

Sri Lankan academics oppose Google censorship

By our correspondent
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Over the past week, Sri Lankan Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) teams spoke to academics and filmgoers about Google's censorship of left-wing, socialist, anti-war and progressive web sites.

Teams distributed hundreds of copies of an Open Letter from *World Socialist Web Site* chairman David North opposing Google's actions to audiences attending a recent film festival on Colombo, winning important support for the WSWS petition rejecting the anti-democratic attack on free expression.

E. Imaduwa, a retired sociology professor from the University of Colombo who had previously signed the petition, sent an email to the SEP reinforcing his support and voicing his "strongest protest" against Google's censorship.

A longtime supporter of the Trotskyist movement, Imaduwa pointed to the extensive Marxist analysis provided by the WSWS on a diverse range of subjects:

"The *World Socialist Web Site*, which I read regularly, has been massively targeted and is the most affected by Google's censorship. From its inception in 1998, this web site has published more than 60,000 articles on politics, history, science and culture in more than a dozen languages. It also provides coverage of labor struggles and social issues from a Marxist perspective. The film and theatre reviews posted on the site, which help very much to humanise society, are an attraction to readers."

Google's actions against the WSWS, the letter continued, was "political black listing," "a gross abuse of monopolistic power" and related to the giant corporation's close links to US capitalist state apparatus and the Pentagon. Imaduwa concluded by denouncing Google and demanding it end its censorship immediately.

Priyantha, a film studies scholar and lecturer at the University of Colombo's Sripali Campus, signed the online petition outside the Colombo film festival.

"I strongly oppose this censorship," he told SEP campaigners. "It's an anti-democratic measure taken by Google against freedom of expression. As [WSWS chairman David] North says in his open letter, Google cannot be allowed to decide what we should or shouldn't read. Just as we do not tolerate censorship in the field of art, so we cannot tolerate censorship in any other field.

"I saw someone telling you that he is not interested in politics anymore. Many artists hold this view because they are utterly dissatisfied and disillusioned about the established political parties. Art and politics, however, are interconnected and I always stand against the separation of art and politics.

"If someone is dissatisfied with the established parties, then he or she should seek an alternative. But then who wants to suppress these alternatives? Undoubtedly, it's the ruling class all over the world. In particular, Google's blacklisting of left-wing web sites is dictated by the American imperialists."

Perera, a private sector accountant attending the film festival, agreed with SEP campaigners that Google's censorship measures had to be seen in a broader context.

"The global capitalist system," he said, "is going through a deep crisis and the ruling classes in every country are unleashing severe attacks on social and democratic rights of the people. I have an executive position in the garment industry and know all about the measures being taken against workers in this crisis situation.

"Competition has increased unprecedentedly in the world market," he continued, "and so the company

owners want to increase productivity to maximum levels and reduce production costs to a minimum. The bosses ask us to freeze wages and increase productivity.

“And when governments also implement these sorts of attacks, workers’ opposition erupts. Thousands of workers in Bangladesh have recently been striking against these measures.

“The WSWS publishes articles on these issues in order to educate the international workers about the roots of these attacks. I think that’s why Google censors left-wing web sites, including the WSWS.”

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>