

Australia: University of Melbourne IYSSE holds successful meeting in defence of Julian Assange

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (Australia)
20 April 2019

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) held a strong meeting at the University of Melbourne on Thursday to defend imprisoned journalist Julian Assange.

Thirty students attended and unanimously voted for a resolution that stated: “This meeting of the University of Melbourne IYSSE condemns the arrest of WikiLeaks’ publisher and journalist Julian Assange. We demand the Australian government cease its collaboration with the US vendetta against Assange and act to defend the democratic rights of the Australian citizen, ensuring him safe passage home if he wishes to return. We resolve to do everything possible to assist developing the international fight for the immediate and unconditional release of Julian Assange and whistleblower Chelsea Manning!”

Before the meeting, members of the IYSSE and Socialist Equality Party developed an extensive campaign on the campus, where Assange studied before he launched WikiLeaks. Assange’s April 11 arrest in London shocked and angered wide layers of students and young people. Campaigners organised speak-outs and distributed hundreds of leaflets, including the *World Socialist Web Site* statement “Free Julian Assange!”

Campaign team members explained to students that the university meeting was one of a series of events organised around the world by the IYSSE and Socialist Equality Parties, and followed demonstrations held in Sydney and Melbourne within 24 hours of Assange’s arrest (see: “SEP (Australia) rallies demand freedom for Julian Assange”).

The campaign met with a powerful response. “Assange is a really rare instance of someone risking

everything for the truth and standing up against the powers-that-be,” Beatriz, a design student originally from Brazil, told IYSSE members.

“What’s happening now reveals how much governments are trying to silence WikiLeaks, because it has something to say... I personally don’t believe that the [sexual assault] accusations are true. I think they were used to try and take him away from any protection—to get him to Sweden and then extradited to the US. So I don’t really take any of that into consideration in terms of his character. I think that what he is doing is way too important to be clouded by any rumours about his personality.”

James, a first year Bachelor of Arts student, said: “What’s happening to Assange is absolutely outrageous. The claims against him have no merit and it’s clearly a ploy.”

The report at Thursday’s campus meeting was delivered by IYSSE club president Evrim Yazgin. He explained: “Manning and Assange are being held because they have exposed crimes carried out in illegal wars that were started by the US based on lies.”

Yazgin continued: “In Australia, successive governments, whether they be Labor or Liberal, have lined up behind the US attacks on Assange. Their attitude is summed up by the former prime minister of a Greens-backed Labor government, Julia Gillard, who branded WikiLeaks a ‘criminal organisation.’ The day after the federal election was announced, it seems the same script is being followed by the major parties to wash their hands of Assange.”

Yazgin placed the campaign against the WikiLeaks publisher in the context of an escalating world crisis of capitalism. “The situation today mirrors the 1930s,

which saw the rise of Nazism in Germany, the effects of the Great Depression, and the outbreak of World War II,” he said.

“The US is pushing back against its demise as the global superpower, by unveiling economic sanctions and trade war policies not seen in 80 years, and preparing new wars against Iran, Russia, and China. Under these conditions, the ruling elites around the world are turning to censorship and the promotion of the far right to suppress anti-war and left-wing voices in the working class and youth. Julian Assange is a class war prisoner.”

During the lively discussion after the report, students said they were disappointed and disillusioned by the mainstream media. Questions were raised about the differences between the IYSSE and the pseudo-left student organisations. Club members emphasised that the abandonment of Assange by groups like Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative and their electoral front, the Victorian Socialists, was not accidental. Rather, it represented a class position, reflecting their upper-middle class politics.

Students also asked what was next planned to take forward the defence of Assange and Manning.

Meeting chairperson and University of Melbourne IYSSE secretary Tessa Pietsch explained that the Socialist Equality Party was standing candidates in the federal election. In Victoria, she and Jason Wardle, IYSSE president at Victoria University, are standing in the Senate, while Peter Byrne is the SEP’s candidate in the lower house seat of Calwell.

“I encourage you all to support our election campaign,” Pietsch said. “Read our election statement, attend campaign meetings, and donate to our election fund. We are the only party contesting the election that has made a central issue the demand for the immediate and unconditional freedom of Julian Assange. Our campaign will advance the fight for his defence.”

Part of the meeting involved IYSSE Annual General Meeting procedures, including the election of the club executive. According to the regulations of the university’s student union, all clubs must have at least 20 student members in attendance at an annual meeting in order to re-affiliate and be eligible to hold events and use university facilities. The IYSSE has done this every year since 2016, when we were first affiliated on the campus, following a two-and-a-half-year fight against

the student union’s anti-democratic blocking of multiple IYSSE affiliation applications.

After the meeting in defence of Assange, several students remained to continue political discussion, sign up as IYSSE members, and purchase literature from Mehring Books.

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