

SEP (Australia) election candidates win strong support for the immediate release of Assange and Manning

Our correspondents
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Last weekend, Socialist Equality Party (SEP) campaign teams spoke with workers and youth in House of Representative electorates about the jailing of WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange and US whistleblower Chelsea Manning and the escalating government attacks on democratic rights.

The SEP is the only political party defending Assange and Manning and campaigning for their immediate release from prison. SEP candidates won overwhelming support for the two courageous fighters who have provided millions of people around the world with the truth about government corruption and criminal behaviour.

Oscar Grenfell, the SEP candidate for Parramatta in western Sydney, spoke with **Leno**, a construction worker who recently lost his job. Leno denounced the imprisonment of the WikiLeaks founder and said he would attend the SEP's rally this Saturday in Parramatta. "I want to be part of this," he said.

"I was shocked when they carried him out of the embassy. It's not the way I remember things in the Western world. It's supposed to be a free world but look at it now! Assange did a good thing which went against the establishment. We need to know these things that he revealed because it has to do with us. It's disgraceful that the Australian government doesn't step up to help their citizen. I don't understand why Australia backs America all the way."

Julie and Bob, originally from the UK, were outraged over Canberra's refusal to demand Assange's release. "I think it's a disgrace," Julie said. "The Australian government should be supporting Assange; you don't shoot the messenger. He has exposed all the stuff governments have done wrong."

"The Ecuadorian president basically sold out to America in order to write off its debt. It was a political move by them. The Australian government has failed in its duty to protect Assange, an Australian citizen, and has become just another puppet of the US," she stated.

Bob said Assange was being persecuted because "he isn't towing the line of the corporate press and isn't in Murdoch's back pocket, like the rest of the media who attempt to control what you think."

Julie added, "Workers should be doing what you're doing and what I'm doing. They should share petitions, be online, make people aware. If they can jail any journalist that speaks up against a government, then it's all over. This is very serious."

Lincoln, a young building trades worker, said, "I'm defending Assange because he has provided more transparency about the government to the people of Australia and people everywhere. That what's needed more and more. The Australian government needs to support him. More people need to know about Assange and his

situation and what he's done."

Angela, a western suburbs teacher, said, "It's a great shame that Assange is labelled a criminal when he's highlighting the true criminals in our society. We're talking about freedom of speech here and we are talking about the truth. We should be fighting with all our might for truth, not for the filtered messages that we get. It's not just about Julian Assange. He is the voice of the voiceless at the moment and we should all be fighting for what he's fighting for."

"I don't know what section of the population they—Labor and the Greens—are trying to satisfy, but he's an Australian citizen and has rights that need to be protected."

"And I don't know what's behind the media's refusal to defend Assange and their attacks against him, unless they have been directed not to give him any coverage. If that's the case, we should be worried about that too. I'm not surprised by all this though. We see it all the time with our refugees and a whole bunch of other things that get silenced. This is why we all need to start getting together and standing up. We must become the voice of the guy who is now being silenced."

SEP national committee member Max Boddy is running for the electorate of Hunter in New South Wales. SEP campaign team members spoke with dozens of voters last weekend, explaining the party's socialist program and the escalating government attacks on democratic rights in Australia and internationally.

Louise, from the Toronto area, denounced all the major parliamentary parties. "They're all fraudsters," she said. "They're all about lining their own hip-pockets. After all the politicking, they move onto cushy jobs because they've set these things up for big business. There's a hell of a lot of that corruption."

"We've lost the right of freedom of speech, the right to have a media with real journalism. It doesn't matter which channel you watch, they're all offering the exact same words, the same lines, the same everything. And it's all been forced from the top down."

"I support your campaign to defend Julian Assange. Workers have to fight to free him. The Australian government should do something about this and our whistleblower protection laws. The reason they aren't protecting Assange is because they've been caught with their hands in the cookie jar."

Retiree **Joan**, also from Toronto, opposed the arrest and imprisonment of the WikiLeaks founder.

"Assange's whole idea was to bring to light the atrocities of war, especially by the Americans who have ridden roughshod over countries," she declared. "Australia says it is giving him consular support, but I don't think we're supporting him at all. He's an

Australian and should be brought back here, regardless of what Trump says.

"If Assange gets extradited to the US, they'll skin him alive because he has shown how disgraceful it has been. His only 'crime' is showing us what is happening and what a huge power like the US is doing to the countries they invade. It's clear that the US thinks it has a right to bomb indiscriminately.

"If you can convince workers to band together, people will listen. When someone stands up, it gathers momentum. Workers here should support Assange, because we need more of him in the world."

Mike Head, the SEP candidate for Oxley in Queensland, spoke with workers at the Goodna shopping centre, in Brisbane's western suburbs. He asked **Marcus**, an IT manager, why it was important to defend Assange.

Marcus replied: "Julian Assange is absolutely a champion of the common person, giving people access to the right information, with an unbiased view, countervailing the power of the large corporations, banks and the governments that feed us propaganda. He should be held up and celebrated, and not condemned or incarcerated.

"The fight for Assange is a pivotal moment as we start to move to complete Big Brother dominance of our information flows. The media is corrupt, and it's a proxy for the governments and the large corporations and their propaganda. The lobbyists are ruling the governments, so it's not democracy anymore but who has the most money."

Asked to comment on internet censorship of the WWSWS and other progressive websites by corporate giants, such as Google and Facebook, Marcus said: "I can't speak for all of the censorship that's happening, but everything is being censored, scrutinised and managed, so that we are only getting the biased content they want us to have."

Last week, **Chris**, a retail worker, told the SEP candidate that the refusal of Australian governments, Labor and Liberal-National, to defend Assange was because they had "done a deal with either the British or American governments." They want him out of the way, she said, because "he's revealed the truth of what they're up to and they don't like it".

Asked why the defence of Assange was important, Chris replied: "Because if they can do that to Assange, who is in the public eye, what are they going to do to us? People like you and me would just disappear! Even though they say they will treat him like any other Australian citizen, that's not going to happen because they are in bed with the other side. They'll make it look like they're doing something but I predict he'll probably end up in Guantanamo Bay."

Later in the discussion, Chris commented: "The working class should get together, being the large majority, not just on this issue but on everything, and show the power that we have. We do need a revolution, we do need to tell them to pull their heads in! Look at the situation with hospitals and schools. We shouldn't have hospital waiting lists. They are just leaving people to die. And they want young people to work for \$2.50 an hour!"

Keith, a forklift driver, said: "Assange has exposed governments, especially the US government, for what they are and I believe he is innocent. He just wanted to let the people, the real people, know what's going on behind closed doors with the people in power, and how they got to be where they are."

Keith said the US-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are about "commodities, fuel, gold, coal—everything like that," and added, "What's this world coming to? The rich keep getting richer and the poor get more confused. They want to have the power over the people

and what we do. They brainwash us every day, with television."

In Melbourne, the Victorian state capital, SEP member Peter Byrne is standing for the northern suburbs working-class electorate of Calwell. Byrne's campaign team has won strong support from local voters for Assange.

Suzan, who works with disadvantaged people, saw the SEP banner "Free Julian Assange" in the Craigieburn Central shopping centre. She stopped her car and came over to make a donation to the party's election campaign.

"I just believe people have a right to the truth," she said. "There's a lot of conspiracy going on out there and we have something called 'freedom of speech.' Assange has shown the whole world what's going on out there and I don't understand why he's being trialled for the truth. He's right in letting the world know what the US has done."

Will works for a large logistics company. "What they're doing to Assange is not right. I'm not into politics, but that's how I feel about it. He was standing up for people like you and me," he said.

"It looks like the governments are corrupt. See what they did to Snowden. He's now in asylum in Russia. I wish Assange had done the same thing because they want to charge him for espionage, which carries a capital punishment in America. Australia should support him and bring him back here.

"We all know the US invasion of Iraq was for oil, and look what happened in Libya. It's so-called democracy all over the world, but we've only got two parties. One comes in, the other one goes and vice versa."

Piotr, an architecture student whose parents are from Poland, said, "The idea that we have to censor the internet is scary for us all. It's meant to be a forum where we all share ideas and share between countries what's really going on. The idea of closing it off to parts of the world is like a George Orwell nightmare."

"How can Assange be put into a cage for nothing at all than putting out the truth. It makes it harder for us to find the reliable sources. We all use Google. It has a monopoly of search engines and it's easily manipulated when you have a monopoly over the masses. What you guys are doing is a good thing and I'm in full support."

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