

Australian workers and youth support March 3 and March 10 rallies demanding freedom for Assange

Our reporters
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In the lead up to rallies demanding freedom for WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, on March 3 in Sydney and March 10 in Melbourne, Socialist Equality Party campaigners have won widespread support from workers, students, retirees and other defenders of democratic rights.

They represent a broad cross-section of the population that rightly views Assange as a heroic figure, who is being persecuted for exposing the war crimes, illegal diplomatic intrigues and mass surveillance operations of the most powerful governments in the world.

Their sentiments stand in stark contrast to the positions of the Australian Liberal-National Coalition government and the entire political establishment. Questioned at Senate estimates hearing last week, senior representatives of the Coalition reiterated their refusal to take any action to secure Assange's release from Britain, and safe passage to Australia, with a guarantee against extradition to the US.

Ciao, a 32-year-old chef originally from Brazil, told SEP campaigners in Melbourne: "I've been following WikiLeaks for years, especially since they released the [*Collateral Murder*] video of the US troops in the chopper in Iraq shooting innocent civilians. Ever since I've been following Julian Assange. His work is affecting how politics is done around the world."

Ciao spoke about the WikiLeaks' publication of leaked US diplomatic cables detailing imperialist intrigue in his country of origin: "In Brazil, Julian exposed two senators who at the time were acting as informants for the US government. So, whatever the Brazilian government was doing back then, they told the US government what they were doing, and how they were doing it. WikiLeaks showed how attached Brazilian politics is to the US."

Asked why he thought Assange had been targeted, Ciao replied: "Politics! For exposing the politicians and the

corruption and the dirty games that are played with politics throughout the world. That's the main reason he's been pursued in this way. It's sad that the Australian government doesn't do anything about him or his situation. He's trying to contribute to society in general. He has been contributing way more than any politician.

"I think it's a good call to hold the rally. First of all, to show what people think about him, the majority of people. Because what he did wasn't anything to hurt us, the people, it only hurt the politicians. Julian did something to help us. That's why the rally is important. People should learn more about him, he's a very important person in our history."

Sue, a housing worker who assists homeless people in Melbourne, said, "It's about freedom of speech. Assange should be able to say whatever he wants to say. He and WikiLeaks need to be able to keep providing vital information to the people. The fact that he's effectively locked up is an outrageous human rights violation.

"The Australian government haven't assisted him. They're dominated by the hard-right. People like the government minister Peter Dutton just want to go around locking people up and coming down hard on people for saying something that goes against their agenda. The world needs to stop worrying about security so much and start worrying about the environment, so we'll all have jobs and water to drink."

Kathryn, an IT worker at a mining firm in New South Wales, commented: "I support the rally being held by the SEP. Julian Assange needs to be set free. Something should have been done much sooner. More people need to be made aware of his plight. The media has been silent so as to prevent working people from being conscious of what is happening to him."

"WikiLeaks played a key role in sparking the Tunisian

and Egyptian revolutions in 2011. It showed people what the ruling class was doing all around the world. When you see it in that context, it makes sense why governments and the media corporations don't want to make young people aware of it."

Jeff, an electrical engineer, stated: "I applaud the intent of Melburnians wishing to free Julian Assange, who I deem to be Australian of the year, every year since his arrest, for the courage of his voice and conviction.

"Julian Assange has to be freed. If there's no freedom for him, don't tell me about freedoms in any context. Julian Assange is the sound voice of protection for everybody's rights. If his rights aren't protected, then no ones are. Show me any editor of a newspaper organisation or a TV reporter with a microphone in his hand. He cannot hold that position if he speaks truth. There is control over the media."

Tanvir, 24-year-old IT student in Sydney, commented: "Assange was doing the right thing and because of that, governments are conspiring against him. We should all be supporting him and defending freedom of speech, but the Australian government is doing nothing about it.

"It's not just about defending Julian Assange. It's about fighting for the future. The attacks on Assange mean that if we speak out then we will be treated the same way. There are such close ties between the Australian and US governments. They are always conspiring for war. There will be more wars coming.

"We want to stop war because we have seen what damage it brings. We are being blinded from the truth and I think the government should be honest with the people. I'm going on March 3 and I think everyone should come because we need to take action to free Assange and end war."

Leon, who is originally from Russia, is studying for a Bachelor of Medical Science at the University of Newcastle. "It's disgusting what they have done to Assange," he said. "WikiLeaks is a really important news source and alternative, where ordinary people can get the actual facts and find out what is going on. He is being silenced. It is not democratic at all.

"Edward Snowden released information that the American government was virtually spying on everyone. They are doing that because they need to control people. Knowledge is power and they are scared of that."

"They are going after Assange because he was telling people what governments didn't want them to know. The government and the media are in the hands of big business who make all the major decisions."

Byron, a first year Bachelor of Communications student at the University of Newcastle, said: "What Julian Assange did was reveal to the public around the world the corruption and war crimes of governments, especially the US government. That information needs to be shared, but the governments don't want that because it poses a threat to their rule.

"The internet should not be censored in any way. It should be a free public tool for information and should not be controlled by any corporation or any government. Workers and young people need to attend this rally to show the corporations, governments and the world that they support freedom of the internet and freedom for Assange."

Sam, a first year Social Science student at the University of Newcastle, noted: "When Julian Assange was first forced into the Ecuadorian Embassy, I was only ten or eleven years old. I knew nothing of what Assange did.

As I've grown up, I've become more aware of why there's been such a witch-hunt against him, from Sweden to the United States. His website and his work expose the endemic corruption of the capitalist economy we live under and the interests of governments, which have colluded with the US to cover up war crimes in the Middle East, illegal offshore accounts and exploitation.

"It speaks to the situation in Australia where we have these political organisations like Labor, the Greens and the unions, who claim to be looking out for the working class, but as soon as that runs contrary to the interests of the dominating powers, like the US, they say nothing. Assange has been thrown to the wolves by these organisations.

"There's been little-to-no media coverage about Assange recently, and the media coverage there has been, has been negative. People need to demonstrate against this and attend the SEP's rally to free Julian Assange."

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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