

Students in every country have the right to free speech! Oppose the censorship of the Sri Lankan IYSSE!

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (US)
9 January 2025

The following statement was issued by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality in the United States, protesting the cancellation by Peradeniya University in Sri Lanka of an IYSSE-sponsored lecture titled “How to Fight Against the IMF Austerity Program.”

The IYSSE in the United States condemns in the strongest possible terms the ban on our comrades’ lecture at Peradeniya University in Sri Lanka. Students and youth in Sri Lanka have the right to free speech and to hear a socialist perspective on the crisis facing their country.

The Sri Lankan government, university administrators and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) do not get to dictate which political views are permissible. Workers, students and youth throughout the entire world have every right to discuss current events, government policies and political action. These are basic and necessary freedoms in a democratic society.

On January 3, the IYSSE-Sri Lanka planned to hold a lecture at Peradeniya University titled “How to Fight Against the IMF Austerity Program.” The IYSSE had obtained all proper permissions for the meeting and had been approved by the university’s Political Science Students’ Association (PSSA). At the last minute, the Acting Vice Chancellor of Peradeniya University intervened to block the meeting from being held.

According to Sumudu Walakulu, a senior lecturer and the treasurer of PSSA who informed the IYSSE of the cancellation, the Acting Vice Chancellor ordered that the IYSSE must “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 IYSSE-Sri Lanka refused to alter the topic, and as a result the meeting was canceled. Responding to the cancellation, the Sri Lankan IYSSE wrote that they “remain 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.”

Reports received by the IYSSE-Sri Lanka suggest that the decision to cancel the meeting originated from the office of Prime Minister and Minister of Education, Dr. Harini Amarasuriya. The Sri Lankan government, run by the People’s Liberation Front and National People’s Power coalition (JVP/NPP) intervened to block the meeting as it interferes with their effort to force the burden of repaying the IMF loans onto the backs of the working class.

As stated by the IYSSE-Sri Lanka, the message is clear: “You may hold events, provided they do not challenge the government!”

Given the critical importance of the topic, the IYSSE-Sri Lanka has moved the meeting to be held in the nearby city of Kandy. Our comrades are determined to fight against this censorship and to allow workers and students the opportunity to hear a socialist perspective and discuss how to combat the austerity measures being imposed on the country by the IMF.

Sri Lanka is in the midst of a major political and economic crisis. The small island country holds a debt of about \$35 billion owned mostly by international financial organizations like the IMF and the World

Bank. When Sri Lanka's foreign debt reserves dropped to just \$1.6 billion in December of 2021, then President Gotabaya Rajapakse announced a plan for major austerity measures that cut off the working class from access to vital resources like food, medicine and fuel, while imposing power cuts.

After the country's debt default in April 2022, mass strikes and demonstrations involving workers, students and the rural poor erupted. Under the threat that the demonstrations could turn revolutionary, Rajapakse resigned in an effort to dissipate the movement. His replacement, Ranil Wickremesinghe, was a well-known pro-imperialist puppet and was undemocratically installed by parliament.

As president, Wickremesinghe negotiated a deal with the IMF that would provide Sri Lanka with a bailout loan on the condition that the government impose even more savage austerity measures. The aim is to make the Sri Lankan working class a highly exploitable and lucrative source of profits for capitalist financiers.

This is the context in which the current government run by recently elected President Kumara Dissanayake of the JVP/NPP has come to power. In the 2024 Sri Lankan elections, the JVP ran on a program claiming to oppose the previous government's pro-IMF policies and pledging to renegotiate the debt bailout loan.

However, now in office the JVP/NPP government is carrying out the same right-wing policies as the previous government and is preparing to enforce the IMF's austerity plans. This will involve the raising of taxes, limiting access to electricity, and slashing all social spending, including healthcare and education.

The meeting by the IYSSE-Sri Lanka and its call for the working class to reject the austerity plan is a direct threat to the JVP/NPP government, their Sri Lankan capitalist backers and to the imperialist financiers like the IMF who are preparing the country for plunder. The banning of the meeting is not the first time the IYSSE and the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka have faced efforts to forcibly prevent workers and students from hearing their perspective.

In November 2023 two members of the SEP-Sri Lanka were attacked with clubs by Indika Perera and Suranga Piyawardena, the president and secretary respectively of the Podujana Pragathishili Sevaka Sangamaya (PPSS, People's Progressive Employees Union) which supported then President Ranil

Wickremesinghe. The SEP members were campaigning for public meetings to be held at Peradeniya University and in Colombo on the centenary of Trotskyism, addressed by SEP-US National Secretary Joseph Kishore.

Other members and sections of the IYSSE have come under similar attacks. In Ukraine, Bogdan Syrotiuk, a member of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists, which is in political solidarity with the IYSSE, was arrested and is being held in prison for his socialist political views and opposition to war. The *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) has been totally banned in Ukraine.

In September, campaigners for the IYSSE and SEP at the University of Michigan were issued citations by the university police while promoting a meeting featuring SEP presidential candidate Joseph Kishore. Throughout the US, major campuses are purging students and groups that oppose the ongoing genocide of Palestinians.

The attack on the IYSSE-Sri Lanka is part of a major right-wing shift throughout the world. In virtually every country the methods of dictatorship are being prepared to suppress all political opposition to the demands of finance capital. We call on all students, youth and workers in the United States to write statements of support demanding that Peradeniya University reverse its decision and allow the meeting to proceed.

Protest letters to the university authorities, with copies to the IYSSE, can be sent to:

To: Acting Vice Chancellor, University of Peradeniya
Email: vc@pdn.ac.lk
Cc: IYSSE
Email: iysselb@gmail.com



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact