

Australian students support June 17 Sydney rally demanding freedom for Julian Assange

Our reporters
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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality held campaigns at universities across New South Wales (NSW) this week to promote the June 17 demonstration at Sydney Town Hall Square, called by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in defence of Julian Assange.

Students enthusiastically supported the SEP's demand that the Australian government act immediately to secure the WikiLeaks editor's freedom, with a guarantee against extradition to the United States. They spoke about the impact that WikiLeaks has had on their political knowledge and understanding, through its exposure of wars and diplomatic intrigues.

The IYSSE held speak-outs advertising the rally at the University of New South Wales (UNSW), one of the largest in Sydney, and the University of Newcastle.

At the UNSW speak-out, Reed Pasara, the president of the IYSSE club on campus, declared: "Any student or worker that defends democratic rights must take up the struggle to free Julian Assange. The situation he faces is the sharpest expression of a campaign to silence any opposition to war and social inequality."

At the University of Newcastle, John Davis, the IYSSE club president warned: "The situation with Assange has now reached a critical turning point." He reviewed Ecuador's decision to cut-off Assange's access to the Internet and visitors at its London embassy and the attempts to force him into British and US custody.

At the University of Newcastle, Akisha said Assange was under attack because he "threatens the major governments. They want to keep people ignorant. He exposed how the US government tampers with elections all over the world and interferes in other countries.

"Assange showed the war crimes they have carried

out in the Middle East and warned us about the new wars they are planning. He is threatening the legitimacy of governments in the eyes of the population."

Akisha noted: "You hear very little about what's happening to Assange from the mainstream media. They want us to forget about what he did and stop us from doing something similar. He's a journalist and he's telling the truth. What is the mainstream press saying? They aren't telling the truth. They barely even report that civilians are being gunned down by Israel in Gaza and that hospitals are being bombed."

Akisha denounced Sweden's bogus investigation into sexual assault allegations against Assange, which it dropped last year. "The rape allegations were never true," she said. "It wasn't the real issue. The most important thing is that Assange's actions are part of a fight for freedom of speech and democracy. The US, in particular, is against people releasing and distributing the truth."

Walter, a PhD student in occupational and environmental health, said: "The focus of the US is on global dominance, not protecting human rights. Their attacks against Edward Snowden for exposing mass spying are similar to what they're doing to Assange.

"They say America is the most democratic country in the world, but we can still see human rights being violated there. A lot of people now recognise that with elections, it's just two puppets on a stage. It's important that people tell the government what they want and speak up against these attacks on democratic rights."

Kieran, a surveying student, said: "Assange is trying to keep the government in check, but the government doesn't want to be in check, especially in America. He is similar to Goldstein from George Orwell's *1984*. He's not a dupe. The government is trying to make it

seem as though he has done the wrong thing, when he is actually a figure for freedom today. He tries to get the truth to people.”

At UNSW, Shrohith, an IT student originally from India, said: “Assange and WikiLeaks are doing what normal journalists should do. It is a big thing now because governments are trying to trample on it.

“Noam Chomsky said the deadliest weapon the US exports is American democracy. In the name of democracy, they change leaders, subvert elections and invade countries. When WikiLeaks releases information exposing this, they feel that they’re being threatened. The perception of people, which is already changing, shifts even more rapidly.”

Asked about the implications of the attacks on Assange, Shrohith stated: “This can happen to anyone, not just Julian Assange. In India, if someone tweets something critical about the president, like a group of 19-year-old kids recently did, they can be arrested.

“One day, maybe if someone tweets something against the Australian prime minister they could be arrested too. The situation can get to a point where no one can speak out against what the governments and big business are going.”

Wen, a Chinese international student, commented: “I think the Australian, US and the UK governments are doing something very bad. Assange is not doing something for himself. What he is doing is telling people what actually happened.

“I heard that the Ecuadorian government might be negotiating with the US about how to deal with Assange. He is in danger right now. I am worried that the Ecuadorian government is sacrificing Assange for their own interests.

“I think there is a connection between the escalating danger of war and the acceleration of the attacks on Assange. There are more conflicts between the US, Russia and other governments. That is why Assange’s life is in more danger.”

At Western Sydney University, Santiago, a business student, said: “I think it’s spineless that Australian governments have joined the attacks on Assange. That’s the kind of thing we’ve come to expect from them. They won’t even support one of their own citizens. It’s because of the nature of what he’s exposed and the links between Australia and the US.

“When it comes to sending Australian troops abroad

or bringing US troops here, it always happens. There shouldn’t be any wars. They are all for the pursuit of land, resources and profit.”

Santiago stated: “The governments know that by attacking Assange, it will have a ripple effect. They want every single student who is against war and anyone who wants to expose what governments are doing to be intimidated.”

Declan, a business student, said: “What Assange did required great determination and conviction. There are freedom of information acts in most countries. Under those laws, what he did is right. They’ve tried to turn him into a villain, when all he is doing is exposing the facts.

“Hillary Clinton’s emails, which were published by WikiLeaks in 2016, showed a lot of wrongdoing. They were very incriminating. It was interesting that she had been involved in selling uranium to Russia, and then she claimed she lost the election because Trump colluded with Russia. It was completely hypocritical.

“Clinton also rigged the Democratic Party primary against Bernie Sanders. If they had gone for Bernie, I think he would have won against Trump. He had support from young people. But at the end of the day, they are both war parties. It’s the same in this country. They’re all getting funding from big business and military contractors. That’s where people like Assange are so important.”

Mary, an arts student, said it was “disgraceful that the Australian government has not done anything to bring Julian Assange back.”

She stated: “He’s been stuck in a tiny room at the embassy for almost seven years, knowing that if he leaves, he will be charged. It is inhumane. They are attacking Assange to try and stop people going against their governments. But we will still rally and protest and they won’t stop us.”



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