

Workers and youth speak out at SEP (Australia) rallies in defence of Assange

Our reporters
15 April 2019

The Socialist Equality Party (Australia) held urgent rallies in Sydney and Melbourne last Friday, less than 24 hours after WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was illegally expelled from Ecuador's London embassy, and taken into British custody, to facilitate his extradition to the US.

The protests were attended by a diverse range of workers, students, young people and long-time defenders of WikiLeaks and democratic rights.

Speakers stressed the responsibility of Australian governments and the entire political establishment which has abandoned Assange, facilitating the US attempts to prosecute him for WikiLeaks' exposures of war crimes, mass surveillance operations and illegal diplomatic intrigues.

WSWS reporters spoke to some of the attendees.

In Sydney, **Halima** stated: "This is an attack on all of our democratic rights. Where has our democracy gone? Did it die yesterday? I think it did. What is going to happen to freedom of speech now? There could be a lot of journalists going to jail unless we can get Julian free and stop them from setting this precedent.

"Otherwise it will limit what we know. We need to be able to know what is happening in the world. We have a right to know. How can we make informed decisions and look after our families if we are deprived of any real knowledge of what is taking place?

"The point of the Internet was to enable people to share ideas and to communicate with each other all over the world. What is going to happen now? What they are doing though won't stop us. We will find a way to free Julian and any other journalists who come under attack. We have to build a movement to stop this because the political system is not working. We're struggling, we're poor, we need a change."

Amina said: "Assange's expulsion was disgusting. The response of the Australian government has been poor. They haven't done anything to protect their own citizen. It's shameful."

Rebecca, a midwife, said: "A great injustice has been done to Julian. We need to fight for the right of free speech. We don't want to be shut up. All we want is a safe world to live in.

"The Australian government doesn't protect its citizens if they are attacked overseas. They don't care about us, the

people. It's all about the US alliance. We are just little puppets. Governments follow the US. They like to be controlled by the big people and they like to control us. We need a new party."

Her son, **Oisin**, a high school student, added: "It's very similar to before the French Revolution. There is such a rigid class system. In the French Revolution there were the first and second estates which were the controlling power and who ruled over the third estate, more than 90 percent of the population.

"Ordinary people had no real power at all. Until eventually they said to the first and second estates, 'we don't need you, we're the real people,' and so they revolted and made a change. That's similar to what we need to do here."

Jay, a university student, said he was extremely grateful for the work of Assange and WikiLeaks exposing the US-led interventions in Syria, Libya, Afghanistan and Iraq.

"It is for those reasons that Julian Assange has been hounded, harried and persecuted," he said. "We should be very clear about that. They are not going to be extraditing Assange to Sweden. They are going to extradite him to the United States, where most likely he will be tried in secret, and he faces possible capital punishment.

"Sometime we lull ourselves into thinking that because we are supposed to be a democracy, we have civil liberties that will always be there and will always be protected. But actually it's been the actions of working class people throughout history that have forwarded and advanced those rights. It isn't something that's been given to us.

"Every organisation must raise its voice at a time like this. We need a renewed sense of activism, where people think that it's their duty to take back the political system in this country. Bring Assange home!"

Jemma, a post-graduate student, said: "It's important to highlight the response of most of the 'left' to the potential extradition of Julian Assange, because it's been completely and utterly disgraceful.

"I find it unbelievable that they are raising this diversionary tactic that Assange should be facing charges in Sweden, because that was something that was never going to happen."

Jemma condemned Australian governments for assisting the attack on Assange, stating: "It's pretty clear that the Australian ruling class, whether it's Labor or Liberal, it really doesn't

make any difference, or even the Greens, have decided to side with their American imperial masters. They are even dragging us into a current trade and cold war with China.”

Marrieh, a casual retail worker, said: “The work of Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning and many others has revealed to the public globally what we should have the right to know.

“Unfortunately, they have had to bring this information to us in very difficult situations that have been created by countries that claim to be democratic. These countries have shown their real face. They are persecuting Assange because WikiLeaks has exposed their war crimes and their trade agreements that affect us so harmfully.

“We need to do everything to stop this extradition process. It is going to be very nasty. We have seen what’s happening to Chelsea Manning and we’ve seen what they do to whistleblowers around the world, especially in America.”

Danielle said, “I was watching a livefeed video of the embassy when the arrest happened. I saw the 10 police arrive at the building and realized that was it. Then someone put their hand over the livefeed.

“It was disgusting. For someone who has been that long without any sunlight, he would have been suffering. He wouldn’t have been able to see well. They were manhandling him. I can’t believe they did it in that manner. These governments are monsters.

“The buck stops with Scott Morrison. The Australian government has to intervene to protect Julian. Julia Gillard did nothing, Kevin Rudd did nothing, Tony Abbott and Malcolm Turnbull did nothing.”

“I support the continued mobilization of workers and youth against for the freedom of Assange; this needs to be a rallying cry.”

Ally, a city worker passing the demonstration on her lunch break, said that when she saw the rally, she “thought finally! Because no one else is talking about Assange.

“He is not a criminal. I think the Australian government should step in to bring him home. The Australian government hasn’t done anything because they are scared of the US. Why else wouldn’t they bring him home?”

In Melbourne, **Evan**, a motorcycle mechanic, said: “I believe this is downright wrong. When they went in and got Assange last night I just couldn’t believe it. They definitely don’t want this free media thing that’s been developing to continue. They don’t want the truth going out to the public. This is the first step to stop it.

“I’m not surprised there isn’t support for Assange from the Australian government. They are completely tied to the US. America has been bringing a lot of military forces to Australia. There are a lot of bases out there that are unknown to the public. I believe this is happening because they’re afraid of China’s rise.”

Simon, an electrician in the construction industry, travelled several hours to attend the SEP demonstration. “A lot of my

fellow construction workers are not aware about the situation facing Assange,” he said.

“I encourage workers to do their own independent research. There is so much misinformation and propaganda out there. Workers need to look beyond the ABC, Channel 7, SBS and Channel 9 television. They should turn to independent media on the Internet.

“Everyone needs to dig into issues that are important to society. They need to follow what is going on and care. I have been following Wikileaks since 2010. I was really disturbed by the Afghan and Iraq war logs. I still remember seeing the Collateral Murder video where the US military helicopter blew away journalists and little children in Iraq.

“I have little children myself. I put myself in those families shoes. The public have the right to know what is going on. I don’t agree with the wars that are going on in the Middle East. Come Anzac day and people will be proud with poppies on their chest. They will commemorate world war one and two. But we are still in wars now that are unnecessary. Why don’t we question them?

“I think Assange and Manning are so terribly courageous. In the future we will have statues of them right here outside the Victorian State Library. They will be celebrated.”

Julia said: “Government don’t want to be held accountable for their actions. It’s a question of free speech. That is going out the window. They are trying to quiet people down.”

Gerry said: “I came here to oppose what’s being done to Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning. It’s shameful and disgusting. Because WikiLeaks exposed the war crimes of imperialism, the empire is after him. They want revenge. They want a show trial. They want him in court and thrown away for good unless they murder him first which is a distinct possibility. A lot more people need to stand up and say enough.

“A few hours ago, I left a message on Socialist Alliance’s website. I asked them why they and Socialist Alternative have been almost totally silent about Assange for years. They have ignored the attacks against him. Their role is beyond contempt.

“Labor and the Liberals are just two sides of the same coin. The same with the Greens. We need to build a real movement to free Assange.”



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