

SEP public meetings pass resolutions defending Assange

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party (Australia) held successful public meetings in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth on June 10 to demand the immediate release of Julian Assange and condemn the role being played by the federal Labor government and the Greens in the US-led vendetta against the WikiLeaks' editor.

The meetings unanimously passed a six-point resolution that denounced the unprecedented campaign to extradite the Australian citizen to Sweden on frame-up sex assault charges and outlined the program that workers and youth must take up to fight this assault on democratic rights (see resolution: "Defend WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange" below).

SEP speakers explained that Washington and ruling elites everywhere were acutely nervous about WikiLeaks because it provided information about the secret operations of the US and other governments. Amid a developing movement of the working class internationally against austerity and war, governments were increasingly resorting to anti-democratic methods to suppress any opposition.

The Sydney meeting was addressed by SEP assistant national secretary James Cogan and Zac Hambides, a leading member of the International Students for Social Equality.

Hambides used a power-point presentation to detail some of the extraordinary exposures made by the WikiLeaks since it was launched in October 2006. This included the infamous *Collateral Murder* video, and the massive number of secret cables exposing the war crimes committed in the American-led occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan and other anti-democratic conspiracies.

The financial blockade against WikiLeaks and the Swedish sexual assault allegations against Assange, Hambides explained, were politically motivated. "WikiLeaks and Assange are being pursued for exposing before the world the crimes and anti-democratic intrigues of governments and powerful corporations," he said.

Hambides detailed the arrest and detention of 24-year-old US Army Private Bradley Manning, who has been accused of leaking US documents and now incarcerated in a military prison for over two years without trial. The speaker said that Manning has been subjected to constant interrogations and periods of forced nakedness in a clear attempt to extract false testimony from him against Assange.

James Cogan told the Sydney meeting that the persecution of Assange and Manning, were "part of a far broader assault on democratic rights internationally." He explained: "Fundamental rights such as the freedom of speech and association, freedom of political expression and organisation, even the right to protest, are being criminalised by governments that are intent on protecting the interests of the corporate elite amid a deepening global crisis of capitalism."

The solution of the ruling elites to the ongoing financial crisis of capitalism, Cogan continued, is "incompatible with the remaining vestiges of democracy." The speaker continued: "The current discussion in Greece about the imposition of military rule has simply brought into the open the thinking in the corridors of power around the world. As masses of people enter into political struggles against savage austerity measures and the escalation of imperialist militarism, governments are erecting the framework for open police-states."

The SEP's public meetings, Cogan explained, have not been called to demand that the Gillard Labor government "do more" to assist Julian Assange. "Appealing to the Labor Party to defend democratic rights is no different to begging an arsonist to help put out the fire they started," he said.

Labor was an "active participant" in the campaign against Assange, the speaker said, pointing to Prime Minister Julia Gillard's false claim in December 2010 that Assange and WikiLeaks' activities were "illegal" and to the government's threats to cancel Assange's passport.

Cogan also reviewed recent amendments to Australia's extradition laws which now allow the government to extradite someone who is charged with "political offenses" by another country. These measures are clearly designed to assist US efforts to drag Assange before an American Grand Jury on espionage charges.

Claims that the Greens defended Assange were a "political deception," Cogan said. "The record shows that Greens did not raise any differences to the inclusion of 'political offenses' in the new extradition legislation and did not even insist on a division in the Senate when a vote was taken," he said. "Throughout the entire persecution of WikiLeaks the sole concern of the Greens has been to provide a political cover for the Labor government and ensure that it remains in power... The Greens are accomplices to Labor's anti-working class agenda."

The SEP speaker warned that Julian Assange could not be defended by appeals to the reactionary Labor and trade union apparatuses, or to the Greens to do something within the decayed façade of parliament, as pseudo-left formations such as Socialist Alternative or Socialist Alliance insisted.

“This is a political dead-end,” Cogan said. “The only way forward is in a political struggle to mobilise the working class in the Australia, Britain, the US, Sweden, and internationally against the capitalist system and its ruling elites as part of the fight for a workers’ governments and socialist policies.”

Extended question and answer sessions followed the reports at all the public meetings with additional contributions from the speakers and audience members.

In Sydney audience members asked for more details about WikiLeaks’ exposures of US diplomatic intrigues; why the US had not attempted to extradite Assange directly from Britain; the role of the corporate media; and the relationship between the attacks on democratic rights and Washington’s drive to secure control of key oil and gas resources.

Much of the discussion centred on the political context in which WikiLeaks emerged as part of the developing opposition to austerity, attacks on democratic rights and war. The whistle-blowing web site and the powerful popular response to it, the meetings were told, were an expression of this shift in the political situation. The defence of Assange had to be based on building a broad socialist movement of the working class against the source of these attacks—the profit system.

In Melbourne audience members asked whether other legal avenues were open to Assange to prevent his extradition, including various international courts or the United Nations.

SEP national committee member Patrick O’Connor explained that while Assange’s lawyers plan to explore other legal appeals, the UN could provide no such protection for democratic rights but was as Lenin once described its predecessor, the League of Nations, a “den of thieves.” He also noted that the US government was even conducting spying operations against UN diplomats.

A Melbourne audience member pointed to the close political relations between the US and Sweden and said that Sweden’s so-called Nobel Peace Prize had been given to Barack Obama within months of his appointment as US president. Another person observed that the international character of the assault on democratic rights was indicated by the Quebec provincial government’s state attacks on the long-running student strike in Canada.

Following these discussions a six-point resolution defending Julian Assange was moved and passed at each meeting and a total of more than \$1,200 was raised in collections for the SEP’s monthly fund.

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SEP public meeting resolution: Defend WikiLeaks’ editor Julian Assange

1. This public meeting, called by the Socialist Equality Party, denounces the Australian Labor government’s intimate involvement

in the political vendetta being conducted the Obama administration against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. By refusing to defend the basic legal rights of the Australian citizen, the Gillard government has played a central role in the operation against him.

2. Washington and its allies in London and Canberra are seeking to use trumped up sexual assault allegations to create the conditions for Assange to be extradited from Britain to Sweden, and then to the United States, to be tried on espionage charges brought by a secret US Grand Jury. They are intent on silencing him and destroying WikiLeaks because the website has exposed US military crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the real nature of imperialist diplomacy worldwide.

3. Prime Minister Julia Gillard has backed the persecution of Assange from the outset. Without any legal justification, she declared WikiLeaks’ publication of US diplomatic cables “illegal”, while her attorney-general threatened to cancel his Australian passport. This year the Labor government amended legislation to remove any barrier to the extradition of Australian citizens accused of “political offences” by other countries—a move designed to facilitate Assange’s extradition to the US if he ever returns to Australia.

4. The persecution of Assange and WikiLeaks is part of a full-scale global assault on basic political and democratic rights, unleashed in the name of the fraudulent “war on terror.” The aim of this assault is to intimidate and silence mounting popular opposition to the program of militarism and austerity being imposed on working people around the world.

5. While posturing as defenders of Assange, the Greens have been Gillard’s enablers and accomplices. They have provided ongoing parliamentary support for the minority Labor government, and acquiesced silently to its amended extradition laws. Their calls on the Gillard government to “do more” to assist Assange are nothing but a cynical attempt to keep the working class subordinated to the Labor Party and the entire parliamentary setup.

6. This public meeting demands the immediate release of Julian Assange and calls on all workers, youth, pensioners, and unemployed to defend him and WikiLeaks as part of the fight to defend the democratic rights of the working class as a whole. Such a fight must be based on a socialist perspective, aimed at establishing a workers’ government, committed to the reorganisation of society on the basis of genuine social equality, freedom and democracy.[Back]

The authors also recommend:

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