

Australian workers and youth defend Julian Assange

Our reporters**21 May 2018**

Over the past week, the imperialist-led campaign against WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange has intensified. The *Guardian*, acting as a mouthpiece of the intelligence agencies, has published a stream of articles aimed at providing the pretext for Assange to be expelled from Ecuador's London embassy, where he was granted political asylum almost six years ago, and forced into the hands of the British and US authorities.

The political establishment in every country has supported the persecution of Assange, including the Ecuadorian government's decision to cut off his Internet access and ban all visitors seven weeks ago. In Australia, successive Labor and Liberal-National governments, beginning with the Greens-backed Labor government of Julia Gillard from 2010 to 2013, have played a central role in the attacks on WikiLeaks for its exposures of US-led war crimes and diplomatic intrigues.

The sentiments of ordinary people stand in stark contrast to the venomous hostility to Assange on the part of governments and the corporate media. On Sunday, the Socialist Equality Party held a successful public meeting in Brisbane, concluding a national series titled "Organise Resistance to Internet Censorship, Free Julian Assange." The Brisbane meeting, like previous events in Sydney, Melbourne and Newcastle, was attended by workers, retirees, students and WikiLeaks supporters.

Over recent days, WSWS correspondents have spoken to workers and youth about the stepped-up attacks on Assange and the campaign to defend him.

Anthony, a casual teacher on the New South Wales central coast, commented: "Julian Assange represents an opposition to state secrecy. I don't buy into the fact that there should be government secrets. There should be complete transparency."

Anthony spoke out against the censorship of the Internet, which has gone hand in hand with the attacks on Assange. "The claims about 'fake news' are a big distraction to redirect public anger away from the government and to justify a crackdown on free speech online," he said.

"Any news that is oppositional to the establishment is deemed 'fake news.' It is a way to censor dissent. It is also a continuation of war propaganda. Russia, North Korea and Iran are not real threats at all. Governments are desperate to distract people from the issues at home, like growing unemployment."

Michael, a 35-year-old support worker in Sydney, said the campaign against Assange was "abhorrent." He explained: "It is an attack on democratic rights and most frighteningly, an attack on people who expose the truth. The assault on Assange is a warning to other journalists who might expose the truth like he did. The ruling classes want to dictate how we think and feel. They want to determine what information we have access to.

"This goes on alongside the preparations for war. There is a desperate attempt by the billionaire class and the capitalist governments to suppress anti-war sentiment. They are quite aware that there is hostility to war and to the attacks on the working class that go with it."

Michael noted: "A lot of people who supported Assange turned against him as soon as he exposed Hillary Clinton's class character." He said leaked emails from the Democratic National Committee, published by WikiLeaks in 2016, had exposed that Clinton was "the personification of Wall Street. WikiLeaks had previously played a role in exposing that she was also a war criminal."

Sebastian, a student originally from Ecuador, spoke

to the WSWS after a speak-out defending Assange, called by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality at Sydney's University of New South Wales. He said that Assange's confinement inside the Ecuadorian embassy was "a complete violation of his rights as a human being.

"To condemn him to stay in such a place, without being able to see his family, without being able to move, this is a crime. No one should be able to take that away from you. He has been forced into this situation because he gave information that should be public for everyone to read.

"The more the US government and its allies are able to censor the deaths and murders they are carrying out, the more crimes they can commit. The US presence in Afghanistan and the Middle East is about economics. It benefits those who are in a position at the top. The real reason for these invasions is to control resources."

Sebastian condemned the actions of the Ecuador's government. He said they were a product of "the change in the Ecuadorian government last year. The time that he has spent in the embassy is a service to the citizens of the world. He wasn't doing anything wrong in my opinion. The current stance of the president is wrong."

Elaine, a social worker in Melbourne's western suburbs, stated: "I'm very concerned about Julian Assange's human rights. How can somebody stay isolated in a limited compound for six years without getting ill? It's not healthy. His rights as a human being have been violated.

"I don't think that Britain should send Assange to the United States for any reason. The US is always dabbling in other people's affairs. It's wrong.

"Assange is trying to tell us certain things that nobody else has the guts to. The whistleblowing that he has done is for the common good. There is nothing personal in that and it is not a grab for power. I admire him."

Sanela, an engineer in Melbourne, said: "I think Assange should be free to speak the truths he exposes about what is going on behind our backs. They should stop persecuting him.

"Unfortunately truth and people who expose it are always victimised. There are heroes in the fight for truth. Assange is certainly one of those heroes."

Sanela denounced the media attacks on the

WikiLeaks editor: "There will always be a smear campaign against somebody who is doing good. It's happening to Julian Assange right now. Of course it's a smear campaign. Whenever you want to walk over somebody, you try to destroy their credibility."

Suraj, a 20-year-old IT student at the University of Newcastle, declared: "The government is doing things behind our backs and the public needs to know what is taking place. That's why I fully support WikiLeaks. For example, we don't know a lot of the crimes that are being committed in the war in Afghanistan.

"I believe in freedom of speech. What Assange is doing is practicing freedom of speech. I don't think a government has any right to stop that."

In Sydney, **Moya**, a retiree originally from Peru, said: "Assange is a journalist—that is his job and that's what I really like about him—he let us know what was really going on.

"We are more conscious now because of what Julian Assange did. No one would dare do what he did, letting us know the truth of what all the governments are doing around the world, and for me, especially, the actions of the CIA.

"I always knew there were a lot of cover-ups with the CIA. It is really a criminal organisation. I know that from my country, Peru. They did so many dirty things behind our backs to get what they wanted.

"The governments attacking Assange are attacking the rights of ordinary working people."



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