

Workers and youth speak out at Free Assange rally in Sydney

Our reporters
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The rally in Sydney, held by the Socialist Equality Party last Sunday to demand that the Australian government take action to defend WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange, was attended by a diverse cross-section of workers, students, professionals and retirees.

The audience encompassed individuals who have actively opposed the US-led vendetta against Assange for over a decade. It also included students and young people who were alerted to Assange's plight during the course of the campaign for the rally. Some of those who participated travelled a substantial distance to register their support for the WikiLeaks founder.

Those in attendance gave expression to the widespread sentiment in the working class in favour of Assange and for the defence of democratic rights. This stands in stark contrast to the role of successive Australian governments in the persecution of the WikiLeaks founder, and the abandonment of Assange by the Greens, pseudo-left organisations, the unions and many self-styled civil liberties groups.

Robin, a 31-year-old railway worker, told WSWs reporters that he attended the rally "because Julian Assange is an Australian hero. He needs to be recognized as a hero. All support should be given to him to bring him back here.

"The attacks on Assange are a continuation of the barbaric US policy of hegemony. They want to crush anyone who is critical of the regime and keep expanding their empire. They're particularly fearful of an informed public. They don't want people to know how routinely they carry out crimes against humanity.

"I saw today that there is growing support for the release of Julian. People want to bring him home so he can continue his work of bringing these corporate and government criminals to justice. I couldn't think of a better leader than Julian Assange.

Reg, a retiree, travelled 400 kilometres, to take part. "I came all the way down for this rally, because Assange is a man who is trying to expose the inequities around the world and the criminal actions of our own government and its allies," he said.

"I don't understand why that there's been so little said, and so little done, about an uncharged Australian citizen being held in detention. We need to be doing something about it. The degree of silence from all political persuasions is extraordinary. You guys seem to be the only ones raising the issue of Assange.

"We know that the Vietnam war was wrong and that the Iraq war was wrong. We know that our involvement in that borders on the criminal. And certainly we know those people who have fought have been terrible affected. They have been made to fight in brutal wars, when Australia has not been threatened. That has got to do something to your psyche, and that is what PTSD is all about."

Salima, an administration worker, stated: "I'm here today to support Julian Assange. As Australian citizens we are obligated to fight for his release. He is a national hero and we should not stand by while he is in arbitrary detention. It is a disgrace. He must be released as soon as possible.

"If the Australian government were doing their job, they would not be hanging him out to dry. They do more to defend people caught smuggling drugs abroad than they have for a persecuted journalist who is a beacon for Australia.

"I knew about Julian when he started WikiLeaks in 2006, so I have been following him for quite a long time. What he has done is extremely important. With the release of the documents he was able to show the truth of what is happening in the world. We as a people need to know what our governments do because our

government is meant to work for the people, not the other way around.

“The media is complicit in the attacks on Assange. That is why a lot of people haven’t heard of him. The media are co-conspirators of the governments and they function as corporations. Their only concern is to defend the wealthy and the powerful. They don’t have people’s interests at heart.

When a WSWS reporter noted Labor’s role in Assange’s persecution, Salina responded: “Julia Gillard was exposed by WikiLeaks as basically being an American asset. So was Bill Shorten the current leader of Labor. So we are in a really difficult position with an election approaching. The major parties are two heads of the same coin. We are sick of that. We have a controlled system here that needs to be smashed.”

David attended the rally after reading about it online. He had watched the Facebook Livestream of the SEP’s June 2018 rally.

“I’ve come to this rally because the mainstream media aren’t doing anything,” he said. “The attacks on Assange are unfair. He’s done what a journalist should do. The media should do what he does, but they are corrupt. They’ve been bought by the elites and the corporations. There is no independence of the media, whether it is in the US, the UK or Australia.”

“If governments are able to attack Assange like this, then it means we’re already a long way down the road to losing freedom of speech. Assange is trying to give that freedom back to people.”

Tom, a student at Macquarie University, said: “Assange is a terribly important figure. It concerns me that he is hardly in the news. He seems to have disappeared from Australian politics. Where is our government, where is our media?”

“I had a big sense of validation at the rally today. I realised I wasn’t the only person who supported this figure, who is an Australian and who told alerted us to the fact that we are being spied on and provided us with other crucial information. It made me see that I’m not the only person who thinks it is bizarre that this man is so persecuted and so neglected by our government.

“We have to keep coming out into the public and speaking in defence of Assange. There are obviously a lot of people here who feel that they have to take a stand because of what he has done and what he represents. Coming out and holding rallies and

meetings is the only way something will be done.”

Tony, who works in sales on Sydney’s northern beaches, said he had recently begun reading the WSWS. “As soon as I saw a rally for Assange, I thought, I just have to do this,” he said. “There have been many times I’ve thought about going to a rally or a protest but I never have. But there comes a time when you just have to do something.

“Julian Assange has been persecuted by our government, which is sucking up to the US government. It is absolutely absurd and cruel. It’s inhuman. And it’s not just the Liberals either.

“Sadly we can’t depend on Labor for anything either. I can’t vote for them. They really are all criminals. They punch down on individuals. The media are just so gutless and complicit. There’s very little media in this country anymore. They’re just stenographers for the government.

“The US government is making such a mess all over the world. Now they are going after Venezuela, probably for their oil. These sort of regime-change operations are always based on lies. And their corporate media and our corporate media are all involved in spreading the lies.”



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