

International statements oppose banning of IYSSE (Sri Lanka) lecture at Peradeniya University

Our correspondents

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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) has received statements from students, workers, academics and others across Sri Lanka and internationally protesting Peradeniya University's anti-democratic ban of a lecture that had been scheduled for January 3, entitled "How to fight against the IMF austerity program."

The lecture had been sponsored by the university's Political Science Students Association (PSSA) and permission had been given by the Head of the Political Science Department. The ban was undoubtedly instigated at the request of the new Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)/National People's Power (NPP) government, which is fully committed to imposing the IMF's austerity measures. The IYSSE has received credible information that the lecture was cancelled after the prime minister's office contacted university management about the event.

The *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) today is publishing international protest letters to the University of Peradeniya's acting vice chancellor.

Harvey Lichtman, a history teacher in New York City, described the lecture ban as "a political and anti-democratic" act.

"I am concerned because an attack in any place on the fundamental rights of free speech and inquiry necessary to education becomes a nail in the coffin of human rights everywhere, especially in this age of immense international connections for society," he stated.

Highlighting the significance of the lecture's title, Lichtman said that putting the IMF debt onto "the people of Sri Lanka is of international concern, including in my country of the United States, because

the financial and corporate elite internationally are imposing the cost of their immense speculative profits on the backs of workers and their families... all people have the right to learn and discuss these exploitive policies.

"I am aware that maintaining such undemocratic practices of censorship for present discussion reinforces censorship for all subjects, so that even opposing views that existed in the past become subject to control and suppression, making history a narrative serving only the needs of those in power."

Robert B. Livingston, an International Studies and International Relations academic from San Francisco, said that banning the lecture is "a disservice against academic inquiry, free speech, and democratic rights [and] a disagreeable stain on the duties of any authority in service of such."

Livingston explained how the impact of US foreign policies was kept from him when he was doing his Bachelor of Arts in International Studies at the University of South Carolina. He was "shielded from learning truths about US machinations that resulted in millions of innocents killed."

He called on the University of Peradeniya's acting vice chancellor to "defend your student's rights to meet and study without hindrance," by lifting the ban on the lecture immediately.

A letter from **Dr. Marc James Léger** from Montreal, Canada noted that "university students are engaged in struggles against attacks on education and the dire consequences of IMF austerity" all around the world.

The acting vice-chancellor must "respect the initiative of the IYSSE to hold meetings at Peradeniya University, with the goal of helping students

understand, and oppose if they chose to do so, the misguided political economy of the government.

“How can people’s lives be improved when the people with the best ideas and solutions are repressed by institutions?” Léger asked. “Students can determine for themselves what they think. They do not need a repressive state apparatus denying what they possibly already understand better than most.”

The **IYSSE in the United States** has issued a statement, which “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 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.”

The **IYSSE in Australia**, pledging that its university clubs will discuss the ban on the Peradeniya IYSSE event and fight to develop the opposition to it among students and youth as part of the fight to defend free speech.

“The reason that the lecture was banned is that the IYSSE’s socialist perspective articulates the interests and sentiments of broad layers of young people and the working class. We demand to know what involvement the JVP/NPP government has had in discussions around the banning of the IYSSE’s event.

“The vice chancellor’s actions are a blatant violation of the democratic rights of university students as a whole, and the IYSSE. If not overturned, the ban will set a dangerous precedent for the suppression of free speech on and off Sri Lanka’s universities. At universities across the globe, similar attempts to stifle political opposition have emerged.”

Yesterday, the IYSSE (Sri Lanka) held a successful public meeting at the Kandyan Arts Residency Hall near the university. We will report on the event in coming days.

SEP and IYSSE members and supporters campaigned among the university students, youth and workers in Kandy and at the university, distributing Sinhala and Tamil versions of an IYSSE statement opposing the university meeting ban.

Many condemned the anti-democratic measures while voicing their disgust with the JVP/NPP, which prior to its election pledged to defend freedom of expression. Numbers expressed disappointment at having voted for the JVP/NPP.

We urge students, youth, workers and all those who defend democratic rights to continue sending protest letters to the Peradeniya University authorities, with copies to the IYSSE.

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To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact