

SEP (Australia) candidates demand freedom for Assange and Manning at Sydney rally

Our reporter
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) won working-class support at its rally in the western Sydney suburb of Parramatta last Saturday, demanding the immediate release of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and US whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

The rally was addressed by three of the eight SEP candidates contesting the May 18 federal election, as well as longstanding SEP leader Nick Beams, and James McGlone, a friend of Julian Assange's father.

Around 100 people participated. Some travelled several hours to attend, commuting from Newcastle, Shoalhaven and other regional centres. A Facebook livestream of the event has been viewed by over 3,500 people.

SEP National Committee member Zac Hambides chaired the rally. He began by demanding that the Australian government use its diplomatic powers to repatriate Assange with a guarantee against extradition to the US.

Canberra's support for the incarceration of Assange, he said, was part and parcel of the attacks by successive Liberal-National coalition and Labor governments on the working class and refugees.

Oscar Grenfell, a *World Socialist Web Site* journalist, is the party's candidate for the Parramatta electorate.

He said Assange's political asylum had "been trampled upon and torn up by brute force." If extradited to the US, the journalist and publisher would face new charges that carry a maximum sentence of life imprisonment or the death penalty.

"If Assange is extradited and convicted, journalists all over the world will live in fear that if they publish anything that exposes the crimes of American imperialism, they too will be hauled before a court, sent to the US and held in chains for the rest of their life.

"This is a very direct attack on the working class. It's

aimed at sending a message: If you oppose militarism, war, social inequality and authoritarianism, and if you take any action that challenges the powers-that-be, you will face the full repressive force of the state," he said.

Grenfell said that successive Australian governments—Coalition and Labor—along with all the parliamentary parties had refused to defend Assange because they were pro-war instruments of the corporate elite.

"They are all committed to the US alliance and to participating in all of American imperialism's predatory wars for oil, for resources and for geo-strategic dominance, and have lined Australia up with a massive US military build-up in this region targeting China.

"Behind the backs of the population, they've joined the preparations for a war against a nuclear-armed power, which would be a catastrophe and would threaten the future of humanity."

SEP National Committee member Richard Phillips, the party's Senate candidate in New South Wales, told the rally that the attacks on Assange and Manning were aimed at destroying freedom of speech and serious investigative journalism.

"They want to replace this with the sort of Ministry of Truth envisaged in George Orwell's *1984* where "War is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength," he said.

Phillips denounced the media union and the GetUp! lobby group, who previously praised Assange, but now refused to take any action to defend him.

He also exposed the right-wing attacks on Assange by Peter Grete and other journalists. Grete was jailed for 400 days in 2015 on frame-up charges by the el-Sisi dictatorship in Egypt. He now claims that Assange is not a journalist because he does not publish "what is

genuinely in the public interest ” or “work with responsibility and respect.”

In other words, Phillips continued, the only people recognised as “journalists are those that slavishly follow the orders of the ruling elites and the military and spy agencies.”

SEP Senate candidate John Davis, a member of the International Youth and Students for Socialist Equality at the University of Newcastle, declared: “Our generation was told that the war in Afghanistan and the criminal invasion and occupation of Iraq were wars of ‘liberation’.”

Davis said WikiLeaks’ publication of the “Collateral Damage” video and exposure of other US war crimes had contributed to the political radicalisation of young people internationally.

“The defence of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning, and the demand for their freedom, is an essential political fight for the younger generation,” he said. “Over the coming months we will deepen our campaign, turning to high school, TAFE and university students and young people, in order to build a mass movement to secure the freedom of Manning and Assange.”

James McGlone, a friend of John Shipton, Assange’s father, addressed the rally. McGlone thanked the SEP for organising the event. He explained that Shipton had recently been interviewed by a London *Times* journalist, who kept insisting that WikiLeaks had revealed government secrets to the enemy.

“But who is the enemy. Is it North Korea, is it China?” McGlone asked. “This is the history of British, US and Australian politics. Suddenly we have an enemy that we have to attack and defend ourselves against.”

McGlone was strongly applauded when he declared, “Our enemies are within. It is the Labor Party of Australia. Our enemy is the Liberal government.”

“We need Julian Assange, we need thousands of Julian Assanges. Our sons are not ready for a war with China. We don’t want a war with anyone. We are sick to death with war.”

SEP National Committee member and former national secretary Nick Beams was the final speaker. He said Assange’s arrest was a “turning point in world politics.” It further revealed that no section of the ruling class defended democratic rights.

Beams reviewed the developing economic and political crisis of the global capitalist system, the re-emergence of mass working class struggles, and the turn to authoritarianism and promotion of extreme-right forces by the ruling elites.

“The SEP has placed the defence of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning at the very centre of our election campaign because this struggle embodies all the essential issues confronting the working class,” he said.

“The fight for democracy can only be taken forward in the struggle against the source of the attacks against it—the capitalist profit system. It can only be advanced in the struggle for socialism, here in Australia and on an international scale.”

Beams appealed to those in attendance to support the SEP’s election campaign, study its election program and join and build the party.

Zac Hambides concluded the event by calling on everyone to register and participate in the 2019 International Online May Day Rally organised by the International Committee of the Fourth International and the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Details of the next SEP election meetings are available here.

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