

More voices from the Sydney rally to free Julian Assange

Our reporters
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Hundreds of people attended Sunday's rally in Sydney, called by the Socialist Equality Party, to demand freedom for WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange.

As the speakers noted, there is a vast gulf between the hostility to WikiLeaks among all of the official parliamentary parties, including Labor, the Liberals, the Greens and their pseudo-left adjuncts, and the support for Assange among ordinary people.

Workers and young people who spoke to the WSWW after the protest commented on the relationship between the stepped-up attacks on Assange, and the escalating drive to war, authoritarianism and internet censorship.

Jasper, a university student in Sydney, stated: "It's very important to organise events like this, when there is little real discourse in the media. The attacks on Assange are criminal. It's horrible to see how Australia doesn't defend one of its citizens and that no other country has, aside from Ecuador. They are going after Assange because he exposes the crimes of our government and shows the influence of power and money on our system today.

"The implications of the attacks on Assange are a complete silencing of free speech. The establishment media has been taken over by big business. You would think journalists would hold freedom of speech and freedom of the press as their core values because it applies directly to them. But they don't even defend it, but attack those who do, like Assange."

Bruno, a travel consultant, attended the rally with his friend **Nathan**, a labourer. "We had to come and show our support," Bruno said. "It's a very important cause, but one that does not receive a lot of attention in the media. It's like they're trying to stamp down on the issue of Assange. So we need to make people aware of it. If someone asks what I did on the weekend, I can tell

them I went to a really interesting rally, and heard thought-provoking points from the speakers.

"Governments are carrying out what George Orwell warned about in his book *1984*. They are bringing in all sorts of anti-democratic laws and trying to silence people. I've never trusted the government. Whether it is formed by Labor or the Liberals it always represents self-serving interests. It doesn't matter whether the person at the front has a red or a blue tie. Their ideology is still going against every democratic principle that there is."

Nathan commented: "Coming here was a good step up from just looking at posts and news on Facebook. It brings a different meaning to the cause, actually being here on foot. It's such an imperative cause trying to protect people like Assange because he tells you the things that the government is not going to tell you. He is trying to liberate people's ability to seek information for themselves.

"Freedom of thought and expression is what this kind of rally brings. They're trying to make an example out of Assange to silence all of us."

Leila, a retired high school teacher, said: "I heard about Julian Assange's dilemma a long time ago. We have always been supporters of his quest. He is a true journalist. What they are trying to do is shoot the messenger who brings the truth. This is what they are doing in persecuting Julian Assange. He should be revered, not judged and persecuted."

Leila's friend **Umar**, a graphic designer, commented: "Governments want people to feel that they are infallible and that there is nothing they can do that is wrong. But Assange has shown the opposite: that governments don't answer to the people, that they lie and that they are trying to maintain their power through repression and the perpetuation of wars everywhere.

“They are denouncing China and Russia and other nations by the government and the media. It is aimed at telling people that they are our enemy. Governments always want people to believe that there is someone to fear, an enemy out there. It is so people don’t ask the government ‘Why haven’t we got work?’ and other issues at home. They want people to be distracted.”

Daniel, a 19-year-old design student, said: “I’ve been a supporter of WikiLeaks since I was about 15-years-old. I’ve followed all the cables and emails that they’ve published. Assange has so much power just by exposing to the world how badly governments are acting. I thought I needed to come and show my support for him. More people need to stand up for his freedom.

“Assange and Edward Snowden represent the last real big supporters of our freedoms. I’m a real supporter of internet privacy. I watched a movie about Edward Snowden’s revelations and I was shocked by how big it is. The government doesn’t deserve all of our information. All of the advertising and tracking online by the major companies is just wrong.

“Google reads our emails. They have total control over our information and now they have artificial intelligence that they are using to track what we are reading and doing online. I bet you could walk into Google’s headquarters, type in someone’s name and they would know everything about you.”

Ehad, originally from Egypt, is a worker who lives in Sydney’s western suburbs. He said he has been “following Julian Assange and WikiLeaks for a long time, about ten years.”

“It is a really sad story. I believe the Australian government should do one of two things. It should free Assange from his persecution or stop claiming to be a representative democracy. It is really unfair. The Australian government is playing a key role in persecuting him. The government has done nothing to assist him and Labor is the same.”

Edgar, a retired engineer, stated: “Julian Assange is the person and Wikileaks is the organisation who are telling the people the truth about these powerful people and governments. They are exposing all of their plots, their crimes, their vicious intentions.

“Wikileaks is showing us maybe for the first time, how the powerful people talk among themselves and how they communicate when they think that nobody is

listening. You probably wouldn’t imagine that there are people you consider to be in responsible positions who think this anti-democratic way. But they are there, and they are a terrible danger for humanity.”

Scott, a professor who attended the protest, commented: “John Pilger, speaking at the rally, condemned the complicit silence, and worse, the parroting of propaganda by ‘Vichy journalists’—including reprehensible examples at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the *Guardian*.

“In my own profession, there are ‘Vichy academics.’ Why the inattention to the state crime plotted and committed against Assange in retribution for his exposure via Wikileaks of war crimes, torture, extrajudicial killings, unlawful eavesdropping on a national industrial scale, and all the rest?”

“For instance, a conference of supposedly critical scholars in Oslo in 2013 saw fit rightly to pass a resolution condemning the treatment at the time of Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden, and yet accepted a veto via catcalls of an addendum in defence of Assange—so convinced were naive Swedish feminists by the fitting up of Assange as a ‘rapist’. There was no excuse for the naivete. The same conference had already heard an account of Swedish complicity with a US state crime in handing over two innocent Egyptian citizens to the CIA for rendition and torture.

“It is high time that public intellectuals in Australia, Britain, and the rest of the ‘west’ stood up for Julian Assange, as they have for Manning and Snowden, and cut through the propaganda war waged to discredit him and Wikileaks.”



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