

Sri Lankan IYSSE holds meeting in Kandy on the fight against the IMF program

Our correspondents
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Last Thursday, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka held a well-attended meeting in Kandy entitled “How to fight against the IMF austerity program.”

The event was organised after the University of Peradeniya’s acting vice chancellor at the last minute banned an IYSSE meeting scheduled for January 3 with the same title. The January 3 meeting had been sponsored by the Political Science Students Association (PSSA) and was due to be held at the university’s Political Science Department.

The IYSSE immediately launched a campaign against the anti-democratic attack, publishing a statement on the *World Socialist Web Site* and rescheduling the meeting to a venue in nearby Kandy. Socialist Equality Party and IYSSE supporters distributed hundreds of copies of Sinhala and Tamil versions of the statement among workers and students at the university and in Kandy.

The university ban sparked widespread opposition from students, workers, academics and others across Sri Lanka and internationally which was reflected in the attendance of more than 50 people at Thursday’s meeting.

Thursday’s meeting was chaired by SEP Political Committee member and IYSSE representative Sakuntha Hirimuthugoda, with the main report delivered by SEP Assistant Secretary Saman Gunadasa, followed by a question-and-answer session.

Hirimuthugoda opened the meeting by explaining that the university vice chancellor’s meeting ban was in line with the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)/National People’s Power (NPP) government’s pro-IMF agenda.

The vice chancellor ordered that the IYSSE “change its theme so as not to appear that the meeting challenges the government policies” was revealing, and its message clear: “You can hold meetings, but only if they don’t challenge the government!”

Hirimuthugoda said the directive was “a forceful attempt to completely subjugate [the IYSSE] to the NPP/JVP regime. It confirms that the government equates its own policies with that of the IMF policies and is determined to suppress any challenge.”

Addressing the meeting SEP, Assistant Secretary Gunadasa explained that the JVP/NPP government’s implementation of the brutal IMF austerity measures, which had been initiated by the former Ranil Wickremesinghe government, was supported by all the capitalist parties.

“Fake lefts such as the Frontline Socialist Party [FSP],” Gunadasa said, have no fundamental differences with these social attacks. “It is ‘advising’ the government to negotiate separate deals with international creditors.”

Gunadasa reviewed how the Wickremesinghe administration government came to power following the betrayal by the trade unions, the FSP and other fake lefts of the April–July 2022 mass uprising against the then government of President Gotabhaya Rajapakse.

These organisations, he said, fully supported calls for an “interim government” by the JVP/NPP and the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), opening the way for Wickremesinghe to come to power.

These forces also insisted that “no politics” be allowed in the mass anti-government upsurge. This was designed, he continued, “to block discussion of the sort of working-class program that we are discussing today.”

Gunadasa told the audience that the IMF and the World Bank were established after World War II to “rescue” the economically vulnerable countries and prevent them from destabilising the global capitalist system. He then reviewed how the IMF in fact “rescues” the super profits of big business and international finance capital by ruthlessly devastating the lives of millions of working people.

This is now occurring in Sri Lanka, he said, through the

imposition of new taxes and higher existing taxes on workers whilst lowering taxes for big business.

This means “state expenditure on the social needs, including health and education, is lowered to the rock bottom,” he said, and is being accompanied by the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs in the public sector through the privatisation/commercialisation of over 400 state-owned enterprises.

Gunadasa then detailed the SEP’s program to defeat the government’s austerity measures and the socialist perspective that the working people must adopt. Production must be based on the needs of the working people and not the drive for super profits, he said.

“Production must be reorganised by expropriating big businesses, the banks and other major centres of economy and placing them under the democratic control of workers who direct and operate these productive forces,” he explained.

Gunadasa said that calls by the fake-left FSP for the government to negotiate loan repayment concessions with international creditors would resolve nothing for the Sri Lankan masses. The working class must fully repudiate all foreign loans and say no to the IMF austerity program. The Sri Lankan working class, he added, had to fight for these measures as a part of its struggle for a socialist perspective.

“Workers must build their organisational strength by forming action committees in their workplaces, plantations, factories and neighbourhoods, independent of all bourgeois parties and the trade union bureaucracies. The rural poor also need to form similar committees in their areas,” he said.

The perspective, he continued, was connected to the SEP’s call for a Democratic and Socialist Congress of Workers and Rural Masses and the struggle for a government of workers and peasants committed to socialist policies.

“This fight will be a part of broader struggle for socialism in South Asia and internationally in which Sri Lankan working class join with its class brothers and sisters in the region and globally, he said, and concluded by calling on workers, youth and students in attendance to join the SEP and the IYSSE.

Two questions were raised during the discussion period. One person wanted to know whether it was possible to oppose the IMF austerity measures and overcome the economic crisis. The second question was from a journalist who said he contacted the university about the IYSSE meeting ban and was told there had been no

restrictions on the meeting. When he contacted the Prime Ministers’ Office, he was told that there had been no intervention to ban the meeting.

Replying to the first question, Gunadasa stressed that the only way to fight the JVP/NPP government’s austerity measures was with a socialist program. “Workers must take the control of the factories and the big companies, which should be nationalised and brought under their control,” he said.

Gunadasa explained that the economic crisis was global in character, pointing out that the ruling classes had responded to this crisis by attacking the working class, imposing economic measures against their rivals, and dragging the whole world towards a third world war and a devastating nuclear conflict. This can only be prevented by the working class mobilised on a socialist and internationalist program, he said.

SEP Political Committee member Pani Wijesiriwardena answered the second question by citing the acting vice-chancellor’s January 3 letter to the Political Science Department head, through the Dean of the Faculty of Arts. It specifically called for a revision of “the topic of the above meeting and advertise [it] accordingly not to appear that the meeting challenges government policies or else consider hereby that above meeting is suspended immediately.”

This letter, which has been publicly circulated on social media, clearly states that the IYSSE meeting would be banned if its topic was not changed, Wijesiriwardena said. It is a clear directive that the meeting is banned because it is challenging the JVP/NPP government’s policies, he added.



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