

ICFI supporters hold rally in India to demand freedom for Assange and Manning

Our correspondents
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On May 11, Indian supporters of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) held a successful demonstration in Chennai, the capital of the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu, to demand the release of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and whistleblower Chelsea Manning. Both are class war prisoners who have been persecuted for their courageous exposure of the war crimes and diplomatic intrigues committed by the US and its allies in Iraq, Afghanistan and around the world.

The demonstration was held in front of the TI Cycles factory in Ambattur, an industrial area in north Chennai. Participants held up banners in Tamil and English that read “Free Assange and Manning” and placards saying “Defend democratic rights,” “Defend freedom of speech,” “Fight for an anti-war anti-capitalist socialist movement of the international working class” and “Fight for a union of socialist republics in South Asia.”

The rally was held despite attempts by the Tamil Nadu state police to block it. The police refused permission for a demonstration opposite the US consulate or UK Deputy High Commission in Chennai.

The organisers later decided to shift the venue to outside the TI Cycles company, for which police permission was granted. A few days before the event, the police visited the office of the ICFI supporters in Chennai and inquired about the details of the organisation and its leading members.

Police also videotaped and photographed the demonstration, and wanted to know the names of the speakers and participants. The organisers refused to provide those details.

The campaign for the rally included the distribution of leaflets and the pasting of wall posters in Chennai’s working-class neighbourhoods, including workers’

quarters for the railways and the Integral Coach Factory.

The demonstration attracted the attention of workers and youth, many of whom stopped to watch and listen to the brief speech by Arun Kumar from the ICFI supporters’ group. He explained that the fight to free Assange and Manning was bound up with defending the fundamental democratic rights of the working class, including freedom of speech.

“The imperialist powers, including the US, are in mortal fear of the truth being revealed about their real ruthless class character,” Kumar said. “A great revolutionary service has been done by courageous people like Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning to the international working class in bringing to light the war crimes carried out by US imperialism under the guise of ‘fighting terrorism’.”

Kumar said the only social force capable of fighting for the defence of democratic rights was the international working class. “The national bourgeoisie of the backward capitalist countries like India and Ecuador slavishly serve their imperialist masters and become complicit in war crimes and intrigues against the people.” As an example, he pointed to the Ecuadorian government’s decision to hand over Assange to the British police by illegally withdrawing the political asylum it had granted to him.

Dealing with the role of the Indian bourgeoisie, Kumar said: “The Modi government has forged a very close military and strategic alliance with the US and also encourages the US provocations against China in the South China Sea.

“Following in the footsteps the US and the European powers, which are seeking to muzzle the free flow of information and discussion through the internet and social media, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led

government in India has also stepped up its Internet censorship on the pretext of opposing ‘hate speech’ and defending ‘national security.’ It is working closely with Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to gag selected websites and social media accounts.”

Pandian, a youth who participated in the demonstration, told the WWSWS he wanted to express his solidarity with the international campaign to release Assange and Manning. “The pro-American government in Ecuador has sold Assange to America, just like exchanging commodities, in return for currying favour with the US. Britain has seized on the situation to arrest him and to sentence him to 50 weeks of imprisonment. It’s probable that Assange could be extradited to the US even before his jail term is complete,” he said.

Govindan, an auto-parts worker in the Ambattur industrial state, said: “I know what Julian Assange did. He spoke the truth. They [the US and its allies] claim to be democrats. Then why do they suppress the truth?

“Assange has brought to light what they have hidden. America is the culprit in the first place. He has exposed the US military’s brutal killings of innocent people in the Middle East. He has also revealed the corruption of the rulers of many countries in the world. What he did was right. I strongly condemn his arrest. He should be freed.”

Ridiculing the US charge that Assange stole state secrets, Govindan said: “They claim to run a people’s government. If that is true, why keep secrets hidden from the people?”



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