

Press release of Left Voice

Sri Lanka: Defy the Ban on May Day demonstrations!

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Press Statement of Left Voice (Sri Lanka)

The May Day celebrations have been banned, in another step in the government's crackdown on political opposition. Taking cover of the current Novel Coronavirus epidemic situation, the Army Commander has summoned political parties and stated that they have agreed not to hold May Day processions and rallies. In fact, decision-making power over May Day rests with the trade unions and workers' parties, which represent the working class, not the bourgeois political parties. Who authorised the Army Commander on behalf of the government to make this decision? This shows that the military makes important decisions in the politics of this country.

The government is in a serious political and economic crisis. At the moment, it is the policy of the government to quell anti-government protests in the name of combating COVID19. The same government is responsible for the increase in the epidemic over the last few months. PCRtests were severely curtailed, and the implementation of quarantine rules was neglected. It was in the political interest of the government to create the third wave of COVID19 in Sri Lanka.

There has been considerable public opposition to the Bill that indirectly proposes to hand-over the Colombo Port City to China, in particular. At the same time, there is an attempt in Parliament to acquit the corrupt politicians who were convicted by the courts, claiming that they are victims of political revenge by the previous government. We can consider the ban on May Day as one step to quell public opposition to such issues.

The Cabinet has decided to bring in rules to regulate social media, which has contributed to building strong public opinion against the government's repressive programme and corruption scams. Already, all state and almost all non-state media act in the interests of the government; it is through social media where sharp criticisms are made of the regime. In this situation, controlling social media shows signs of a dictatorial path. The May Day ban should be seen as a link in the chain of social media control.

We support the decision of the trade union alliance to hold a joint trade union May Day; and the decision of the Frontline Socialist Party to carry out its May Day programme. It is the responsibility of the people to take appropriate action while celebrating May Day to protect themselves from infection and ill-health. It is unacceptable for the government to impose repressive laws. The public were not restricted from moving around and gathering during the festive season; therefore the people can clearly understand the purpose for which May Day has been banned.

On the one hand, the international working class May Day should be celebrated in Sri Lanka, confronting state repression. At the same time, leftist parties and democratic organisations must

work to ensure that decision-making power over the people of this country is not vested in the state and bourgeois political parties. Therefore, we consider holding May Day this time as a political challenge which must be met by the Left and class struggle trade unions at this time.

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For the *Left Voice*

Sri Lanka