

Australian students endorse rallies to free Julian Assange

Our reporters
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Over the past days, dozens of students and young people have expressed support for rallies next month, called by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), in defence of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

Campaigners for the IYSSE, the youth wing of the SEP, have intervened at university orientation events, attended primarily by first year students, which began this week. They have found widespread hostility to escalating militarism and war, the growth of social inequality and the assault on democratic rights, including the US-led persecution of Assange.

The beginning of the university semester coincides with growing support for the campaign to free Assange, exemplified by a statement issued by acclaimed singer Roger Waters earlier this week, calling for the greatest attendance at the upcoming rallies.

The Australian government, however, with the support of the entire political establishment, has refused to take any action to defend Assange, an Australian citizen. The Greens, the corporate media and the pseudo-left have maintained a complicit silence on the vendetta against the WikiLeaks founder.

In Sydney, at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) orientation week, **Andy**, a computer science student, told IYSSE campaigners today: “The first thing we should do is put pressure on the Australian government. Assange is still an Australian citizen and we have every right to demand his freedom.

“Morally speaking he did the right thing in exposing government crimes. Assange didn’t do anything illegal. He didn’t steal documents, he just published them.

“We have to protect everyone’s fundamental rights. This is the way to do it, to educate people and to rally them to action.

“The government should fear their own citizens, the working class. If we get Assange back, there might be some backlash from Washington, but that backlash is nothing compared to the power of ordinary people. If we do this on an international scale, then both countries would have to listen to their citizens. That would be the ideal scenario.”

Sabrina, an 18-year-old psychology student, said: “What Assange did is good, because a lot of us were blind to the crimes that governments were committing behind our backs. Now that we know, we can start taking a stand and try to address the problem.

“Governments function like dictators. They want to keep information secret. They don’t want the general populace to know what is going on in the world. Because Assange and WikiLeaks released that sort of information, it has started the beginning of a movement. He’s an Australian citizen and a man for the people. Australian governments should have protected him, but they haven’t, which is wrong.”

Cody, a first-year law student, expressed support for the protests. He noted a broader assault on democratic rights, commenting: “Democracy is now run by money and big business. The media is run by moguls like Rupert Murdoch. Real democracy should be the free spread of ideas through a multitude of sources, not just from ‘official’ sources.”

The 18-year-old student condemned growing militarism: “Capitalism thrives off war. Businessmen thrive off war, like Porsche and Grumman did during World War II in the 1940s. There is always a profit to be made. Those who are in power should be held accountable for their use of power and their abuse of power.”

In Newcastle, a working class regional centre north of Sydney, **Alyssa**, a first-year law student said: “The US

government is scared of honest journalism and Julian Assange is a journalist. He hasn't done anything wrong.

"Democratic rights are being stripped from everyone as a result of Assange's persecution. If honesty and truthfulness in the media aren't allowed, then how are we supposed to know what's going on in the world and the reasons behind war? We need truthful media and Assange was willing to do that.

"The Australian government should be held accountable for abandoning him. They are bowing to the US. These rallies are important because they will help people to learn more about the persecution of Julian Assange. I'm going because I believe Assange should be set free and he should be defended. All people should go if they believe in democratic rights and if they are against the censorship of the internet."

Meghan, a journalism student at the University of Newcastle, stated: "I think the vendetta against Assange is an imperialist one to hide abuses against human rights and persecute those who have revealed them.

"It is changing the way journalism is supposed to be conducted. It used to be about holding people accountable, especially governments. What is happening now is totalitarian and scary. The Australian government is acting as an extension of the US state, seeking to impress its ally. It is sucking at America's teat, instead of standing up for the rights of its citizens."

In Melbourne, the Inaugural General Meeting of the IYSSE club at Victoria University unanimously passed a resolution in support of the fight to free Assange.

It declared: "As the publisher of WikiLeaks, Julian Assange has played a significant role in the political radicalisation of an entire generation of youth and students around the world. WikiLeaks has revealed US war crimes in the Middle East and imperialist machinations around the world.

"For telling the truth, the ruling elite are seeking to silence Assange and make an example of him to intimidate other principled journalists and would-be whistle-blowers."

It concluded by resolving, "to send the largest possible delegation to the March 10 rally, mobilising students and youth both on and off campus to wage a struggle against the attacks on freedom of speech and

democratic rights."

Alma, originally from Chile, works in aged care. She told SEP campaigners in Melbourne: "Assange speaks the truth first of all and reveals the lies of governments all over the world that have been hidden from us. I'm going to try and come to the rally. I work on Sunday but if I can change my shift I will come."

Apollo, a retired engineer, said: "Assange should get a Nobel Prize for exposing the corruption and coercion that governments don't want the average people to know about. There's a lot of bad things the governments do, mainly for profits.

"If you can't fight the argument, you fight the person. That's why they have smeared Assange. He should be freed to pursue what he's doing and I congratulate him. The Australian government should back him 100 percent."

Asma, a PhD student working in renewable energy research, stated: "I'm interested in social justice issues. I read about Assange and I watched a series and did some Google research. They're definitely trying to shut him down because he's exposing what people don't want other people to know about. I'm all for him.

"They just want to shut him off further because he's exposing more truths. The Australian government have abandoned him and left him on his own. It's unfair and it's against human rights. I was in Malaysia at the time and the government shut down access to the WikiLeaks site. Young people were curious about it."



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