

Strong support for Julian Assange at Sri Lanka's Jaffna University

Our reporters
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Members and supporters of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and its youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), campaigned at the University of Jaffna and the nearby Technical College to build support for WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

The campaign promoted a picket organised by the SEP and the IYSSE in defence of Assange and Manning, to be held in Jaffna on Wednesday, July 10.

The city is the capital of the northern province, which was devastated by the nearly three-decades long communal war waged by successive governments against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

The war-ravaged northern and eastern provinces are still under military occupation. Students at Jaffna University are frequently subjected to repressive measures and political witchhunts.

Campaigners displayed a banner with the slogan "Release Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning!" at the university entrance and organized a literature table. They distributed hundreds of copies of the WSWs statement: "For a worldwide campaign to prevent Julian Assange's rendition to the US!"

Students signed a petition signalling their support for the campaign and purchased a number of books, including *Socialism and Fight Against Imperialist War* and *The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished 20th Century* by David North, chairman of the International Editorial Board of the WSWs.

Most of the university students were unaware of the imprisonment of Julian Assange, who has been persecuted for exposing US war crimes and diplomatic intrigues. Many had also not heard of the American whistleblower Chelsea Manning who leaked incriminating US army war logs and diplomatic cables

to WikiLeaks.

Assange has been jailed in Britain on bogus bail charges and faces extradition to the US. Manning has been imprisoned by the Trump administration for refusing to give perjured testimony against Assange and WikiLeaks.

Students were deeply opposed to the treatment of both courageous individuals, when they were told of their plight by the SEP and IYSSE campaigners.

By contrast, academics at the university, along with the student union and the Jaffna-based Tamil newspapers, are silent on Assange's persecution. These organizations are seeking to secure the interests of a Tamil bourgeoisie, including by trying to curry favour with the US. They thus have an interest in covering up the crimes of American imperialism.

S. Gengadharan, a student, said he had frequently encountered SEP and IYSSE campaigners on campus.

"Today you are the only people standing here and explaining what is happening to Julian Assange and why he should be released," he said. "That is how I became aware of this issue. Now I recall that some of the WikiLeaks documents exposed war crimes in Sri Lanka. I give my full support to this campaign for the rights of all and for the release of Assange."

Ranjan, a management student, saw a video of Assange's brutal arrest by the British police on April 11. He stated: "The fact that Assange, a journalist, was dragged out and arrested is not only an anti-democratic act. It is also barbaric.

"Today, democracy in the world is only nominal. The United States, which is described as the world's largest democracy, is committing murders all over the world. Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning both revealed the truth. So I insist that both of them should be released immediately."

An English graduate, **N. Pathapiriyam**, said that the US was intervening in other countries, on the pretext of defending human rights.

“Europe and Australia are supporting it. It is illegal that the Trump administration demands the dispatch of Assange from Britain to the US. They can even demand that we be extradited from our country if we criticize the US. We hear that the US is maintaining illegal detention camps in places like Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib. I support the struggle to release Julian Assange,” he said.

Selva, a teacher, said: “I know about Julian Assange. There is a worldwide threat to journalism and the right to free speech. This campaign is concerned with protecting the democratic rights of writers and journalists in all countries.”

A retired Irrigation Department employee, **R.S. Devendiram**, stated: “I have heard about WikiLeaks and Assange. He revealed the crimes committed by US imperialism around the world.

“The Ecuadorian embassy handed him over to London police due to US pressure on them. As the US is a major power, other countries are giving in to its demands. Washington is using its power to bring a news publisher, who exposed it, to the US to punish him.”

Devendiram said that US military interventions were based on lies. “America invaded Iraq claiming it had chemical weapons, but nothing was found there,” he said. “Now it is trying to intervene in Iran by claiming it has uranium. It is preparing for a confrontation with China and Russia.”

S. Praveen, a technical college student, said: “Assange, as a journalist, is correct to expose the war crimes of the US and its allies. Britain and the US are trying to punish him for that, which is anti-democratic. Everyone should come forward to protect him.”



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