

Support builds for international campaign against censorship by Hindu extremists

## British film director Ken Loach calls for support for Indian filmmaker Deepa Mehta

Our correspondent  
27 April 2000

Many of those attending a special screening of Ken Loach's film *Land and Freedom* in Sheffield, England on April 19 signed a *World Socialist Web Site* petition supporting Indian filmmaker Deepa Mehta.

A sustained campaign by religious extremists and other right-wing forces in India recently forced Deepa Mehta to temporarily suspend filming of her latest work, *Water*. Mehta intends to resume filming under more favourable conditions later in the year.

In late January, Hindu fundamentalists—in league with members of the state government of Uttar Pradesh led by the Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP)—wrecked her set in Varanasi, claiming that the film, about the plight of poverty-stricken widows in the 1930s, would be anti-Hindu. The thuggery resulted in \$650,000 in damages.

Filmmaker Ken Loach, who was present at the Sheffield film showing, encouraged the audience to sign, saying, "Deepa Mehta needs support from all over the world."

The screening was a special event to raise money for the Rob Dawber Mesothelioma Fund (contributions can be sent to: The Rob Dawber Mesothelioma Fund, Mark Serwotka, 39 Vivian Road, Firth Park, Sheffield, England S5 6WJ). Rob Dawber is a former British Rail track worker from Sheffield, who has written a screenplay, *The Navigators*, about the impact of rail privatisation, which Loach is due to start filming later this year. In December 1999, Dawber was diagnosed as suffering from mesothelioma, a rare form of lung cancer caused by exposure to asbestos dust, and the fund is to assist him and other sufferers.

After the showing, Loach answered questions about

the making of *Land and Freedom*. *World Socialist Web Site* reporter Barbara Slaughter addressed the audience about the attempts by Hindu nationalists to prevent Deepa Mehta from filming in India.

She said, "*Land and Freedom* is a powerful film because it is truthful. It tells the truth about the role of the Stalinists during the Spanish Civil War. This is an aspect of history that has been hidden for the past 65 years. Someone I know was in Madrid when the film was first shown there, and she attended a meeting afterwards at which young people were asking, 'Why do we not know anything about this history?'"

"I had the privilege of interviewing Jim Allen, the scriptwriter for the film, not long before he died and he told me about the problems which he and Ken Loach encountered in their efforts to get their film made. The problems were mostly a lack of financial support, which meant that time after time their plans had to be revised and narrowed down from their original artistic vision.

"In her films, Deepa Mehta tells the truth about historical issues that have been obscured for decades and this is why she is hated and feared among ruling circles in India. This is why she is attacked and vilified by the Hindu extremists and their supporters in the Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) in India. Her film sets have been destroyed and she and her actors have been physically threatened, because she dares to tell the truth.

"At the beginning of *Land and Freedom*, someone addresses a meeting of workers in Liverpool about the struggle in Spain, 'Every defeat for us is a defeat for

you.' This is as true now as it was then. We must support Deepa Mehta in her defence of artistic and democratic freedoms. I ask you to sign our petition to the Indian authorities demanding her right to make her film.”

After the meeting, over 40 people queued up to sign the petition, including students, teachers, social workers, lecturers and pensioners.

The WSWS urges readers to write letters of protest to the Indian authorities:

Atal Bihari Vajpayee  
Prime Minister of India  
South Block, Raisina Hill New Delhi, India-110 011  
Fax: 91-11-3019545 / 91-11-3016857

Shri Ram Prakash Gupta,  
Chief Minister,  
Uttar Pradesh 5,  
Kalidas Marg Lucknow, India  
Fax: 91-522-239234 / 91-522-230002  
E-mail: cmup@upindia.org & cmup@up.nic.in

Please send copies of all statements and letters of protest to the WSWS at: editor@wsws.org



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