

Istanbul public meeting calls for the defence of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning

Our correspondents

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Last Saturday, *Sosyalist E?itlik* (the Socialist Equality Group), the sympathising group of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in Turkey, held a public meeting in Istanbul to demand the freedom of WikiLeaks' founder Julian Assange and the courageous whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

Before the meeting, *Sosyalist E?itlik* supporters conducted an intense campaign to publicise the meeting. Many posters were put up and the campaign was widely promoted on social media.

Leading members of *Sosyalist E?itlik* and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) addressed the meeting.

In his introduction, *Sosyalist E?itlik* member Ozan Ozgur explained, "This meeting is part of the ICFI's ongoing international campaign to defend Assange and Manning. We dedicate this meeting to the memory of our late comrade Halil Celik, the founder and leader of *Sosyalist E?itlik*."

"The ICFI and its sections and supporters all over the world see the campaign to defend Manning and Assange as the spearhead of the defence of democratic rights and against imperialist war," Ozgur noted. He reviewed the general situation facing Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning, detailing the main developments over the last nine years. "Both can be defended only by the independent political mobilisation of the working class," he stressed.

Ulas Atesci, a writer for the *World Socialist Web Site* and leading member of *Sosyalist E?itlik*, made a contribution titled "What is behind the stepped-up persecution of Assange and Manning?"

Pointing to the relationship between the growing imperialist war preparations, in particular against Iran by the Trump administration and escalating attacks on democratic rights, he said, "Assange and Manning are being targeted for exposing the illegal wars, mass

surveillance operations and the daily diplomatic conspiracies of US imperialism and its allies."

Secret diplomacy was an illegitimate tool of the ruling classes of the world and exposing their crimes is not a crime, Atesci stressed. There was a historical precedent for the massive exposure of classified materials and it took place after the conquest of state power by the Russian working class in October 1917 under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party.

Atesci cited the words of Leon Trotsky, co-leader of the October Revolution and then People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, on the secret diplomacy: "Secret diplomacy is a necessary tool for a propertied minority, which is compelled to deceive the majority in order to subject it to its interests. Imperialism, with its dark plans of conquest and its robber alliances and deals, developed the system of secret diplomacy to the highest level. The struggle against imperialism, which is exhausting and destroying the peoples of Europe, is at the same time a struggle against capitalist diplomacy, which has cause enough to fear the light of day."

The great working class revolution in Russia in 1917 showed the way forward for workers all over the world. Atesci explained the same crisis of US and world capitalism that gives rise to the growing danger of war, trade war and conflicts between imperialist and great powers is also creating its opposite, the growth of the class struggle and the maturing of the objective conditions for socialist revolution.

"After the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and almost three decades of uninterrupted wars by US imperialism in the Middle East and North Africa, there is a revival of working class struggles internationally that pose a serious threat to the capitalist ruling elites," Atesci said and pointed to the strike wave of teachers in the US, mass "yellow vest" protests against French President Emmanuel Macron, and ongoing mass

protests in Algeria and Sudan.

Atesci emphasised the situation facing the working class by quoting the ICFI's New Year statement: "The alternatives that confront the working class are not 'Reform or Revolution,' but rather 'Revolution or Counterrevolution.' How the death agony of the capitalist system is resolved—whether by the capitalist methods of dictatorship, fascism, imperialist war and a collapse into barbarism, or through the revolutionary conquest of power by the international working class and the transition to a socialist society—will be determined by the outcome of the class struggle on a world scale."

He concluded: "As we see the conditions of Assange and Manning, and impending war danger, there is no time to lose. We call upon all participants to make a decision and join the building of the ICFI and establishing *Sosyalist E?itlik* as the Turkish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International."

After this speech, IYSSE (Turkey) spokesperson and writer Cetin Akin addressed the meeting and comprehensively explained the journalistic record of Julian Assange and WikiLeaks from the outset. He spoke about the main exposures by WikiLeaks including the Afghan and Iraq war logs, diplomatic cables, the Guantanamo Files, the Clinton e-mails, Vault 7 and also a number of diplomatic leaks on Turkey. "This record makes clear why the ruling elites hate Assange and prosecute him so aggressively," Akin stated.

The last speaker, Baris Demir, also a writer for the *World Socialist Web Site* and *Sosyalist E?itlik* member, dealt with the role of the pseudo-left groups in the witch hunt against Manning and Assange. "Their silence makes them complicit in the persecution of Manning and Assange," he said and stressed that the abandonment of Assange by the middle-class "left" was a striking example of their essentially right-wing political outlook.

Demir spoke about the counterrevolutionary role of pseudo-left organisations during the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia in 2011 and detailed their support for the imperialist wars against Libya and Syria. He also explained the reactionary role of identity politics, including the retrograde #MeToo movement, used by upper-middle class layers to enhance their privileged economic and social position.

Following the speeches, there was a lively discussion and contributions were made from the floor. One participant, working as an independent journalist, thanked *Sosyalist E?itlik* for organising the meeting and stressed that it was the only meeting to defend Assange and

WikiLeaks in Turkey. He explained that Assange and WikiLeaks played a very important role in his decision to become a journalist and declared his support for the campaign being waged by the ICFI and *Sosyalist E?itlik* and offered to collaborate on this critical issue.

At the end of the meeting, a supporter of *Sosyalist E?itlik* read the letter by Julian Assange to the independent British journalist Gordon Dimmack. As at the ICFI's successful meeting in London, a resolution was unanimously adopted opposing the US extradition proceedings underway against Assange and calling for workers and young people to join the fight to defend democratic rights and demand the freedom of Assange and Manning.

The resolution passed at the meeting:

Free Julian Assange! Free Chelsea Manning!

In a country in which more than one hundred journalists are in prison and anti-war and progressive websites are censored, including WikiLeaks, this public meeting in Istanbul condemns the arrest, imprisonment and US extradition proceedings against WikiLeaks founder, publisher and journalist Julian Assange.

The US charges against Assange for his journalistic practices can carry a combined maximum prison sentence of 175 years or even the death penalty. We demand the immediate and unconditional release of Assange and courageous whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

Assange and Manning have been targeted for exposing war crimes, corporate and state corruption and anti-democratic conspiracies that have cost more than one million lives in Iraq and Afghanistan alone. The state persecution of Assange and Manning for publishing true information to the world's people is an obvious political crime.

This meeting issues an urgent call to all workers and young people, and all genuine defenders of democratic rights, to join the fight for Assange and Manning's freedom. We say to Assange and Manning: "You are not alone, you have not been abandoned, you have not been forgotten. You will be freed."



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