

Indian Trotskyists hold public meetings in defence of Assange and Manning

Our correspondents

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Indian supporters of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) last month held successful public meetings in Sriperumbudur, a major industrial hub located just outside Chennai, the Tamil Nadu state capital, and in Kolkata, the West Bengal capital, to demand the release of WikiLeaks founder and publisher Julian Assange and whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

The meetings were part of the international campaign being waged by the ICFI/WSWS in support of Assange and Manning, who have exposed the war crimes of the US and its allies in Iraq and Afghanistan and other illegal activities by governments around the world.

The main speaker at both meetings was Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka) assistant secretary Deepal Jayasekera. ICFI Supporters Group member Arun Kumar addressed the Sriperumbudur event on September 1, which was chaired by Shibu Vavara. He also chaired the Kolkata meeting on September 15. Extensive campaigns in the lead up to the meetings won important support from students and workers in both cities.

Chairing the Sriperumbudur meeting, Vavara explained that the fight for the release of Assange and Manning by workers and youth was inseparable from the defence of freedom of speech and other basic democratic rights. Journalists, intellectuals, students and other individuals challenging the government's anti-working class and anti-democratic policies, he said, were being targeted.

Arun Kumar told the meeting that the persecution of Assange and Manning was part of an escalating attack on democratic rights by governments everywhere—from the Trump administration in the US, to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP-led regime in India. He reviewed recent political development in India and the Hindu-

supremacist Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) government's assault on basic rights, in particular, its current crackdown in Kashmir.

Kumar denounced Modi's abrogation of the special semi-autonomous status of Jammu and Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, and the downgrading of it into two union territories under the direct control of the central government. The Modi government's actions on August 5, he said, were illegal and amounted to a constitutional coup. The unprecedented security lockdown, communication blackout and arrests and detention of thousands was in order to suppress all popular opposition to this attack on democratic rights.

Support for the Modi government's actions by the US, and other imperialist powers, is because they all want to expand their economic and geostrategic ties with India, in line with Washington's preparations for war against China.

Addressing the meeting, Jayasekera said: "We are gathered here today to powerfully demand the immediate release of the two most prominent class-war prisoners in the world—WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and whistleblower Chelsea Manning. They have been imprisoned and persecuted, not for committing any crime but for courageously exposing the most heinous crimes carried out by the leading criminals in this world today..."

"Assange and Manning have done a great service to the international working class and the necessary struggle against imperialist war, austerity, militarism and dictatorship. Their exposures have helped the working class understand the predatory geo-political aims of the imperialist powers and the real agenda behind their bogus claims of defending 'human rights' and 'democracy'."

Jayasekera briefly reviewed the international campaign being conducted by the ICFI and the *World Socialist Web Site*, the orientation of this work towards the international working class, and the call for the establishment of a Global Defence Committee. He explained how all the official institutions in the ruling elites—political parties, the corporate media and the pseudo-left—are directly or indirectly supporting the witchhunt against Assange and Manning.

“The persecution of Assange is not an isolated effort,” he continued, but the spearhead of a massive assault on basic democratic rights to suppress “growing opposition to war, austerity and social inequality.”

Referring to developments in Sri Lanka, the speaker explained how all factions of the ruling elite had used the April 21 terror bomb attacks in the island to activate long-held plans to impose dictatorial forms of rule that would be used to suppress the growing struggles of the working class.

Jayasekera concluded by calling on the audience to join the struggle to defend Assange and Manning, to study the program, perspective and history of the ICFI, and fight to build an Indian section of the Trotskyist movement.

Questions and discussion following the speeches at the Sriperumbudur meeting ranged from the characterisation of Assange and Manning as class-war prisoners, whether WikiLeaks’ exposure of Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign had contributed to her defeat, and how to combat the confusion mongering of the pseudo-left about Assange and Manning.

In reply, Jayasekera explained how Assange and Manning’s exposures of imperialist war crimes had strengthened the struggle against war, austerity and attacks on democratic rights. He pointed out that Assange had expressed his hostility to both Clinton and Trump and that WikiLeaks’ publication of Clinton’s secret speeches to Wall Street exposed her as a representative of investment bankers and US finance capital.

Jayasekera also explained that the WSWS/ICFI combatted the influence of the pseudo-left by exposing their class agenda and fighting for the independent mobilisation of the working class on a socialist and international perspective.

WSWS reporters spoke with some of those attending the public meetings. A Royal Enfield autoworker in

Sriperumbudur said: “Apart from your party, no one else is saying anything about Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning. This is the first time that I’ve hear about these issues. I support Assange and Manning for their courageous stand in exposing war crimes. The media and politicians say nothing about the catastrophic consequences of a nuclear war and I support your world party’s fight against war.”

Referring to the Modi government, he said: “Modi has come to power for the second time. He boasted about creating new jobs before he came to power [2014] but after five years in government unemployment is the highest it has been for nearly five decades. Farmer suicides continue unabated because of the deepening agricultural crisis.

“The Modi government looks after the profit interests of big business people like Ambani and Adani. The AIADMK-led Tamil Nadu state government is just a puppet of the BJP government.”

Sanjiban, a Jadavpur University student, attended the Kolkata event. “I learnt about Julian Assange from the WSWS, after meeting some WSWS supporters in Kolkata. This public meeting was impressive.

“The fight for the freedom of Assange and Manning, who have done nothing wrong, is only being carried out in India by WSWS supporters. There are so many progressive left parties but none of them say a single word about Assange or Manning. This is a really shameful thing. Your meeting was good because the speakers clearly described Assange’s situation and how freedom of speech is demolished by the ruling elites worldwide.”



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