

Sri Lanka: Enthusiastic student response to forthcoming IYSSE anti-war meeting at Peradeniya University

Our correspondents
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka is holding a public meeting at the University of Peradeniya titled “The Ukraine War and How to Stop It” The meeting is at 4 p.m. on Tuesday in Lecture Hall No. 86 in the Department of Political Science.

Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and IYSSE members have been campaigning at the university over the past week to build the event which is sponsored by the Political Science Association at the request of the IYSSE.

Some articles in the Colombo media accuse Russia of provoking the war while covering up the role played by the US and NATO. Other articles report on Washington’s provision of billions of dollars of military equipment and munitions to Kiev. All these articles conclude by calling for “sanity” and an end to the war.

While these political sentiments exist on Sri Lankan university campuses, students have responded to the IYSSE’s campaign, keen to discuss the US-led war against Russia in Ukraine, with many agreeing to attend the meeting.

IYSSE campaigners explained how NATO had expanded its military presence close to the Russian border over the past decades, armed Kiev to the hilt and provoked the Russian invasion. The US and other imperialist powers want to subjugate Russia with the predatory aim of grabbing its minerals and other natural resources.

The IYSSE opposes the Putin regime’s reactionary invasion of Ukraine and the US-NATO war against Russia and fights for the development of an internationally unified socialist movement of the

working class to end the bloody conflict and the descent into a devastating nuclear third world war.

Campaigners distributed hundreds of copies of the IYSSE statement “Build a mass movement to stop the Ukraine war!” and the *World Socialist Web Site* article “78th anniversary of US atomic bombing of Hiroshima: In 2023, socialism or barbarism.”

Roshika, an arts faculty student, said: “We really don’t want war. We all want freedom and the right to live. The program carried out by the IYSSE and WSWs to educate the public is extremely important and is in order to make people aware of the developing situation. I will come to the meeting and will urge other students to participate.”

Bhagya, who was with Roshika, joined the discussion, explaining that she did not realise that Ukraine accounted for 30 percent of the world’s grain production. She commented on the unaffordable increases in the cost of food, electricity, transport charges and educational equipment. “The burdens we face are part of the world crisis,” she said.

“Our parents are unable to bear the cost of our education and so many students are engaged in part-time jobs. It’s a dream to find a good job though, even if you study hard. The student unions protest against our governments, but the rulers are not changing their policies,” she added.

Bhagya also spoke about the catastrophic consequences of using nuclear weapons. “When you know about and understand the destruction to Hiroshima in Japan in 1945, it’s unthinkable what would happen in a new world war,” she said.

Two first-year science students joined the discussion but wanted to remain anonymous because of the

political restrictions imposed on new students by the student union.

“Things like the advancement of modern science and technology as well as the world’s resources should be shared equally, but we confront war and destruction of the environment and increasing economic problems,” one of the students said.

“We are first year students and cannot act without permission of the student union. We are against these kinds of restrictions,” the students explained. In the late 1970s, the Sinhala chauvinist Janata Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) took over the Inter-University Student Federation (IUSF) and used physical threats and other anti-democratic practices to maintain political control.

While the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), a factional faction split from the JVP in 2011, now dominates the IUSF, it uses the same anti-democratic methods.

Opposed to students turning to the working class with a socialist and internationalist program, the FSP falsely claims that the right to free education can be defended by pressuring Sri Lankan governments.

An engineering student explained the high and escalating cost of tertiary education. He spends about 35,000 rupees (\$US108) per month on boarding fees and other educational costs. Yet, as he pointed out, there are not enough teachers in some university faculties. Poor families cannot afford to pay the cost of a tertiary education for their children, he said.

“Only first, third and fourth year students can get university residential facilities. We are in second year and are boarded outside because university hostels facilities are limited.

“The cost of a low-quality meal of rice with lentils and two vegetables is 60 rupees and if you want a piece of fish then you must pay extra. Some of our friends share one meal. There are no proper Wi-Fi facilities for us and if we want print outs it costs lots of money,” he added.

Suranga is a Jaffna University graduate who earns his living by doing tuition classes around Peradeniya. He is originally from the Northern Province where his father works in a branch of the Irrigation Department.

“It’s American imperialism that has led these wars throughout the world, including in the Middle East, in the last few decades. Ukraine has been at war for more than a year now, but Russia is not backing down, and so the risk of using nuclear weapons is increasing,” he

said.

“It is important to educate youth and workers,” he continued, adding: “I understand that the only social force in the society capable of challenging the war is the international working class.”

Suranga condemned the war waged by successive Colombo governments against Sri Lankan Tamils. “I’ve experienced the horrors and devastation of war in our country,” he explained.

“The war in Sri Lanka did not arise from ordinary Sinhala-Tamil people—we lived together without any problems—it is the Sinhalese and Tamil leaders who fuel the racialism. And recently there have been provocations against Muslim people,” he said.

Savinda, 29, lives near Peradeniya University hoping to earn an income delivering food parcels and other goods on his motorbike. He was previously employed by Sinohydro, a Chinese construction company, but lost his job after the company stopped construction of a water project amid Sri Lanka’s economic crisis. “The world powers only think about how to rob countries and I agree that this social system should be overthrown. We need to learn about politics, international development and socialism,” he said.

Ranjith, a non-academic worker from the arts faculty, said: “I only learnt about the [Ukraine] war from the newspapers and so I thought Putin was the provocateur and that Russia was trying to invade other countries to increase its power. I didn’t have any idea why America provoked this war but now understand that one reason is to grab vital resources in Russia.”

Ranjith went on to explain the difficult economic situation he confronted. “President Wickremesinghe is imposing massive attacks on the people. Water tariffs and electricity charges have massively increased, and the cost of all other goods is skyrocketing.

“Our wages are not enough to live on, and we are wondering how to feed the children. There is a warlike situation at our homes because of economic problems we face and how we can cope with the situation,” he said.



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