

# Sri Lankan Trotskyists win strong support for Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning

Our correspondents  
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Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth and Student for Social Equality (IYSSE) campaigners in Sri Lanka won significant backing from University of Sri Jayawardenepura students on Monday. Situated in Colombo's southern suburbs, the university is one of the country's largest tertiary education institutions.

SEP and IYSSE members and supporters distributed hundreds of copies of a leaflet entitled "Join the International Struggle to Free Assange and Manning" and held lively discussions with scores of students. Citing *World Socialist Web Site* articles, campaigners explained to students that Manning, who has consistently defended freedom of speech, has been imprisoned again for refusing to testify to a US Grand Jury against Assange.

Assange, who was seized from London's Ecuadorian embassy by British police on April 11, has been sentenced on bogus bail charges to 50 weeks jail in Belmarsh prison and was recently admitted to the prison hospital. The Trump administration is seeking his extradition to the US and has filed 17 trumped-up espionage charges against him. He faces up to 170 years imprisonment.

SEP and IYSSE campaigners showed university students and campus workers the "Collateral Murders" video clips, which were published by WikiLeaks, and video footage of international protests demanding Assange's freedom. Students signed a petition supporting the campaign launched by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). Campaigners also held a demonstration and chanted slogans including, "Free Assange, Free Manning," "No to internet censorship," "Hands off free speech, free expression."

Monday's campaign was held against the backdrop

of mounting provocations by Buddhist extremist groups and Sinhala racist thugs against Sri Lanka's Muslim population. These fascistic formations are being encouraged by the ruling and opposition parties and the mainstream media.

Pseudo-left parties in Sri Lanka, including the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP), United Socialist Party and the Nava Sama Samaja Party, have maintained a stony silence about the escalating US-led vendetta against Assange and Manning.

Activists from the Inter University Student Federation (IUSF), which is controlled by the FSP at the Jayawardenepura campus, tried to sabotage the SEP's campaign on Monday. IUSF leaders demanded to know whether campaigners had the permission of the student union and university authorities. They backed off when SEP supporters made clear they had a democratic right to campaign.

Monday's event is part of a series of events, including demonstrations, lectures and public meetings, planned by the SEP and IYSSE at work places, universities and in working-class areas in the coming weeks.

**Pushpanath**, a 2nd year technology student, said he was shocked by the "Collateral Murder" video and now realised why the US was so hostile to the WikiLeaks exposures. "The US is scared that any exposure of the real nature of their operations will produce huge opposition from the masses. The US is trying to pretend it is a defender of human rights but no other country has ever violated human rights on this scale," he said.

His friend **Navanjana** added, "We were not very familiar with these important issues. We're university students and have had some opportunity to learn about this but the majority of people here had not had a chance to follow these developments because the

mainstream media hardly report them. I agree with you that a third world war is the biggest danger for mankind. I regard Assange as a thoughtful journalist who has identified that threat.”

A student from a nearby school explained to SEP campaigners that he had seen video footage of Assange being arrested by British police. “I saw these videos on the internet and from there got some idea that he had revealed US war crimes. But I didn’t see anything about this on the local media,” he said. “The Sri Lankan government doesn’t encourage this sort of news. Their practice is to block any public opinion that goes against them.”

**Hasini**, a student who is awaiting university entrance, admitted that she previously knew nothing about Assange but supported any campaign that protected freedom of speech and the right to information. “Every person has a right to say what he believes. No one should go against that right,” she said.

After SEP campaigners explained that the attacks on Assange and Manning were part of an international assault on freedom of speech and other democratic rights, Hasini said: “Yes, I agree and it’s same here. The mainstream media in Sri Lanka is closely linked to the establishment and that’s why it keeps silent about most of the issues that are important to the public.”

**Udith**, a political science graduate, said, “Capitalist governments can no longer allow the truth to reach the general masses. How many times did this government block social media in past period? Your campaign is timely. A world war is a possible threat and these kinds of exposures are very important in building a movement against war.”



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