

Australia: SEP public meetings defend WikiLeaks and Julian Assange

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (Australia) held successful public meetings in Sydney and Melbourne this week in defence of WikiLeaks and its founder, Julian Assange. Entitled “Imperialist diplomacy exposed: Behind the witch-hunt of WikiLeaks and Julian Assange,” the events were attended by a wide range of people, including students, workers, professional people and retirees. For many, this was their first SEP event.

Both meetings were addressed by Nick Beams, SEP national secretary and a member of the WSWs international editorial board, and SEP national organiser and WSWs writer, James Cogan.

The speakers reviewed key WikiLeaks cables, drew out the political significance of the intensifying provocations against WikiLeaks and Assange, and explained the necessity for the development of a revolutionary political movement of the international working class to put an end to the system responsible for the lies, state crimes and conspiracies revealed by the leaked documents. The reports were followed by questions and discussion, and collections of more than \$2,700 for the SEP’s monthly fund.

Speaking first, James Cogan told the Sydney meeting that the increasingly vitriolic and anti-democratic assault on WikiLeaks, including US Vice President Joe Biden’s inflammatory claim that Julian Assange was a “high-tech terrorist,” demonstrated “the total repudiation, within American ruling circles and the ruling class internationally, of the most basic conceptions of democratic rights, civil liberties and freedom of the press”.

Cogan warned that Washington was attempting to extradite Assange to the US and prosecute him on espionage charges. He said there were “legitimate fears” that Private Bradley Manning, a military intelligence analyst who allegedly leaked documents to WikiLeaks, “was being held in solidarity confinement in a maximum security prison and effectively being tortured into making a false allegation that Assange pressured him or paid him to leak the material to WikiLeaks”.

“The working class has immense interests in the defence of WikiLeaks and Julian Assange,” Cogan said. “If the US capitalist state is able to destroy WikiLeaks and imprison or kill Assange for leaking evidence of civilian killings in Iraq, massive atrocities in both Iraq and Afghanistan and cables that shed light on the day-to-day reality of imperialist diplomacy—then the rights of all of us will have suffered a serious setback.” (See: “Imperialist diplomacy exposed: Behind the witch-hunt of Julian Assange and WikiLeaks”)

Nick Beams told the meeting that the extraordinary nature of the measures being unleashed against WikiLeaks and Assange pointed to the profound historic significance of what had been revealed in the US diplomatic cables. (The WSWs will publish Nick Beams’s full report on December 23).

Beams recalled the international reverberations that followed the release by Leon Trotsky, in the wake of the 1917 Russian Revolution, of the secret diplomatic cables of the Tsarist regime and the imperialist powers. In the statement accompanying the publication of the cables, Trotsky wrote: “Secret diplomacy is a necessary tool for a propertied minority which is compelled to deceive the majority in order to subject it to its interests. Imperialism, with its dark plans of conquest and its robber alliances and deals, developed the system of secret diplomacy to the highest level. The struggle against the imperialism, which is exhausting and destroying the peoples of Europe, is at the same time a struggle against capitalist diplomacy, which has cause enough to fear the light of day.”

Beams explained that Trotsky’s assessment powerfully resonated today because, “imperialist intrigues against the world’s people are still being carried out”. The WikiLeaks exposures, he continued, came “as we enter the second decade of the unending ‘war on terror’ and as preparations for war against China are under active discussion in imperialist military and political circles”. The speaker referred to Australian cables revealing that two former Labor Party leaders, Kim Beazley and Kevin Rudd, had secretly discussed with US officials Australia’s commitment to a future war against China.

Beams pointed out that the ongoing diplomatic lies and deceit were not the product of individuals, but of the nature of imperialism itself. He explained that long-standing political fictions and historical lies were also being laid bare—including the invincibility of the market, exposed by the global financial crisis and the massive US bank bailout in 2008, as well as the real class nature of the capitalist state and bourgeois justice.

The speaker drew out the political significance of recent cables revealing that those involved in the political coup that removed Rudd as Australian prime minister in June this year, such as Labor Senator Mark Arbib, were in ongoing secret contact with the US embassy. WikiLeaks, he said, had confirmed that the US was involved in “every aspect of Australian political life” and that the Labor Party and the unions were the “chief conduits” for this involvement.

Beams noted that the attacks on WikiLeaks and Assange had rightly aroused the opposition of millions of people around the world. There was a deep recognition, he said, that “the capitalist politicians, irrespective of their nominal political colouration, are implementing policies that threaten the very future of mankind”.

This concern, however, lacked a clear political perspective. What was required, he emphasised, was an understanding that the danger of war and the attack on democratic rights were an expression of the breakdown of the capitalist system. “The global financial crisis revealed, in the economic sphere, that all the problems confronting the working class are international in scope. Now the WikiLeaks cables have emphasised the same point in the political sphere.

“The way forward lies in the building of a party which, in its program and orientation, fights for the international unification of the working

class. That is the perspective of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution, and its Australian section, the SEP.”

Lengthy discussion followed the reports. In Melbourne, questions were asked about how to define the working class and resolve the crisis of political perspective and consciousness; the SEP’s approach to parliament and elections; and the response among ordinary people within the US to the WikiLeaks revelations. Questions and comments also referred to Washington’s role in Rudd’s removal as prime minister.

In Sydney, audience members asked about how financial institutions, such as Amazon and PayPal, were legally able to cut off services to WikiLeaks; what was likely to happen in China over the next 10 to 20 years and why so many “left” parties were moving to the right and aligning themselves with imperialism and austerity policies.

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In Sydney, Kerry, attending her first SEP event, said the meeting was “very informative”.

“Marxism was brought up a lot and I’ve always been interested in a Marxist approach—it makes sense to me,” she said. “I’m passionate about WikiLeaks because I look at the way society is run. Masses of people are oppressed by an elite, by bigger forces, the wealthy, and a lot of the truth is hidden from us and so we believe what the elite want us to believe, for their benefit. WikiLeaks, by releasing all this information, has brought out what has been hidden from us for so long.

“A group of people, including Julian Assange, took the initiative and risked their lives, in order to release the truth to us, so we know who we are voting for, so we know what is going on in the society we’re living in.

“Through groups such as the SEP all the ‘little people’, so to speak, can come together, acknowledge the truth, acknowledge what’s worth fighting for and rise up and change the situation, rather than sitting here and being fed lies and living a life of being exploited for the ‘big guns’ and their benefit.”

Sam told the WWSWS that he decided to attend the Sydney meeting because WikiLeaks “backs up the truth” and it was necessary to “defend democratic rights, which have almost been quashed in the United States and a lot of other parts of the world, and to put a stop to all the lies behind all the stinking wars”.

Heath, a young unemployed worker, said he was “very impressed” by the depth and clarity of the analysis presented. “I liked the way the speakers explained the broader issues involved in the attack on WikiLeaks and then went right into the depth of it,” he said. “What impressed me is that this party is so principled. It is the only party that I have come into contact with that has a continuity of ideas and principles and a clear perspective.

“Nick Beams explained that what WikiLeaks has exposed is part of a bigger system of manipulation. He explained how the lies and conspiracies that WikiLeaks has revealed confirm what people with a Marxist analysis have known all along. WikiLeaks exposes only a tiny fraction of the lies, but it shows a pattern.

“The response of the Obama and Gillard governments to the leaks shows that they understand as much as we do that WikiLeaks is the thin edge of the wedge. It is the start of a wider shattering of the official edifice. The previous WikiLeaks releases of war logs revealed the actual crimes being committed by the US and its allies in Afghanistan and Iraq, but the diplomatic cables are about how the governments relate to each other. It is diplomacy by insinuation and intrigue. They lie about

everything. This exposes the system for all those who have had faith in it.”

Another important feature of the meeting, he added, was that the Socialist Equality Party was the only one that had not abandoned the working class as the vehicle for socialism. “The SEP is consistent in its analysis that the working class is the revolutionary class that will change society. This is not based on a faith but an understanding.”

In Melbourne, Cindy, a Year 12 secondary student, said: “The whole WikiLeaks issue shows the problems with the US government and what is really going on behind the scenes.

“One of the speakers explained the connection with the global financial crisis and that this was the breakdown of capitalism. I’d never thought of it that way and was interested to hear this. You don’t think of it that way. You can compare what bank CEOs receive when they retire—really huge payouts—with what workers receive, which is nothing.

“One of my teachers told me about the Gulf Oil disaster, and that the top executives in BP knew it would happen. The workers saw the problem and wanted to fix it, but the company didn’t do anything and it exploded. I don’t think many people know that 11 workers died.

“I liked studying the French and Russian revolutions [in Year 12] to learn how the change in governments occurred and how leaders were made. I learnt about Leon Trotsky. I was against the whole autocracy that the Bolsheviks had to get rid of. The ideal of Lenin and Trotsky was Marxism. Lenin hated war and wanted to end World War I because it was a capitalist war.”

Kashif, a solar hardware engineer, said: “Although we choose who will be the decision-makers, these people are not acting for us but are becoming puppets for capital. This is because the capitalists dominate and they use these governments for their interest and not for the common interest.

“I’m against the attacks on Julian Assange. I’m against any attacks on freedom of speech. When someone does wrong they should be exposed, no matter where. What is wrong in revealing that someone is doing the wrong thing? Why is he being persecuted? Why is his website blocked? They have no law to persecute someone who is pursuing the truth. Under what law did Julia Gillard say that Assange’s activities are illegal?

“The countries persecuting Assange have a common interest. These countries—the US, Australia, Sweden and the UK—have a foreign policy that is designed to suit a handful of people, the capitalists. The WikiLeaks are a blow to their foreign policies and this has affected the funding of their policies; that’s why they are trying to stop Julian Assange.”



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