

IUSF at Kelaniya University in Sri Lanka threaten physical violence against IYSSE anti-war campaigners

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The Kelaniya University Student Union (KUSU) has tried to sabotage an International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) campaign to discuss the US-led NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and Israel's murderous war on Gaza.

The KUSU leaders are members of the Inter University Student Federation (IUSF) which is controlled by the fake left Frontline Socialist Party (FSP).

The IYSSE and the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) are campaigning for an anti-war public meeting under the theme "The war in Ukraine and how to stop it" to be held at 3 p.m. on October 19 at the Colombo Public Library Auditorium.

On October 12, members of the IYSSE/SEP were distributing their leaflets and speaking to students on a public road through the university premises. At around 4.15 p.m., a group of students rushed up, saying they were members of IUSF and KUSU, and demanded the IYSSE/SEP campaigners leave immediately.

The KUSU representatives claimed the road belonged to the campus then declared there was no room for party politics at the university, only "student politics," by which they mean IUSF/FSP politics. At most campuses, IUSF leaders use outright thuggery against other political tendencies to maintain their dominance.

The IYSSE/SEP members refused to leave insisting it was their democratic right to engage in politics at universities and in public places like Wewalduwa Road. They pointed to the longstanding democratic traditions of universities allowing free political discussion—traditions that have been trampled on by the IUSF.

IUSF activists declared that if such rights were

permitted, there would be "clashes." They said they didn't care what happened in the past and threatened: "If you don't leave here within five minutes, you will see what will happen."

The KUSU leaders had already informed university security officers. To avoid a physical clash, IYSSE/SEP members shifted the campaign to the highway near the campus entrance.

We urge students at Kelaniya and other campuses to condemn the IUSF's anti-democratic actions and to defend the right of our members and students to discuss the critical political issue of imperialist war.

The incident recalls the arrest of a member of the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL), the SEP's predecessor, on the same spot in 1990. The police claimed that RCL members selling the party's newspaper, *Kamkaru Mawatha*, were trespassing into university premises.

The RCL insisted on its democratic right to campaign in a public place, which was backed at the time by many lawyers who were outraged. The court ruled in favour of the RCL member. Now, the IUSF leaders have assumed the role of the police in suppressing democratic rights.

This was not the first time the IUSF threatened physical violence against the IYSSE.

- On October 5, a KUSU/IUSF mob menaced IYSSE and SEP members campaigning for the October 19 meeting at the same place.

- On February 23, 2023, a group of IUSF activists at Jayawardenepura University threatened an IYSSE member, Sakuntha Hirimuthugoda to hand him over to the university's disciplinary authority. When two SEP members came to his defence, the same thugs tried to

physically attack them. The campus's disciplinary officer threatened to call the police.

IYSSE convener, Kapila Fernando wrote an open letter to the IUSF, the Jayawardenepura Student Union and the FSP, condemning this action. It stated:

“Your organisations, which claim that there is no space for party politics at the universities, are engaged in definite party politics, both on and off the universities. Students and everyone else, including yourselves, know very well that it is the FSP's politics.

“While your organisations are involved in party politics at the universities, you forcefully prevent other parties from doing so, especially the SEP and IYSSE which are based on proletarian internationalism. This is completely anti-democratic and deceitful.

The letter emphasized that by banning SEP/IYSSE politics in universities, the IUSF had violated the fundamental democratic right to freedom of speech.

“This anti-democratic intervention reveals not the strength of your organisations but their weakness. What you fear is that the international socialist perspective of the IYSSE will gain ground among the students as your bankrupt policies are exposed by the deepening crisis of capitalism,” it stated.

The threats of physical violence at Kelaniya University demonstrates the IUSF and its FSP mentors have not backed away. Their anti-democratic methods flow from their pro-capitalist anti-working class politics. The FSP represents the interests of the upper middle class and is hostile to the development of an independent political movement of the working class against capitalism.

The SEP/ IYSSE advances a program that represents the interests of the working class. During the campaign at the Kelaniya University, we were distributing an ICFI statement “Down with Netanyahu's government! Stop the imperialist-backed Zionist onslaught against Gaza!”

The ICFI statement declared: “The uprising in Palestine is itself part of a developing eruption of anger and opposition in the form of mass strikes and protests throughout the world. It is this social movement, guided by a consciously socialist and revolutionary program and perspective, that must be mobilized to put an end to imperialist war, inequality and all forms of oppression. This is the perspective and program of the Trotskyist Fourth International, led by the International

Committee.”

Students cannot go forward under the pro-capitalist IUSF/FSP leadership. The only way to defeat the IMF-dictated Wickremesinghe government's attacks on social rights, including public education and healthcare, and to defend democratic rights, is for students to turn to the working class and fight for socialist policies. Building an international anti-war movement of the working class is a crucial part of this struggle.

We urge students to form IYSSE branches in their respective universities to lead the struggle for this program. We urge students, youth and workers to attend the IYSSE's anti-war meeting in Colombo on October 19 as part of joining this struggle.



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