

Australian workers and youth back June 17 Sydney rally in defence of Julian Assange

Our reporters
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Over the past weeks, workers and young people in Sydney and across the country have expressed their support for the June 17 Sydney rally, called by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), in defence of Julian Assange.

Under conditions of a virtual media blackout of the event, and the dire plight confronting Assange, there is widespread sympathy for the WikiLeaks editor.

Many of those who have spoken to SEP campaigners have denounced the refusal of the Liberal-National Coalition government of Malcolm Turnbull to take the action required to secure Assange's freedom and safe passage to Australia. There is also mounting anger over the silence of the Greens, the trade unions and their adjuncts in the pseudo-left organisations, all of whom have abandoned Assange to his fate.

Layne, a 20-year-old apprentice chef in Newcastle, stated: "Julian Assange has been virtually imprisoned. Governments are suppressing him because he represents freedom of speech. He revealed the secrets of the American government and other governments. He opened up their databases to make all this information available for regular people which they have been withholding from us.

"They are not trying to prosecute him because of the Swedish rape allegations, which have been dropped, or supposed bail offenses. They want to charge him for something so they can brutally interrogate, torture and imprison him. By cutting off his communications, they are trying to make him go mad.

"Julian Assange should be brought back to Australia. I would call on everyone to support this rally in all ways possible and to fight until Julian Assange is freed and brought to Australia. He is an Australian citizen and he deserves to be free for what he has done."

Christos, a psychology student, spoke to SEP

campaigners in a working-class suburb of western Sydney. "WikiLeaks has taken a very courageous stance in bringing to light important geopolitical matters that a lot of powerful people have tried to cover up," he said.

"They are a very important part of transparency. They hold the hierarchies accountable to the working class.

"The attacks on WikiLeaks fit into a pattern of neoliberal global capitalism. In the current political climate, it's no surprise that people like Assange are being targeted. It's a reflection of the stance of the people in power to the common people.

"I think it's very important that you guys are holding this rally. Nobody talks about WikiLeaks anymore. The media has abandoned coverage. But the man is still detained, so the situation hasn't changed. It's the approach of the media and others that has changed."

Gabriel, a 19-year-old TAFE student and white goods apprentice, said: "Julian Assange is an individual who has done nothing other than proper principled investigation and unbiased reporting. He is a symbol of freedom of speech and justice for ordinary people. I think it is critical that we free him. I want to support this rally.

"That Assange isn't free is a prime example that the American government and its allies think they can escape international laws. They think they can do whatever they want and get away with it. The Australian government just seems to back America in whatever it does. The previous Labor government declared Assange a criminal, which he is not. He is an Australian citizen and that seems to have been totally disregarded to follow this bureaucratic triumph over free speech."

Alex, a corporate lawyer, stated: "We as Australians are failing one of our citizens who has been in

confinement since 2012. His health is deteriorating. What is our government doing about it? They are abiding by the US rules. They want to please the American government, by doing nothing when one of our citizens is being tortured. He can't get out and he is living in fear of being arrested, deported to the US and locked up in jail by the CIA."

Alex commented on the broader erosion of civil liberties within Australia. "The Australian government here is constantly pushing through laws that target whistleblowers," he said. "Malcolm Turnbull, back when he was a lawyer, opposed these sorts of attempts to suppress information. But now his government is doing it."

Josh, an IT worker, said: "Julian Assange is not like other journalists. He's publishing the truth about the crooks in the government.

"I don't like to put him down into the same category as the media, because I believe he's the exact opposite of what the media represents, which is pushing false information and giving people rubbish every day.

"Assange has not done a single thing wrong. He's given us access to the information we deserve as a people. We should not be treated like sheep and kept from all this government information about what they're doing to get more benefits for themselves and give more money to the financial elites.

"Julian Assange is the absolute example of what we need to push the government and the state to leave us alone and give us the information we need to make decisions about our planet, our world and the people."

Shaun, an office worker, said that Assange was a "real hero, not just for Australia but for the world. He revealed the truth of what's really going on in the war in Iraq.

"I think the rally will help free him to a certain extent. What really needs to be done is someone in the parliament has to speak out on this issue to defend an Australian citizen. He tried to do the right thing, not just for Australia, but for everyone who wants to know the truth and know what's happening."

Daniel, a teachers' aide in Melbourne, told SEP campaigners: "Assange released cables exposing US wars and the duplicity of the media. The whole world got to see the US and how it really is. This threatens the US, and its allies like Australia.

"The Australian government has provided less than

nothing. If Assange steps out of the Ecuadorian embassy he could be extradited to the US. The Swedish case held no water, yet the Australian government did not come out and say this. If anything, they did the opposite."

Michael, a Brisbane stage-hand, said: "We have to defend Assange because he was the first to expose and speak out against the war crimes and other plots that were being carried out by the US and its allies. What is at stake is freedom of speech for journalists and for all of us. This is an attack on democracy, because the Ecuadorian government is now trying to hand him over to the British and the Americans.

"It will be a big blow if Assange is taken from public view. If he does get locked up, anyone who stands up in the future will get the same or an even harsher penalty.

"This international campaign is essential. It's up to ordinary people to stand up. Amnesty International should be helping out, but it hasn't. The Australian government should be defending him, but it won't. The WSWs is taking up the fight but other movements, like the pseudo-left groups, are supporting their own governments."



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