

Australian youth defend WikiLeaks and support demonstrations to free Julian Assange

Our reporters
20 February 2019

Australian students and youth have voiced support for rallies next month demanding that the government take immediate action to secure the return of WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange to Australia, with a guarantee against extradition to the US.

Students at university orientation week events have expressed their appreciation for WikiLeaks's role in educating them about the criminality of US-led wars in the Middle East, and alerting them to mass intelligence agency surveillance and daily diplomatic intrigues. Many have noted WikiLeaks' contribution to the politicisation of their generation.

The sentiments stand in stark contrast to the role of successive Australian governments in the US-led vendetta against Assange. They also stand as an indictment of the organisations that have abandoned WikiLeaks and Assange, including the trade unions, the Greens and pseudo-left parties such as Socialist Alternative.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth wing of the Socialist Equality Party, has been the only student organisation raising the persecution of Assange, and the related drive to war and authoritarianism, at orientation week events.

At the University of Sydney, one of the country's oldest and most prestigious, **Lucas**, a third-year arts student, told IYSSE campaigners: "Assange's role in releasing so much information has been to the benefit of the people. It was material that should not have been hidden in the first place.

"It's brilliant with the age of the internet that we have mass communication technologies and access to so much of what is taking place in the world. Assange and others have shown us what is really going on in the world. People are disgusted by it and rightfully so. It's no wonder that the powers that be are trying to censor the

internet and persecute people like Assange.

"WikiLeaks shed light on the real intentions of the US, as a superpower, in Iraq and Afghanistan. It completely stripped away the pretext that these were wars for democracy and human rights. There were very strong financial motives. Under the US occupation of Afghanistan, opium production in the country has skyrocketed. In Iraq, they were after oil and they did not want Iraq to develop ties with other countries.

"It's disgusting that the Australian government hasn't taken any action to defend Assange. They should have supported him from the beginning. But everything they do is at the behest of the US. They wouldn't do anything that would threaten that relationship."

When it was noted that the previous federal Labor government had also joined in the persecution of Assange, Lucas responded: "This is why people are losing faith in the whole two-party system. It seems like on particular issues it doesn't matter who is in power, the same policies are pursued. Big corporations and the banks donate to both of the major parties, and they're the ones who seem to always win out in the end.

"When the Greens were at their zenith, with Bob Brown as leader, I had high hopes. But they've come to nothing. They supported the Labor government when it was attacking Assange."

Junaid, a first-year international relations student at the University of Sydney, commented: "It seems like everyone is out to get Assange. He has been confined to the Ecuadorian embassy for so long. It's wrong because WikiLeaks is about checks and balances. Who will watch the watchmen without organisations like them?

"Governments are out to get Assange because of what WikiLeaks exposed about their crimes. We need to protest and make clear our support for him. Governments will

only defend him if we put pressure on them.

“There is a real danger of war. If you look at the situation in Syria, it is like a proxy conflict between two nuclear-armed powers. It’s dangerous for us. Australia has been involved in so many US wars over the past decades, even though most of the people are opposed to participating in these conflicts. It’s wrong, because it’s the lives of ordinary people that are at stake.”

Mohammad, a 17-year-old engineering student at the University of New South Wales (UNSW), said: “I think that what has happened to Assange is similar to what happened to Edward Snowden and it’s horrible. He’s being persecuted and he is not receiving any assistance.

“WikiLeaks has published things that would usually be hidden, but which are of huge benefit of the public to know. I’m Iraqi, so it hits close to home. I’ve seen the effect of the war crimes that America have carried out in Iraq.

“I think an international campaign is necessary to defend Assange. He is being persecuted for exposing the truth to us. I am in full support of him.”

Adam, an 18-year-old in a preparatory course for an arts degree at UNSW, stated: “Assange has been in Ecuador’s London embassy for seven years. If he steps foot outside, he’s going to be locked up. I’ve never heard of anyone hold up in an embassy for that long in my life. We need to make sure he is freed soon.

“It’s important to have freedom of the press, otherwise people will never know the truth. When a truth is revealed that contradicts what people had been led to believe, then they are going to get angry. That’s what we saw with the mass upheavals in the Middle East during the ‘Arab Spring.’

“We shouldn’t start locking up journalists for just doing their jobs. We need to defend our journalists and media institutions, otherwise we’ll go back to the dark days of censorship where if the government sees something published it doesn’t agree with, the newspaper gets shut down and is locked up.

“I’m going to come to the rally to defend freedom of speech and freedom of the press and to make clear that we shouldn’t be locking up journalists for getting the truth out.”

Marcus, an 18-year-old carpentry student, spoke to the IYSSE at the University of Newcastle, north of Sydney. “The attack on Assange is an attack on journalists,” he said. “It’s to shut them up. They’re trying to make an example of him to silence other journalists. The government is trying to withhold information that people

should know.

“I think both Labor and Liberal are against Assange, even though he’s an Australian citizen. If it happened to anyone else, they would be assisted by the government. But they haven’t because they support the US alliance and all of these wars he exposed.

“It’s important to speak out about this issue, especially for young people. Our generation needs a grasp of what’s happening. Everyone has the right to be informed. I’ll definitely come to the rally.”

Emelia, an 18-year-old student at the University of Newcastle, said: “This rally is important for young people to attend. A lot of us aren’t really doing anything political. If we were passionate about this and wanted the situation to change, they might listen.

“It’s not that young people are apathetic about social issues. A lot of young people are just alienated and misinformed, and we don’t have any choices really. Young people are depicted as dumb, but what is really available to us in official politics?”

James, a 23-year-old car mechanic in Sydney, commented: “It is particularly important for workers to attend the rally, because the attacks against Assange are setting a precedent for anyone who goes against the powers-that-be. They are trying to establish a situation where anyone who goes against governments and the employers can be detained, attacked and silenced.

“I think everybody should see the WikiLeaks site. It can lead to a paradigm shift and huge amounts of insight. It’s helped show me what governments are really doing. I remember asking when I was a kid, ‘why is Australia involved in Afghanistan and Iraq?’

“I didn’t understand. I am working now, but the war is still going on. Where does it end? America’s involvement overseas is never about ‘spreading democracy.’”

See also:

Support for Assange and SEP Australia demonstrations evokes strong international response
[19 February 2019]

Rally to demand the Australian government acts to free Julian Assange!

Sydney Martin Place Amphitheatre, 2pm, March 3!
Melbourne State Library, 1pm, March 10



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