

IYSSE (Australia) convenor Oscar Grenfell's speech to the Sydney Free Assange rally

Oscar Grenfell
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On behalf of the IYSSE, I'd also like to thank the students and young people who have taken a stand and come to the rally today, because the defence of Julian Assange is a crucial political fight for the younger generations. It is the cutting edge of the struggle against the attempts by governments and the corporate elite to suppress free speech, censor critical and alternative media, and prevent young people knowing what is really taking place in the world.

They're persecuting Julian Assange because they know how much he and WikiLeaks have done to politically educate an entire generation of young people. We have seen this during the campaign for these rallies.

We've met students and youth from all corners of the world who have been alerted by WikiLeaks to the growth of militarism, the daily diplomatic intrigues and conspiracies that dominate world politics, and the illegal surveillance operations of the intelligence agencies. They rightly view Assange as a hero, who is being persecuted for exposing the truth.

I'd like to cite a couple of examples.

In Melbourne, IYSSE campaigners spoke to Ciao, a young chef originally from Brazil. He said: "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 noted that WikiLeaks publications had exposed Brazilian senators who were acting as protected informants for the US embassy, something he, and the Brazilian people, would not have learnt without WikiLeaks. He concluded: "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."

Mohammed, a 17-year-old engineering student in Sydney, told us: "WikiLeaks has published things that would usually be hidden, but which are of huge benefit for the public to know. I'm Iraqi, so it hits close to home. I've seen the effect of the war crimes that America has 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."

And Byron, a first-year student in 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 governments don't want that because it poses a threat to their rule."

He stated: "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."

These sentiments stand as an indictment of the Labor and Coalition governments that have collaborated in the US-led vendetta against Assange.

We have also met, however, many young people who know little about Assange, or who have not heard of him at all. An 18-year-old was just ten years old in 2010, when WikiLeaks published the US army's Iraq and Afghan war logs and hundreds of thousands of diplomatic cables. They were only 12 years old when Assange was forced to seek asylum in Ecuador's London embassy.

Definite political forces are responsible for depriving many young people of any knowledge of Assange's plight.

In 2010, the top Australian media executives published an open letter to the Gillard Labor

government, demanding that it end its support for the US-led attacks on WikiLeaks, and defend Assange as a journalist and an Australian citizen. The following year, Assange received a Walkley Award for “most outstanding contribution to journalism.”

What has the Australian media done since? They have lined up behind the campaign against Assange, repeating the lies and slanders concocted by the CIA, and doing nothing to defend a persecuted colleague.

But it's not just the media and the journalistic fraternity that has covered itself in shame. A host of organisations that once claimed to support Assange have abandoned him, from the trade unions, to the fake-left, the Greens, and many self-styled civil liberty groups.

This can only be understood as a class response.

The revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia in 2011 were a key turning point. These organisations, speaking for affluent layers of the upper-middle class, watched the social upheavals in those countries, provoked in part by WikiLeaks publications, with fear and horror.

Exposures of war crimes overseen by the right-wing governments of George Bush in the US and John Howard in Australia were one thing.

But the ongoing publication of leaked documents revealing the daily criminality of official politics, and propelling masses of workers and youth into struggle, was quite another. The representatives of the upper middle class saw this as an existential threat to the social order, upon which their wealth and privileges are based.

They responded accordingly, throwing Assange to the wolves, and dispensing with the opposition to war they had once professed. They, no less than the ruling elites, want an end to the WikiLeaks model—that is, truthful and honest journalism, conducted outside the control of the corporations and official political and media institutions.

But while these organisations have made their peace with imperialist war and repression, workers and young people are entering into mass struggles against militarism, inequality and dictatorship. This is the constituency for the defence of Assange and all democratic rights. Over the coming months, the IYSSE will do everything it can to take forward this crucial fight to build the mass movement that will secure Julian Assange's freedom.



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