

Support builds for Melbourne March 10 rally to demand freedom for Assange

Our reporters
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Members and supporters of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) have won important support from workers and young people in Melbourne for the rally to demand the Australian government act to defend the freedom of WikiLeaks' publisher Julian Assange. The demonstration is this Sunday, March 10, at 1:00 p.m., outside the State Library on Swanston Street.

The event is part of an ongoing campaign to secure the liberty and security of Assange, who has spent over six years confined to the Ecuadorian embassy in London by threats he will be extradited to the US on trumped up charges. Last weekend, the SEP held a demonstration in Sydney, which was addressed by SEP leaders and other prominent defenders of Assange, including world-renowned journalist John Pilger, civil rights advocate Professor Stuart Rees and *Consortium News* editor-in-chief Joe Lauria (see: "The political lessons of the March 3 Free Assange rally").

In Melbourne, the IYSSE made the #FreeAssange campaign central to their work on different universities during orientation week—the beginning of the academic year when new students are introduced to their campuses.

At both the University of Melbourne—where Assange previously studied—and Victoria University, IYSSE annual general meetings unanimously passed resolutions in support of the WikiLeaks' founder and the upcoming rally.

These resolutions stated: "As the founder and 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."

They concluded: "We resolve 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."

At the University of Melbourne and Victoria University, students spoke about why they supported Assange and the March 10 rally.

Nemanya said: "I know Julian Assange was an advocate for knowledge—knowing things that the government was doing, what is behind everything, knowing secrets, basically if there were human rights violations. I think people should be aware of what the government is doing, so we can change it.

"I'm disappointed with what's happening because he's an Australian citizen. He has the right to find out information if he wants to, he has the right to express his opinion, it's part of freedom of speech. I think there should be more done. Young people should be more involved in politics, protesting their opinion."

Talha, also at Victoria University, added: "Julian Assange is letting us know what is happening in the real world. I think the Australian government is refusing to defend him because this is what he is doing."

An IYSSE member, originally from Afghanistan, said: "I think that Assange is one of the people who always wants to know the truth. He wants to know how the governors govern. What he did is what all people who want to live peacefully in the world want. The documents that Julian revealed shows why the American and Australian governments are angry. This

is how a criminal hides their crime.

“These governments acted like a criminal against the people. We need to raise our voices now because Assange is not just a person, he is our voice. He is the words that we want to say. We all are responsible. What he did for us was to let us know the truths that were hidden from us. Now it is our responsibility to support him.”

University of Melbourne student Gunjan, who had not known about Julian Assange until she met the IYSSE, has since participated in the campaign for the rally. “Since I have had discussions with the IYSSE, I’ve become interested in his situation because he was the founder of WikiLeaks and, because of what WikiLeaks had published, he is now in trouble,” she explained.

“WikiLeaks is important because it reveals the truth about what is going on in the world. Freedom is a necessity for everyone. Julian is being held against his will and is under threat from the US government. So, it is our duty to force the Australian government to free him.”

Another University of Melbourne student, originally from Iran, added: “I think it is a disgrace that the Australian government hasn’t done anything about Assange. A citizen has every right to expose the lies and the disgrace of the government, so I endorse what he is doing.

“The fact that WikiLeaks exposed a whole bunch of secret documents about the lies that governments are telling people, whether it is in the Middle East or in the West, is a sobering fact to know about it. What he has done is heroic. Any decent human being who is in favour of freedom of speech and transparency should join the rally.”

At Northcote train station, one of many leafleted by campaigners this week, RMIT PhD student Nathan spoke about his support for WikiLeaks and the rally to defend Assange. His video interview was posted on the SEP’s Twitter account and subsequently retweeted by WikiLeaks to its 5.4 million followers.

Students and youth supporting the campaign have turned out to different sections of the working class.

Earlier this week, SEP and IYSSE campaigners distributed hundreds of leaflets advertising the rally to meatworkers finishing their shifts at a plant in western Melbourne operated by transnational corporation JBS

Swift. Public school teachers have also responded to the campaign, reflecting the global upsurge of teacher struggles internationally. At Footscray City College, teachers adopted a resolution backing the March 10 rally.

Multiple campaigns in working-class areas across Melbourne have won important support for the demonstration.

Building worker Rok told *World Socialist Web Site* reporters: “It is just ridiculous. On what charge would Julian Assange be held? There are no charges. It should be obvious any charges are fabricated, that they are just revenge. You need to be able to use the internet for free information. All the dodgy things that WikiLeaks revealed about the actions of governments and corporations and their close ties to each other made sense.”

We encourage all workers and young people to attend the Sunday March 10 rally in Melbourne, 1:00 p.m. outside the State Library in Swanston Street. Around the world, show your support through Twitter using the hashtag #FreeAssangeRally and by Facebook and Instagram shares and links.



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