

# Sri Lankan SEP holds a public meeting to defend WikiLeaks and Julian Assange

**Our correspondents**  
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As part of the international campaign launched by the *World Socialist Web Site* in defence of WikiLeaks and its founder Julian Assange, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Students for Social Equality (ISSE) in Sri Lanka held a public meeting in Colombo on December 21.

The meeting was attended by a cross section of people from different parts of the island, including students, industrial and plantation workers, and professionals. As part of the campaign for the meeting SEP and ISSE members distributed thousands of copies of the WSWs statement “Free Julian Assange! Hands off WikiLeaks!”

Held at the Jayawardene Centre near Colombo Town Hall, the meeting was chaired by SEP political committee member Vilani Peiris and addressed by K. Ratnayake, a member of the WSWs International Editorial Board and ISSE convener Kapila Fernando.

Vilani Peiris opened the meeting by explaining the political significance of the provocations against WikiLeaks and Julian Assange, and the recent claims by Democrat and Republicans politicians and the corporate media that Assange was a “terrorist”. She said the American and international ruling classes had repudiated the most basic conceptions of democratic rights.

“The ruling elites turn these conceptions upside down,” Peiris said. “They describe the war crimes, violations of human rights and conspiracies that they have carried out in the interests of a tiny financial oligarchy as ‘democracy’ whilst labelling the exposure of these imperialist intrigues by WikiLeaks as ‘criminal’ and ‘illegal’.”

Peiris said that WikiLeaks had exposed the US government’s hypocritical “concerns” about the war crimes committed by the Sri Lankan government during of its communal war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in early 2009.

“WikiLeaks has released a secret cable sent from the US embassy in Colombo,” Peiris said, “which confirms that the Obama administration was well aware of the war crimes committed by President Mahinda Rajapakse and his associates during the final stages of the war against the LTTE. The US was complicit in these crimes and helped cover up for those

responsible.”

ISSE convenor Kapila Fernando explained that the WikiLeaks exposures were occurring in the midst of the greatest crisis facing world capitalism since 1930s. Governments all around the world, he said, were now in the process of imposing the burdens of that crisis onto the backs of the working class, students and the oppressed.

In country after country, rulers have begun attacking public education and repressing youth who oppose these measures, he said. Students fighting for free education in Sri Lanka and Britain had been confronted and attacked by state authorities using police-military methods.

Fernando explained that there was an essential interrelationship between the defence of WikiLeaks’s freedom of expression and the struggle by students to defend the right to education. Students everywhere, he said, should recognise that the hysterical campaign against WikiLeaks is an attack on fundamental rights. Students all over the world should support the campaign by the WSWs to defend WikiLeaks and Julian Assange.

SEP political committee member K. Ratnayake told the meeting that the so-called rape allegations made by two Swedish women against Julian Assange were bogus and formed part of the international campaign to silence WikiLeaks and its founder.

“The only so-called ‘crime’ committed by Julian Assange was to release documents exposing the secret diplomacy and war crimes committed by US governments, including the Obama administration and their allies,” the speaker said.

Ratnayake pointed out that the only precedent for the WikiLeaks revelations was the release of the secret diplomatic agreements between the imperialist powers following the Russian Revolution in October 1917. Leon Trotsky explained at the time: “The Russian people, and the peoples of Europe and the whole world, should learn the documentary truth about the plans forged in secret by the financiers and industrialists together with their parliamentary and diplomatic agents. ... The abolition of secret diplomacy is the primary condition for an honest, popular, truly democratic foreign policy. The Soviet Government regards it as its

duty to carry out such a policy in practice.”

The speaker pointed to the historic parallels. “Today capitalism is reeling under another breakdown and a new period has opened up. Tensions are deepening between major powers, mainly provoked by the US, while ruthless attacks are being carried out against the democratic rights and living conditions of working people. Washington’s drive to assert its strategic and economic interests is producing increasing conflicts that can only lead to disastrous wars.”

Ratnayake said the cables not only revealed ongoing US provocations against Iran but Washington’s cover-up of systematic torture being carried out by the Indian government in Kashmir. “President Obama—and prior to him, President Bush—know what is going on in Kashmir but has covered it up. This is because the US is trying to court India as a strategic partner against China,” he said.

Ratnayake noted that there had been no comment about the increasing attacks on WikiLeaks from Sri Lanka’s pseudo-radicals, such as the United Socialist Party and the Nava Sama Samaja Party, who often resort to anti-imperialist rhetoric.

The speaker explained that the WikiLeaks provided working people with essential information about how the capitalist diplomacy actually operated. “The US and other imperialist powers are fearful of WikiLeaks’ revelations,” he said, “because it has the potential to strengthen the working class and masses of ordinary people coming into struggle against them.”

Ratnayake emphasised that these struggles could only be advanced through the development of a revolutionary, socialist and internationally unified movement of the working class, and urged the audience to join and build the Socialist Equality Party, the Sri Lankan section of the International Committee of the Fourth international.

The meeting concluded with a unanimous vote for a resolution defending of WikiLeaks and Julian Assange. The resolution denounced the campaign against Assange as “a political witch-hunt by US imperialism and its allies” and noted that detention of US Army private Bradley Manning on suspicion of being the source of secret material exposing war crimes to WikiLeaks was part of that anti-democratic campaign.

“The repression against WikiLeaks, including the arrest of Assange, is a serious attack on democratic rights. It aims to not just prevent the revelation of crimes carried out by imperialist powers, including US, but to terrorise and silence anyone who dares to expose the secret deals and crimes of those governments.” The resolution concluded by explaining that the development of an international campaign to defend WikiLeaks was “a life and death issue for working class in every country.”

Several of those in attendance spoke with WSWs reporters after the meeting. Ratnavale, a leading human rights lawyer in Sri Lanka, said: “The speakers have revealed many important things about WikiLeaks and arrest of Assange. The WSWs and the SEP are the only ones that have held this sort of meeting in Sri Lanka, no other organisation or party is interested in bringing the truth of these events to the people. This information is very important.”

A Ports Authority trainee said: “After listening to the speakers I now understand the importance of the meeting. Now I know why the US-led imperialists and the so-called media are afraid of Assange and his web site. WikiLeaks has exposed the real nature of the rulers, their atrocities and conspiracies and through this information we’re able to understand the developing tensions between the countries. The imperialist rulers are bringing us towards a third world war. In my opinion we have to broaden and intensify the campaign to defend WikiLeaks.

Giham de Chickera, a cartoonist with Sri Lanka’s *Daily Mirror*, said: “I think WikiLeaks has revealed what’s happening at the higher levels of government all over the world. There are things called freedom of speech and freedom of expression which must be practiced and I think people everywhere must enjoy these rights not as a privilege but to have the right to know what is being discussed at the top. Given that the mainstream media has failed in its duties, Assange has provided a very valuable service.

“WikiLeaks is a simple and brilliantly effective concept and so it’s not surprising the way he has been prosecuted. All those who believe in freedom and democracy should fight against the attack on WikiLeaks. You can’t persecute a man for exposing the truth.

“The bottom line is leaders are afraid of the truth. I respect your campaign in this regard and although I am not a member of any political party, I frequently follow WSWs. You can’t make any compromise. It’s very clear that the capitalist system cannot solve the problems of people. When you work only for profit you cannot take decisions on behalf of the people. I think that the capitalist system has come to an end.”



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