

IYSSE/SEP (Sri Lanka) campaigns against meeting ban at Peradeniya University

Our reporters
22 January 2025

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) and the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sri Lanka held a campaign at the entrance of Peradeniya University on Tuesday against the anti-democratic ban imposed on its January 3 meeting entitled “How to fight against the IMF austerity?”

Acting Vice Chancellor Ranjith Pallegama banned the meeting which had been sponsored by the Political Science Student Association (PSSA). He instructed the head of the Department of Political Science to cancel the meeting unless the topic of meeting was changed so as “not to appear” to challenge “the government policies.”

The IYSSE statement condemning this anti-democratic action drew significant support from students, teachers and workers immediately. The ban became a national issue with comments in the establishment press and questions raised in parliament.

In a desperate attempt to prevent the issue being taken up by students, the Vice Chancellor of Peradeniya University, Terrence Madhujith, on January 15 banned all activities of the Peradeniya Student Union (PSU) and faculty unions, without giving any reason. Two days later, he ended the sweeping ban, again offering no plausible explanation.

The university authorities, however, have not lifted the ban on the IYSSE lecture.

IYSSE and SEP members campaigned on Tuesday at the Galaha junction, the main entrance to university premises, carrying placards. The slogans included: “Lift Peradeniya University’s ban on IYSSE meeting against austerity,” “Hands off freedom of speech in universities” and “Build IYSSE branches in universities.”

The campaigners distributed over a thousand copies of the latest IYSSE statement, “Sri Lanka-Peradeniya University tries to justify ban of IYSSE lecture,” both in Sinhala and Tamil languages.

The campaign attracted attention from workers, students

and others. The SEP/IYSSE literature table received special attention from university students, lecturers and workers, some of whom bought Marxist books. They strongly opposed the cancellation of the IYSSE meeting.

Tharushi, an Arts Faculty student, said that she knew about the ban on the IYSSE meeting from her friends. “As your statements and articles explain, this is an attack on freedom of speech and academic freedom.”

Referring to the Peradeniya Student Union, she added: “I am surprised to see the cold silence maintained by the student union despite the fact that this attack has broader implications for all student unions and groups inside universities and beyond.”

She explained that a number of her friends shared the same opinion, but had not come forward out of fear of intimidation. An animated discussion developed as IYSSE members particularly brought to her attention the relative academic freedom during the 1950s and 60s inside universities. She was enthusiastic to know that Trotskyists for decades have been fighting anti-Marxist tendencies, including post-modernism and Pabloism inside universities.

Danidu, from the Medical Faculty, joined the discussion, expressing his strong opposition to the cancellation of the IYSSE meeting. “Like me, there are many more students who oppose this anti-democratic action of the vice chancellor”, he said. While expressing some disappointment about the silence of student unions, he added: “However, I am not surprised by this cowardly response, because they are openly supporting the JVP/NPP [Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/National People’s Power] government which has totally abandoned their election promises after coming to power.”

He referred to the fruitless discussions of the student unions with the education minister Harini Amarasuriya, who is also prime minister, about the burning issues facing students, including hostel problems, the lack of

lecturers and lecture halls and the meager budget allocation for education. Danindu said nothing has changed in relation to those issues and the situation has only worsened.

Given the pro-IMF policies not only of the JVP/NPP government but of all previous capitalist governments, Danidu said he could understand why the topic of the IYSSE meeting on the IMF was opposed by authorities. He said while millions of workers are badly affected by IMF austerity, students also are not spared from those attacks.

Speaking about the many problems in the health sector, he said: “Now I can understand how this profit-hunting social system does not care about human lives. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, governments around the world left millions of people to their own fate. While drug companies earned huge profits, COVID has not been eradicated and is continuously taking human lives.”

A number of other students expressed their opposition to the ban on the IYSSE meeting and emphasised the importance of this campaign. SEP/IYSSE members explained the direct connection between the JVP/NPP government’s implementation of IMF austerity policies and involvement in cancelling the IYSSE lecture.

Some workers who voted for the JVP/NPP and its leader, President Anura Dissanayake, expressed their disappointment in the government saying they were lied to during the presidential and general elections a few months ago.

A small businessman expressed his opposition to the ban of the IYSSE event, adding: “Now the situation for small businessmen like me and broader masses of people is going from bad to worse because of the pro-IMF policies of the government. However, the situation with big business is totally different and they are doing well. Every government has taken loans for their own benefit and made normal people to pay for those loans.”

Chaturanga, a postal worker, said: “I oppose this anti-democratic attack banning a meeting opposed to the IMF.” He continued: “While the government promised to reduce the prices of school items including exercise books, school bags and shoes, nothing has been done. Food items are unbearable. That is how the government has made us to pay for IMF loans.” He has to work additional part-time jobs to earn enough money because of the unbearable living conditions.

A 30-year-old driver for the state agricultural department stopped to talk with IYSSE campaigners. He

is not married because he has to financially help his two brothers who are at school. In opposing the ban on the IYSSE meeting, he said the IMF austerity measures affect not only workers but students and other oppressed sections of the population.

The campaign concluded with a speech by Dehin Wasantha, an SEP central committee member and a non-academic university worker. Wasantha outlined what had happened since the ban on the IYSSE meeting and explained its broader implications. He highlighted the treacherous role played by the pro-JVP PSU and the Inter University Students Federation (IUSF) controlled by the fake-left Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), who have deliberately keep silent on this anti-democratic attack and allowed authorities to crush students’ democratic rights.

“We, the SEP/IYSSE, emphasise the fact that the revolutionary class in the society is the working class and the students must turn to that class. These student unions are totally hostile to this socialist perspective... We should strengthen this campaign within the working class.”

He called on students to build up IYSSE branches in every university. “Workers, youth, students, intellectuals, all people who care about democratic rights, should issue statements demanding the vice chancellor to lift the ban on our meeting. Read the *World Socialist Web Site* that is the voice of this struggle and introduce it to your friends.”

We also ask you to condemn the ban by Peradeniya University authorities on the IYSSE lecture. Send protest letters to the university authorities, with copies to the IYSSE.

To: Acting Vice Chancellor, University of Peradeniya
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Cc: IYSSE
Email: iysseslb@gmail.com



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)