

Why the SEP does not endorse the WikiLeaks Party

Patrick O'Connor—SEP Senate candidate for Victoria
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WikiLeaks' founder Julian Assange has launched a new party ahead of the federal election in Australia on September 14. From the Ecuadorian embassy in London—where he remains under siege by the British authorities, who are denying his democratic right to accept political asylum in the South American state—Assange is heading a slate of Senate candidates for Victoria, New South Wales, and Western Australia.

At a time of widespread disgust with the major political parties among ordinary working people, the WikiLeaks Party (WLP) is appealing to growing anti-establishment sentiment that finds no expression whatsoever within the major parliamentary parties. Assange is regarded as a courageous figure for his role in exposing thousands of documents detailing US killings of civilians and complicity in torture in Afghanistan, along with numerous other crimes previously hidden from the world's population.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) has opposed the efforts of the Obama administration, assisted by the Labor government in Australia, to railroad Assange into jail through baseless sexual misconduct allegations in Sweden and an espionage case being prepared in Washington. We have sought to mobilise the working class in Australia and internationally against his persecution.

However our long-standing defence of Assange against a state frame-up does not obligate us to support his senate candidacy or his newly formed political party.

Principled socialist politics is not based on personalities but on the interests of the working class. We evaluate parties and the candidates who represent them on the basis of their political history, program and class orientation. Proceeding from these criteria, political support cannot be extended by the SEP to the

WikiLeaks Party, which has been formed around Julian Assange's person. To the extent that the WLP has attempted to formulate its programmatic demands, it remains within the framework of bourgeois-reformist parliamentary politics.

Julian Assange has played an important role as a journalist and whistle blower. His political conceptions and activities are another matter. Assange's politics are an eclectic combination of libertarianism and reformism. However sincere his intentions, Assange's political associations have been all over the map and reveal a man whose decisions are influenced by impressionism, naiveté and short-sighted opportunism.

Within Australia, Assange has sought to cultivate relations with elements of the political establishment, such as the WLP's campaign director and most prominent spokesperson, Greg Barns, a barrister and former senior advisor to the conservative Liberal-National government of John Howard.

As for the structure of the WLP, office holders and members of the new party include a wildly heterogeneous political mixture of disaffected Liberals, and libertarians and various currents of middle-class protest politics. While the WLP is yet to announce its full slate of senate candidates, its national council comprises Assange's family members and former colleagues, activists with the WikiLeaks Australian Citizens Alliance, lawyer and human rights advocate Kellie Tranter, peace campaigner Gail Malone, Aboriginal educational consultant Luke Pearson, and Omar Todd, a filmmaker and activist with the anti-whaling Sea Shepherd group.

The party is yet to issue a program. Its constitution outlines several reformist objectives, including "promoting transparency of governmental action, policy and information [and] transparency of

corporations’ and non-government organisations’ actions, information and policies”, and “ensuring that governments, corporations, entities, associations, trade unions and the persons associated with such bodies, such as politicians and corporate executives, are held accountable for their policies and actions.”

According to one account of a discussion with Assange earlier this year, the WikiLeaks’ editor believes that if he is elected to the Australian senate then the US Grand Jury espionage case against him will be dropped, because “the US Department of Justice won’t want to spark an international diplomatic row.” He likewise believes that the British government would capitulate on its Swedish extradition threat, because “the political costs of the current standoff will be higher still.”

If this is, indeed, the basis of Assange’s decision to run for parliament, then he has apparently learned very little from his own experiences. Far from the Australian parliament becoming the vehicle for his exoneration and release, it has been, and will remain, a vital cog in the conspiracy against him. The Obama administration is determined to make an example out of Assange, declared a “high tech terrorist” by Vice President Joe Biden, to intimidate all opponents to US imperialism. No-one within the administration will give a second thought to any “senator elect” status that Assange may be able to claim after September 14. Washington’s contempt for diplomatic norms, and for the Australian parliament, was made perfectly clear in the leaked cables released by WikiLeaks itself.

In the course of our federal election campaign, the Socialist Equality Party will continue to fight unequivocally for the defence of Julian Assange. We will do so on the basis of our struggle to develop an independent and unified political movement of the working class, directed at the overthrow of the capitalist profit system. That is the only viable way to advance the struggle for democratic rights.

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