

# Facebook deletes WSWS post on Sri Lanka

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14 November 2018

On Monday, Facebook removed a post on Sri Lanka by the *World Socialist Web Site's* official Tamil-language Facebook page. The alleged reason was violation of unspecified restrictions in Facebook's "community standards," which is no explanation at all.

The Tamil language, spoken by 74 million people, is the language of the ethnic Tamil minority in Sri Lanka and South India, as well as a large global diaspora.

The move is the latest in the crackdown on left-wing, anti-war and socialist organizations by US-based technology monopolies including Google, Facebook and Twitter. As these companies integrate themselves ever more closely into the American state apparatus, they are increasingly weaponized to promote US imperialist aims all over the world. At the center of this drive is the suppression of socialist political viewpoints.

This is not the first time that the *World Socialist Web Site's* Tamil-language Facebook page has been targeted by Facebook. On two separate occasions, Facebook removed the "share" option from public meetings promoted by the page.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has been a central target of internet censorship more broadly, with its search traffic falling by more than 75 percent after Google announced a change to its search algorithm aimed at limiting "alternative viewpoints."

Amid a deepening political crisis in Sri Lanka, the United States is seeking to exclude Chinese influence in the island country, located off the southern coast of the Indian subcontinent. The country of 21 million sits astride the world's most heavily trafficked west-bound trade route and boasts a busier port than any in the United States.

On October 26, Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena removed Ranil Wickremesinghe as prime minister and replaced him with former president Mahinda Rajapakse. Washington has made clear that the appointment of Rajapakse is unacceptable, due to his "excessively close ties to China," as the *New York Times* put it.

The modern history of Sri Lanka has been dominated by the use of communal politics by all factions of the ruling class to stoke divisions between the country's Sinhalese majority and its Tamil minority. Anti-Tamil discrimination by successive Colombo governments fueled tensions that broke out in a bloody civil war that raged between 1983 and 2009, costing more than 100,000 lives.

While every capitalist political party in Sri Lanka has sought to base itself on one or another ethnic faction, the Sri Lankan Trotskyist movement has carried out a decades-long political fight to unite Sinhalese and Tamil workers on the basis of a common socialist program.

This struggle has won the Socialist Equality Party of Sri Lanka widespread support, and the *World Socialist Web Site* has a higher per-capita readership in Sri Lanka than anywhere else in the world.

The WSWS has warned that since the brutal suppression of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in 2009, the Tamil nationalist parties have lined up ever more directly with the interests of US imperialism in the country. The article censored by Facebook explains that the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) has opposed the appointment of Rajapakse to curry favor with its American allies. It states:

"The TNA's decision to support Wickremesinghe has nothing to do with defending democracy. Rather, the organisation is pursuing the same pro-imperialist course that saw it support the US-sponsored regime-change operation that brought Sirisena and Wickremesinghe to power in 2015. That operation was aimed at installing a pro-US government in Colombo in line with Washington's war preparations against China."

The article pointed to the growing strike movement "among workers of all ethnicities in Sri Lanka," including protests by thousands of Tamil-speaking plantation workers in the days preceding the sacking of Wickremesinghe. It argued that "the only way forward is on the basis of the struggle being waged by the [Socialist Equality Party] to unify the working class of all

nationalities on a socialist and revolutionary perspective.”

While Facebook has given no explanation for the removal of the article, its motivations are self-evident. The company is not only increasingly integrated into, but more and more staffed by, current and former officials of the US intelligence agencies. These state agencies see the growing audience for international socialism as an obstacle to their efforts to exploit ethnic divisions in developing countries to further the geopolitical aims of US imperialism.

There can be no doubt that last month’s speaking tour in Sri Lanka by WWSW Editorial Board Chairman David North, which was given prime time coverage by leading media outlets in the country and was closely followed by workers, has provoked consternation in Washington.

Facebook’s action comes amid a growing demand in the Western press that the social media giant step up political censorship in developing countries, with Sri Lanka singled out in particular.

A leading role in this campaign has been played by the *New York Times*, which has published a series of articles claiming, absurdly, that freedom of expression on the internet is responsible for communal violence in developing countries, including Sri Lanka.

The *Times* complained in an April 21 front-page article that amid “Facebook’s rapid expansion in the developing world,” the company “pushes whatever content keeps users on the site longest—a potentially damaging practice in countries with weak institutions.”

In an article focused almost exclusively on Sri Lanka, the reference to “countries with weak institutions” is a euphemism for former colonies. The *Times* is implying that unless Facebook censors speech in such countries, their populations, apparently unable to control themselves, will massacre each other out of communal hatred.

The *Times*, speaking for the “Quiet Americans” of the US intelligence agencies, claims that the people of developing countries must be gagged and told what to think by American corporations to keep them from committing criminal acts. Such arguments border on open racism: a 21st century invocation of the “white man’s burden.” The only justifiable response to this neo-colonialist garbage is contempt for the hacks who churn it out.

When Sri Lanka’s Sirisena government last March temporarily shut down Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram, the *Times* lauded the move as necessary to “stem mob violence directed at its Muslim minority.”

This is yet another lie, echoing the Sri Lankan government’s self-serving justifications for censorship.

The aim of Sirisena’s shutdown of Facebook was not to prevent ethnic violence, but to cover it up. The Sri Lankan regime wanted to shut down social media in areas affected by violence largely to hush up reports of complicity in the incidents by the police and armed forces of the US-backed regime.

The well-known collusion of the army and police with fascistic rioters was a central point made in the Socialist Equality Party’s March 10 statement, “Oppose Sinhala racist violence against Muslim community in Sri Lanka.” That statement observed:

“Senior government minister Sarath Amunugama was forced to admit on Wednesday that mobs were transported from other areas and that there was evidence of the involvement of retired and active security personnel. Social media posts showed videos and photos of police special task force (STF) officers watching mobs carrying out attacks on shops and houses.”

The only perspective capable of opposing communalism and uniting workers of every nationality is that of socialist internationalism. But this is precisely the perspective that Facebook, Google and the other technology giants are intent on suppressing, because it cuts across the efforts of US imperialism to exploit communal divisions to further entrench Washington’s global dominance.

These efforts at state censorship must be opposed! The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on its readers to take up the struggle against internet censorship in the United States, in Sri Lanka and all over the world!



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**