

Amid Sri Lankan elections, YouTube censors Tamil-language WSWS posts

V. Gnana
16 July 2020

In recent weeks, YouTube has censored several podcasts of Tamil-language WSWS articles uploaded to the Tamil WSWS Facebook page via YouTube. The administrators of the Tamil WSWS Facebook page challenged each of these acts of censorship, and each video has been made publicly available again, but after several days' delay. Even though YouTube's decision to re-post each video after censoring it makes clear that the Tamil WSWS is not violating YouTube's Community Guidelines, this censorship is continuing.

YouTube has repeatedly sent the following message to the YouTube channel posting podcasts of Tamil-language WSWS articles:

“As you may know, our Community Guidelines describe which content we allow—and don't allow—on YouTube. Your video was flagged to us for review. Upon review, we've determined that it violates our guidelines and we've removed it from YouTube.”

The censored podcasts warned of the dangers of a US-led war against China in the region, of mounting police violence or of military rule in the United States or in Sri Lanka. YouTube blocked Tamil versions of these articles for several days after they were flagged by unnamed users:

- June 16: Would-be führer Trump steps up coup plotting

- June 17: The protests against police murder: The way forward

- June 22: Police violence and class rule

- June 25: India and China remain on knife edge as

war tensions continue

- July 2: Hands off the Sri Lankan Trotskyists—SEP demands military stops harassing its election candidates in Jaffna

There should be no mistake about the political significance of censoring these articles. Thousands of workers and youth follow WSWS reports and statements in Tamil via social media. YouTube censorship aims to prevent the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) of Sri Lanka from alerting Tamil-speaking workers in Sri Lanka, India and around the world in a timely fashion of the dangers they face: war, disease and police-state rule in the interests of international finance capital.

Sri Lanka's discredited political establishment is organizing an election amid a raging COVID-19 pandemic, mounting rumors of coup plots and threats by top officials to impose military rule, and growing social anger against austerity and police-state rule among working people. President Gotabaya Rajapakse has installed military officials in top state positions and demanded they be legally immune from prosecution over actions they might take.

While forces in the Sri Lankan military and state align themselves with US war threats against China, the Sri Lankan ruling class is using communal politics to try to divide Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim and other workers. The 1983-2009 Sri Lankan Civil War that erupted amid anger at anti-Tamil discrimination by successive governments in Colombo ended a decade ago. Only this year, the Rajapakse government released Sunil Ratnayake, a former sergeant and war criminal convicted of killing eight Tamil civilians, including three children.

Moreover, such crises are not unique to Sri Lanka, but are unfolding around the world—even in the United States, the world’s wealthiest and most powerful capitalist country. Workers and youth in Sri Lanka followed the US police murder of George Floyd and the Trump administration’s moves to illegally deploy the US military against the population, and Sri Lankan authorities brutally cracked down on protests against the killing. The Sri Lankan military later shot a 24-year-old Tamil man, Thiraviam Ramalingam, in Jaffna.

Sri Lankan military intelligence officials have repeatedly harassed and threatened the SEP’s election candidates in the Tamil-majority north of Sri Lanka, which is still under military occupation a decade after the end of the Civil War. They visited the SEP’s candidates, illegally demanding their information and trying to intimidate workers and youth who support the SEP’s campaign.

Under these circumstances, the dangerous implications of YouTube’s anti-democratic decision to censor Tamil WSWS podcasts are virtually self-evident.

They expose the utterly fraudulent arguments the *New York Times* gave in 2018 to justify US-based Internet firms launching mass censorship of social media in former colonial countries. It claimed that in these countries, freedom of expression online leads to communal violence. Facebook, it wrote in an article largely focused on Sri Lanka, “pushes whatever content keeps users on the site longest—a potentially damaging practice in countries with weak institutions.”

At the time, the *Times* was simply echoing self-serving arguments the Sri Lankan government used to justify shutting down Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram during mob violence against Muslims. This censorship was not aimed at halting the violence, but at covering up widespread reports that Sri Lankan police and military units were complicit in it. Even government ministers were forced to admit that retired and active Sri Lankan security personnel were involved in watching and helping transport the rioters.

Soon after, Facebook began deleting Tamil WSWS posts and preventing Facebook users from sharing them online.

The censorship of WSWS and SEP (Sri Lanka) material on this basis is reactionary and wholly unjustified. The SEP, the Sri Lankan Trotskyist

movement, has an unblemished record for decades of opposing all communal violence and working to unify the struggles of the working class, in Sri Lanka, the Indian Ocean region, and beyond, across all national and ethnic lines. It is the ruling class and the state in Sri Lanka, with which Washington and US social media companies work, that abets communal violence.

Today, as reactionary governments from Sri Lanka to Europe and America try to mobilize heavily-armed riot police and military units against strikes and protests, it is clear that Internet censorship is aimed not at preventing but at imposing police-state rule on workers internationally. The WSWS calls on its readers and supporters to share its material, take up the struggle against Internet censorship, and oppose the threats against SEP candidates in Sri Lanka.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact