not to appear that the meeting challenges the government policies or else consider hereby that the above meeting be suspended immediately.”

The vice chancellor's actions are a blatant violation of the democratic rights of the PSSA, university students as a whole, and the IYSSE.

Walakulu stated that “due to the severity of the message” from senior university officials, he advised the PSSA president to cancel the event. He pointed out, however, that changing the meeting topic was at odds with PSSA's objective of making “various insights” on Sri Lanka's economic crisis available to “the university community.”

Although the IYSSE decided to postpone the meeting,

it remains committed to opposing this anti-democratic action. The IYSSE calls on students, university intellectuals, and workers to support the fight to hold this important meeting. We urge them to condemn the university authorities and government for this attack on democratic rights.

There are strong indications that the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)/National People's Power (NPP) government played a role in cancelling the lecture. According to information received, the office of Prime Minister Dr. Harini Amarasuriya, who also serves as the minister of education, had inquired about the lecture's purpose and format.

There would have been discussions at the highest levels of the JVP/NPP about the potential impact of the lecture, which aimed to address the government's commitment to implementing the International Monetary Fund's austerity program—a commitment reiterated by President Anura Kumara Dissanayake in his November 21 parliamentary policy statement.

The directive to “revise the topic of the speech... not to appear that the meeting challenges government policies” is revealing. It confirms that the government equates IMF policies with its own and is determined to suppress any challenge. The message is clear: “You may hold events, provided they do not challenge the government!” This represents an attempt to enforce total submission to the JVP/NPP regime.

The JVP/NPP came to power by exploiting mass discontent with the traditional parties dominated by corrupt elites, making false promises of “renegotiating IMF policies.” Once in power, the right-wing government categorically abandoned these promises, embracing the IMF's austerity measures.

Only the IYSSE, working with the Socialist Equality Party (SEP-Sri Lanka) and the *World Socialist Web Site*, has consistently opposed the IMF austerity program announced in March 2023 by the previous government of Ranil Wickremesinghe. The IYSSE has advanced a program, based on a socialist perspective, to mobilise the working class, rallying the rural poor and youth, including students, against these devastating policies. We call for the international unity of the working class to develop this struggle.

Since launching the campaign for this lecture, IYSSE members have received enthusiastic support from students, teachers, and non-academic staff. Many engaged in detailed discussions about the government's policies and strategies to fight the IMF austerity program.

The April–July 2022 uprising of workers and youth against the economic crisis led to the resignation and flight of President Gotabhaya Rajapakse. However, the trade union bureaucracies and pseudo-left groups, including the Frontline Socialist Party, colluded with bourgeois parties such as the JVP/NPP to block an independent movement of the working class. This betrayal allowed Ranil Wickremesinghe to become president and implement the IMF's brutal austerity program, which the Dissanayake government is now intensifying.

The approximately 400,000 university students across Sri Lanka's 17 universities are engaged in ongoing struggles against attacks on education, a lack of housing, a dire shortage of academic staff, meagre bursaries and a host of other problems.

The government fears the IYSSE's political intervention could unite students with the working class in a struggle against the suppression of social and democratic rights. This is the real reason for its intervention to block the IYSSE lecture.

We urge students, academics, non-academic workers, intellectuals, and all who cherish democratic rights to denounce the Peradeniya University authorities for banning the IYSSE lecture. We call on you to send protest letters to the university authorities, with copies to the IYSSE.

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To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact