

Sri Lankan SEP hold rally in defence of Assange and Manning

Our correspondents
5 March 2020

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in Sri Lanka held a demonstration in central Colombo on Tuesday afternoon demanding the release of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning.

About 60 workers and young people, including party members and supporters, joined the picket, which was held outside Fort Railway station. A delegation of party members from war-ravaged northern Jaffna travelled 400 kilometres to attend the event. A group of plantation workers from Hatton in the central plantation area also participated. The SEP/IYSSE demonstration won the attention of thousands of workers and youth who were returning from their jobs and studies.

Demonstrators enthusiastically chanted slogans in Sinhala and Tamil, including “Free Julian Assange,” “Free Chelsea Manning,” “Defend the right to free speech,” “Stop internet censorship,” “No to imperialist world war,” “Fight for international socialism” and “Build the SEP.” SEP/IYSSE members distributed copies of a February 20 WSWs perspective titled “Growing support for Julian Assange on eve of extradition hearings.”

Several media organisations, including *Veerakesari*, the country’s main Tamil daily, i24 News, an Israel-based international news and television group, the European Pressphoto Agency and *Sunday Morning*, covered the event.

K. Ratnayake, WSWs national editor, addressed the rally following the picket. He stated that the campaign by the International Committee of the Fourth International and the WSWs to free Assange and Manning had been intensified with the beginning of British court hearing for Assange’s extradition to the US, where he faces Espionage Act charges and life imprisonment.

“Assange and Manning are being persecuted because of their exposure of the war crimes executed by the US-led imperialist powers in Iraq and Afghanistan,” Ratnayake declared. “The struggle for their defence, therefore, is an essential part of the struggle against imperialist war and for the defence of democratic rights, free speech and the freedom of expression.”

He reviewed the decade-long persecution of Assange carried out by the US and its allies, including Britain, Australia and Sweden, since WikiLeaks’ publications.

Ratnayake continued: “Making moral appeals to the ruling classes for his release is futile. The fight for Assange’s release should be taken into the hands of the workers, students and all those who value democratic rights. The imperialists want to silence Assange and Manning not only for concealing their past crimes but because they are preparing for new crimes and paving the way for monstrous wars.”

Ratnayake pointed to the international upsurge of the working class as the basis for such a perspective.

The speaker explained that the persecution of Assange was the sharpest expression of a broader assault on democratic rights.

In Sri Lanka, the government was reviving the police-state measures associated with the 30-year anti-Tamil civil war prosecuted by successive Colombo administrations.

Political opponents and journalists who criticised the government were brutally victimised and some of them were murdered, including *Sunday Leader* editor Lasantha Wickrematunga, under President Mahinda Rajapakse’s previous government.

Under the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government, artists like Shakthika Sathkumara and Malaka Devapriya were victimised at the instigation of sections of the Buddhist hierarchy. As the ruling class faces a

deepening crisis, it has brought Gotabhaya Rajapakse to power, a figure directly implicated in war crimes, to suppress working class opposition and safeguard class rule.

Ratnayake explained that the SEP was the only party in Sri Lanka raising the issue of Assange. The SEPs around the world had established the same record, demonstrating that the defence of democratic rights was inextricably tied to the fight for the social rights of the working class.

Addressing the rally, IYSSE convener Kapila Fernando called on students and youth to join the struggle for the release of Assange and Manning. He warned that the major powers were creating the conditions for a third world war that would threaten the very existence of humanity. This underscored the necessity for the unity of the working class internationally in the fight for international socialism.

WSWS reporters spoke to some of those in attendance.

Arjun Ainkaran, a young worker, said: “It’s so important to hold campaigns like this. Actually many people don’t know these type of attacks are taking place. All the governments are afraid of the truth being exposed. If everybody knows what Assange has revealed, people will hate American imperialism. I saw in the news that a major Iranian commander was killed by an American drone strike. It’s a serious incident.

“I have read about Edward Snowden [who revealed massive surveillance operations carried out by US intelligence agencies] before. When I now heard about Chelsea Manning, I realized that she also did a brave task like Snowden. I demand freedom for Assange and Manning and I will join further events like this.”

Soaresm, a young visitor from France, stated: “It is important to build international solidarity to free Julian Assange. This fight must be taken forward to protect liberty and freedom of expression. French people would like to give asylum to him in France, but the capitalist class won’t permit that. It is obvious that to free him a movement must be built from below.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact