

SEP (Australia) meeting announces rallies in defence of Julian Assange

Our reporters**18 December 2018**

The Socialist Equality Party announced at a public meeting last Sunday that it will organise demonstrations in defence of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange next March in Sydney and Melbourne.

Delivering the main report at the Sydney meeting, which was livestreamed internationally on Facebook, SEP national secretary James Cogan stated that the protests, on March 3 in Sydney and March 10 in Melbourne, would be aimed at mobilising the widespread support for Assange among workers and young people.

The rallies would expose the role of the entire Australian political establishment in the persecution of the WikiLeaks founder, Cogan said. They would reiterate the demand that the Australian government take immediate action to secure Assange's return to Australia, with a guarantee against extradition to the United States, which is seeking to prosecute the journalist and publisher for his role in the exposure of war crimes, illegal diplomatic intrigues and mass spying.

Cogan stated: "It is legitimate to ask why we have selected those dates, given the possibility that Julian may be forced from the embassy well before March. We believe it provides sufficient time to build the widest support for the demonstrations, in workplaces and among students, under conditions in which we anticipate that the political establishment, media and the trade unions will maintain a wall of silence or actively oppose them."

He stressed that the social force that had to be independently mobilised in the fight for the freedom of Assange was the working class.

Addressing a diverse audience of workers, students, young people and retirees, Cogan also announced that the SEP would stand Senate and House of Representatives candidates in the upcoming federal election, which is expected to take place in May. The SEP campaign would centrally raise the defence of Assange, as part of the fight for a socialist program directed against the turn to war and authoritarianism.

Cogan began his report by pointing to an image of Assange taken from the video-link testimony he gave against the Ecuadorian government's repressive "special protocol," which is aimed at creating additional pressure to force him out of its London embassy and into British and US custody.

Assange warned that the protocol, which prohibits him from making any political comments and mandates intrusive medical examinations, would create a health crisis for him or be used to furnish the pretext for his expulsion from the embassy.

Assange's appearance, Cogan said, testified to the deterioration of his physical and psychological health.

"It is no longer sufficient to condemn the Liberal-National Coalition, the Labor Party, the Greens, the so-called independents in parliament such as Andrew Wilkie, the trade unions and the establishment media for collaborating in the persecution of Julian Assange," Cogan declared.

"They are collaborating, frankly, in what others have described as the slow-motion murder of an Australian citizen, a journalist and a publisher."

The SEP national secretary outlined the relationship between the vicious persecution of Assange, by the most powerful governments in the world, and their intense fear over the reemergence of mass social and political opposition from the working class.

WikiLeaks' 2010 publication of leaked US diplomatic cables, Cogan explained, had exposed sordid diplomatic conspiracies against the world's population. The exposure of government corruption played a direct role in triggering revolutionary upheavals in Tunisia, which ousted the country's decades-long regime in January 2011. The American journal, *Foreign Policy*, nervously warned that it was the first "WikiLeaks revolution."

"Within weeks," Cogan stated, "the Egyptian working class launched mass strikes against the US-backed Mubarak regime and millions of people poured into the streets demanding political change."

It was in this context, Cogan explained, that the US administration of Barack Obama, and its allies around the world, including Australia, pursued WikiLeaks and Assange.

It was necessary, he said, for defenders of democratic rights to be able to address the slanders that had been developed by the major powers and endlessly repeated by the corporate media to justify the persecution.

Chief among these was the claim that Assange had been wanted for "rape" and had evaded sexual assault charges in Sweden. In reality, no charges were ever laid. Cogan said the Swedish investigation, which was finally abandoned in 2017,

had all the hallmarks of a “sordid political frame-up.” It had been continued, at the behest of the British authorities, to provide a pretext for Assange’s arrest and eventual extradition to the US to face prosecution for WikiLeaks’ publications.

Cogan also refuted the lies that Assange was a “Russian agent,” purportedly responsible for the election of US President Donald Trump.

In reality, WikiLeaks had, in the interests of the truth, published leaked emails demonstrating “that the Democratic National Committee had worked to sabotage the campaign of self-styled left candidate Bernie Sanders and ensure that Hillary Clinton won the party’s nomination.” It then published secret speeches given by Clinton exposing how she vowed her support for the billionaire oligarchs who run the US and boasted of her militarist credentials, such as the 2011 US-led war on Libya.

The attacks on WikiLeaks, he continued, had been a central component of a broader attempt to suppress freedom of speech and censor oppositional views from the Internet. In 2017, Google had introduced a new algorithm, in collaboration with the US and other governments, that dramatically reduced traffic to socialist, left-wing and anti-war publications, including the WSWs and WikiLeaks.

Similar measures were being imposed by Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms. This was motivated, Cogan explained, by the fear in the ruling elite over the emerging mass struggles by the working class around the world, exemplified most recently by the “yellow vests” demonstrations in France.

The ruling class, Cogan said, “wants to prevent ordinary people accessing critical information and an alternative perspective, in the belief that if it can keep the working class ignorant, it will not fight for its social and democratic rights.”

The SEP speaker stressed that this was an international phenomenon. The Australian ruling elite had played a central role in the persecution of Julian Assange. It was the Greens-backed federal Labor government of Julia Gillard that had branded WikiLeaks a criminal organisation and pledged its support for US attempts to railroad Assange to prison. Every government since had backed the attempts to destroy WikiLeaks.

This was inextricably linked to the Australian political establishment’s support for the US “pivot to Asia,” a vast US military build-up directed against China.

The abandonment of Assange by a whole layer of the upper middle-class, and by organisations such as the unions, was bound up with their support for these preparations for war.

Cogan stated: “The immense struggles that will be developing in Australia and the world, over wages, working conditions and housing, over health and education, over the environment, and against the danger of war must take up the demand for the unconditional right of Julian Assange to leave the Ecuadorian embassy in London.”

The SEP, the speaker said, would insist in this emerging movement on the necessity for the socialist reorganisation of

society, as the only means of halting the turn towards dictatorship and averting the threat of catastrophic war.

The report was followed by a lively question and answer period. Audience members in Sydney and online asked Cogan to elaborate on technical aspects of internet censorship, on the Swedish allegations against Assange and on the SEP’s attitude to Labor, the unions and the deepening social crisis confronting the working class.

In a contribution during the discussion period, longstanding SEP leader Nick Beams explained that the hostility towards Assange among pseudo-left organisations, some journalists, and organisations such as the Greens and the unions, was part of a “broad, social process that has developed around the world over the past decade.”

Beams noted that the most affluent layers of the upper middle-class had responded with intense class fear and hostility to the emergence of working-class struggle expressed in Tunisia and Egypt, which they viewed as a threat to their own privileges and wealth. They had dispensed with their previous nominal opposition to imperialist war and had aligned themselves with US-led military interventions, and the campaign to censor the internet.

Attendees at the meeting expressed their enthusiasm for the upcoming rallies in defence of Assange and interest in participating in the SEP election campaign.

The authors also recommend:

SEP meeting attendees speak out in defence of Julian Assange
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