

Socialist Equality Party in Sri Lanka intensifies the campaign to free Julian Assange

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka are intensifying their campaign to demand freedom for WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and US whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

Over the past fortnight the Sri Lankan Trotskyists have held a well-attended public meeting in Colombo and a powerful rally near Jaffna's Central Bus Stand, as part of the global campaign initiated by the International Committee of the Fourth International. Thousands of Sinhala- and Tamil-language copies of the WSWs editorial board statement entitled "For a worldwide campaign to prevent Julian Assange's rendition to the US" were distributed to promote these events.

The July 16 Colombo public meeting was attended by dozens of workers, youth, artists and intellectuals. Chairing the event, SEP political committee member Pani Wijesiriwardena explained that Assange could be extradited to the US on concocted espionage charges and jailed for 170 years, and that the Trump administration had re-imprisoned Manning and was attempting to financially bankrupt her in a bid to force her to testify against Assange.

Wijesiriwardena said Assange's persecution was the spearhead of an escalating attack on democratic rights and freedom of expression, intended to stop the exposure of more government crimes and to suppress opposition to social inequality and war.

"The struggle to free Assange and Manning must necessarily be an international struggle," Wijesiriwardena said. "The fight to free them must be brought to the centre of the struggle for social and democratic rights by the international working class,"

he said, urging all those at the meeting to get involved.

Pradeep Ramanayake, speaking on behalf of the IYSSE, reminded the audience about the imperialist crimes exposed by WikiLeaks. Assange's web site, he said "is an intelligence unit for the ordinary masses."

K. Ratnayake, Sri Lankan national editor of the WSWs and a long-standing SEP political committee member, told the meeting that the struggle to politically arouse and mobilise the international working class in defense of Assange was inseparable from the defence of all democratic and social rights.

"The SEP and its supporters must build a powerful campaign in Sri Lanka and India as part of this international fight," he said. Ratnayake referred to the five-day national strike of Ecuadorian workers, youth and peasants, which began the day before. The strike included calls for Assange's release, underscoring the central role of the international working class in this struggle.

Assange and Manning were being persecuted by Washington and its allies, the speaker continued, because their exposure of war crimes in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya and other intrigues throughout the world was a major blow to US imperialism.

"The US and other imperialist countries are now preparing for new wars and crimes against humanity and they want to stop any more exposures and to suppress all mass opposition."

Ratanayake pointed to the real danger of a US-led war with Iran, deepening US-China tensions, and the rising tide of working-class struggles internationally.

The response of the ruling classes everywhere, he said, was fascism and dictatorship.

The speaker condemned the stony silence of the

pseudo-left organisations in Sri Lanka, such as the Nava Sama Samaja Party, Frontline Socialist Party and United Socialist Party, and their international counterparts over the persecution of Assange and Manning. Ratnayake concluded by urging the audience to join the Global Defense Committee initiated by the WSWS editorial board and take forward the struggle to free Assange and Manning.

On July 10, six days before the Colombo meeting, the SEP and the IYSSE held a demonstration near the Central Bus Stand in Jaffna, the capital of Sri Lanka's war-devastated north, to demand the release of Assange and Manning. Campaigns were conducted at Jaffna University, Jaffna Technical College and at other city locations in the days before the event.

Workers, students, youths and housewives attended from Jaffna's suburbs and nearby small islands, as well as from Kilinochchi, a central northern town. Protesters chanted slogans and carried placards such as "Release Julian Assange who exposed imperialist war crimes! Release Chelsea Manning! Defeat the threat of Third World War!" and "Oppose Tamil nationalism, which backs US war plans," "Oppose Colombo government's support for US war plans!"

Government intelligence officers were mobilised to observe the demonstration. Ten years after the end of the government's communal war against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the military still occupies and monitors the North.

Chairing a meeting after the rally, SEP central committee member P. Thirugnanasampanthar denounced the jailing of Assange and Manning. He pointed out that WikiLeaks had exposed Washington's complicity in the war crimes and disappearances committed by former President Mahinda Rajapakse's government and paramilitary groups associated with state security forces. SEP political committee member M. Thevarajah stressed the importance of the WSWS editorial board's call for the formation of a Global Defence Committee.

The protest was covered by many media outlets, including *Rupavahini*, *Vasantham TV*, *Dan TV*, *Pahalavan TV*, *IBC Tamil*, and *Capitol TV*. Separate voice clips from Thirugnanasampanthar and Thevarajah were broadcast by radio stations, and footage was screened on the 10.30 p.m. edition of *Shakthi TV*'s "News First" on July 10. *Udayan*, a Jaffna-based daily,

carried a report with photographs of the demonstration under the headline: "Release Julian Assange immediately!"



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