Australian workers and youth support March rallies in defence of Julian Assange

Our reporters
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Over the past days, workers, students, young people and retirees have expressed their support for Socialist Equality Party (SEP) rallies in defense of WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange in Sydney on March 3 and in Melbourne on March 10.

Many of those who have spoken to SEP campaigners have backed the demand, upon which the demonstrations have been called, that the Australian government immediately use its diplomatic powers and legal discretion to secure Assange's return to Australia, with a guarantee against extradition to the United States.

These sentiments stand in stark contrast to the actions of the federal Liberal-National Coalition government and the Labor Party, which have participated in the US-led vendetta against Assange. They are also an indictment of the Greens, pseudo-left organisations such as Socialist Alternative and the entire media establishment, which have abandoned Assange amid stepped-up attempts to prosecute him for WikiLeaks' exposures of war crimes, illegal diplomatic intrigues and mass spying.

Safwan, who spoke to SEP campaigners in western Sydney, said: "The Australian government has turned its back on Assange because of their ties to the US. They haven't even spoken out in his defence, let alone tried to help him. But Assange is an Australian citizen. We need to stand up for him.

"Julian Assange is a threat to governments and the powers-that-be because of the information that WikiLeaks has published. The Australian government was involved in the war in Iraq. Julian Assange revealed things about the occupation that most of the Australian public is very opposed to. So by defending America, the Australian government is also trying to defend itself against ordinary people."

Erdene, a 19-year-old journalism student in Sydney, commented: "People have to support a brave journalist like Assange. He released secrets about the American military and for that he is threatened by the US government. He didn't do that for profit, but for justice. In defending Assange, we are defending the idea that one must be brave enough to see through the darkness and fight for the truth.

"The ruling class everywhere is using every tool to block access to any ideas that oppose the system. They are trying to stop people from figuring out the problems in society and from finding solutions."

Steven, a worker on the New South Wales Central Coast, said: "Assange hasn't broken any laws. He is the victim of a warmongering elite in the US, along with the government in Australia. Our country's laws stipulate that there is a legal requirement to protect Assange, but that hasn't happened because it doesn't suit the agenda of the major political parties.

"The attack on Assange takes place after the so-called war or terrorism, which was a campaign to change the laws to beef up security and undermine democratic rights. The idea now being promoted is that state military secrets are not allowed to be printed. But there wouldn't need to be state secrets if its work was all done legally.

"I think the only way we can free Assange is if they feel that they are being scrutinised by a large amount of people, and they fear being ousted. Then they might free Assange."

Sora, a stay at home parent in the town of Maitland, stated: "I support the rally to free Assange. It is important for us to hold this protest to show that we will not tolerate any further attack on our democratic rights. If we choose not to stand in solidarity with Assange, that is a green light to governments around the world to further attack free speech and strip us of all the rights that we have as citizens.

"In censoring the internet and people like Assange, governments are cracking down on regular people's ability to learn about what is really happening in the

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world today. They want to skew the news in their favour. If they weren't doing anything wrong, why would they be suppressing alternative opinions and news?

"The conditions of Assange's political asylum are absolutely shocking. He is in virtual solitary confinement in Ecuador's London embassy. I read that doctors have warned that his health is in severe decline and that he has been denied necessary medical treatment. That is deplorable. The conditions he faces are a crime in themselves. Assange shouldn't be detained for doing his civic duty as a journalist.

"The Australian government hasn't helped Assange because they want to look good to the US. It doesn't matter if its Labor or Liberal. WikiLeaks also helped exposed our government's crimes against humanity, including the persecution of refugees, war crimes and their complicity in US government intrigues here. Our government wants to prevent any further leaks."

Philip, a retired nurse in Melbourne, said: "I'm coming to the rally. I've been aware of what is happening to Julian Assange for years. I've seen a film about Edward Snowden and one about Assange in Sweden.

"Since the Swedish allegations of sexual misconduct against him have been dropped, why have the British still got him holed up in the Ecuadorian embassy? What has happened to his civil rights?

"The Conservatives and the Labour Party in Britain are not much different from one another. I lived there when I was studying, and Labour MPs as well as Conservatives had all been to the posh schools. They're the same. The House of Lords all prance around. I didn't like any of them.

"And we're getting the same here in Australia. I think too many of the wrong sort are getting in parliament. What is wrong with the Australian government? Prime Minister Morrison is an international embarrassment. He is pathetic. I saw how he answered Pamela Anderson.

"If Assange is extradited to America, they want to lock him up forever or even execute him. I'll be beside myself with rage if he is sent to the US. I'll march in the streets. He is a Melbourne boy."

Reverend John Jegasothy spoke to SEP campaigners in western Sydney. Jegasothy, of the minority Tamil ethnic group, fled his native Sri Lanka during the country's brutal civil war. He is a well-known human rights activist.

Jegasothy commented: "I'm really worried about human rights and the people who are being treated so poorly around the world, particularly Assange. The whole world knows what's happening to him. Australia should be doing something to get him out.

"He hasn't seen the sun for so many years, so he needs medical attention right now. He should be a free man. That's what I ask for, and I hope your rally will go well and there'll be more people to support him around the world and in Australia in particular.

"Assange is one of the pioneers. They can silence him, but they can't silence the world and all those people who are calling for justice and peace."

Jason, a year 11 high school student in Sydney, said: "Governments today either suppress information or prosecute people who release it. Julian Assange released documents exposing the American government so they're targeting him.

"They say that he was committing espionage against the American government, but if the media can't report on real issues that government are responsible for, or if it gets prosecuted for reporting on crimes committed by government, then the media will be fearful to report on anything.

"The big media here colludes with the government, including the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Channel Seven, Channel Nine and others. They are working together to censor important issues, including the danger of climate change and the growth of far-right and fascist movements that are a danger to ordinary people.

"In this day and age, Facebook and the other social media are the only really important means to get information and broadcast your voice. If they take that away, you have nothing. But the social media sites are also carrying out censorship.

"It's almost like the dystopian novel *1984* by George Orwell. The governments spy on their populations. They use excuses like terrorism to do it. They need to know what people are thinking to control them."

The authors also recommend:

Rally to demand the Australian government acts to free Julian Assange! Sydney Martin Place Amphitheatre, March 3! Melbourne State Library, March 10!

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