

Australian workers and youth denounce persecution of Julian Assange

Our reporters
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Over the weekend, Socialist Equality Party (SEP) campaigners spoke to a broad range of workers, students and young people about upcoming SEP meetings opposing the stepped-up persecution of Julian Assange, and the censorship of the Internet by governments around the world in league with the “tech” monopolies.

Workers and youth denounced the decision of the Ecuadorian government last month to cut off Assange’s Internet access and right to receive visitors at its London embassy, where he sought asylum more than five years ago. The move, taken under pressure from the US, Britain and the other major powers, was aimed at silencing WikiLeaks’ exposures of the drive to war, and intimidating other opponents of escalating militarism.

The sentiments of ordinary people stand in stark contrast to the actions of the Australian political establishment. All of the parliamentary parties, along with the corporate press, liberal pundits, and the pseudo-left, have maintained a deafening silence over the latest attacks on Assange. This is in line with the support extended in 2010 by the Greens-backed Labor government of Julia Gillard, and every government since, for the US-led persecution of Assange.

Callum, a University of Melbourne student, said: “Assange has released documents that have been kept secret by various governments, including the US. The Swedish government made allegations of sexual misconduct against him which turned out to be false.

“Assange’s Internet access was cut-off because he is releasing documents that are ideologically dangerous to the US government. The US can only act in an imperialist manner when it is not seen by everyone.

“The US claims to act for freedom and justice when in reality, they act in an imperialist way that runs counter to this. When Julian Assange releases documents, he can undermine their ideology and show us what they don’t want us to see.”

Callum also condemned the British government, stating that they were “enforcing Assange’s detention in the embassy. They are restricting his movement and keeping him there under threat of arrest and extradition. They are his unofficial jail keepers.”

Leo, a Bachelor of Science student at the University of Melbourne, said: “What Julian Assange and WikiLeaks are doing is opposing the power of the US government. What the US media gives to the public is different from what Assange and WikiLeaks does. By leaking secret government information, WikiLeaks is harming the government’s reputation by revealing what it is doing overseas.

“WikiLeaks and Julian Assange are telling people the truth. By doing that, they are opposing the power of the government. Starting wars benefits the rich always. The US government is starting wars for resources and to prevent challenges to the US dollar.

“By exposing the truth to the people, they get some power. You can’t change anything without knowing the truth.”

John, a University of Melbourne mathematics student, stated: “I fully oppose Internet censorship. It is a human right to know what is going on. No one has the right to own information which may influence everyone.

“WikiLeaks is on the front line of human rights. They put their lives and their reputations on the line to fight for freedom. Unfortunately, this is the only way to spread knowledge in the current international environment. I would like to see more people in the world do this.”

John drew the connection between the turn to censorship and the preparations of the US for war with China and Russia. “Because of the economic structure of the US, war is inevitable,” he said.

“The inequality of wealth and income triggers enormous social problems. The government tries to solve it with the brutal means of war. If world war becomes a

reality, the winners might benefit, but the people are the losers.”

Tamer, a former IT worker, spoke to SEP campaigners in Dallas, a working-class suburb in northern Melbourne. “I’ve been on the WikiLeaks website,” he said. “I think Julian Assange is a freedom fighter. He has put the right information out to the public. The governments kept hiding it to mislead the people.

“It is all of them—the Saudi embassy cables were leaked on his website. And the one about the US killing of journalists in Iraq—the innocent guys who the military just murdered. Assange showed how the people in control in the US think they can shoot people like dogs, and he showed how much they lie.

“As for the Australian government, they don’t do their duty. Assange is not guilty. He has done something, but it is to tell the truth, not lies. They are not doing what the constitution says. He is an Australian citizen, they should help him. They don’t like to upset the United States.”

Rosie, a student at the University of Newcastle, a working-class city north of Sydney, said that Assange is a “sort of underground town crier.” She said: “Knowledge is power, and if he’s spreading things that people don’t want him to spread, they will seek him out.”

Rosie commented that she did not trust the corporate press: “There is a need by governments around the world to control what people think.” She noted the growth of anti-war sentiment, stating, “I think people are a bit over war propaganda. We went through the ‘war on terror,’ but now the reasons for going to war have lost their impact. They are going to need to escalate the intensity even further to rally people for war.”

Rosie denounced the US-British-French air strikes against Syria on April 14. “Everyone in my family were shaking their heads with the recent attack on Syria, saying ‘here we go, we’re bombing again.’

“We started discussing what a world war in the modern age would be like, with the use of modern technology such as drones. We wondered if there would be conscription. It seemed like the beginning of the beginning of the end. If the media outlets get more intense and emotive, maybe they are prepping us for war.”

Nicholas, an information technology student at the University of Newcastle, said he had not previously heard about the latest attack on Assange. “There have been no news articles about the censorship of Julian Assange that I’ve seen, certainly nothing on Facebook,” he stated. “There have been more reports about supposed Syrian chemical attacks, rather than Julian Assange’s

disconnection from society.”

Nicholas commented that he was fearful of a global military conflict. “When you take all of the recent events together, I think there is a drumbeat to war, and it is building up to a significant event,” he said. “I think there is a possibility that we’re leading to World War III, when you consider the episode at the recent Winter Olympics in South Korea where the US Vice President Mike Pence refused to stand for North Korea’s anthem, the instigation of trade war, and the strikes on Syria.”

Harley, who is studying mechanical engineering at the University of Newcastle, said Assange was being persecuted because “he released a lot of sensitive material that pissed off governments.”

Harley rejected the pretext of the US government and its allies for the strike on Syria. “It doesn’t make any sense, why would the Syrian government launch a chemical weapons attack against its own people when they are gaining ground in the civil war and when Trump recently declared that he was going to be moving troops out of Syria,” he said.

Harley denounced the massive allocation of funds to the military, stating, “all the money’s going to the army. It’s not just in the US, it’s here in Australia as well. Meanwhile, they are cutting costs everywhere, in education and every other sector.

“There has been a threat of a third world war for a while. We are living at a point of time where you can kill everyone on earth in a day with nuclear weapons. There are flashpoints for a global conflict everywhere.”



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