

Participants in SEP (Australia) rally demand freedom for Assange and Manning

Our correspondents
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Workers and students who joined the Socialist Equality Party (SEP)'s rally in the western Sydney working-class suburb of Parramatta last Saturday strongly backed the call for the immediate release of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and US whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

Around 100 people participated, and thousands more around the world have watched the Facebook livestream video of the event. The rally was addressed by three of the eight SEP candidates contesting the May 18 Australian federal election, as well as longstanding SEP leader Nick Beams, and James McGlone, a friend of Julian Assange's father.

In interviews, participants passionately defended Assange, as both a journalist and publisher, for courageously exposing the war crimes, anti-democratic conspiracies and mass surveillance conducted by the US and its allies. They added their voices to the demand issued by the SEP for the Australian government to intervene to secure Assange's right, as an Australian citizen, to return home with a guarantee against being extradited to the US on concocted conspiracy and espionage charges.

Further evidence of the developing support for Assange came in a poll conducted by the Australian "60 Minutes" television program following the broadcast on Sunday night of an interview with his father, John Shipton, the following night. Shipton warned that his son would be "dragooned to the United States and thrown into a jail cell, never to get out" in order to "demonstrate that publishers and whistleblowers will be destroyed."

The poll asked: "Julian Assange's father is urging Australian authorities to step in and stop Assange's extradition to the US, and ultimately, finally bring him home. But does he deserve our support?"

Despite the program's own efforts to slander Assange by featuring the smears propagated by the corporate media to justify the illegal termination of his political

asylum by Ecuador and the immediate extradition application issued by the Trump administration, the vote was overwhelmingly "yes." As of today, the poll stands at 72 percent in favour, after over 10,000 votes.

At the SEP rally, **Adriana**, a high school student, described her response to seeing Assange being dragged out of Ecuador's London embassy. "It was very upsetting to see such an excellent journalist, treated in that way, as if he was an enemy. If you go against the government you are seen as a bad person."

Adriana commented: "The government and the media had a big role to play in the treatment of both Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning. They have influenced social media. The SEP has showed another side of Assange to the one playing out in the mainstream media.

"That is why I think is so important to come to these meetings, to be opened up to the truth. I came to the rally today because I felt like it was important, especially now that Julian Assange has been arrested. It's more important than ever to show him our support."

Joseph, an unemployed worker, explained why he came to the rally. "Julian Assange has told the truth, the whole thing. Big government and organisations, and public relations companies for that matter, are trying to suppress the truth because there is an agenda going on.

"People like Julian Assange know how to actually report on what is going on and they get through all the truth-suppression mechanisms. He is being persecuted for doing that, and that is very sad.

"They want to put him through the conveyor belt of the US justice system... That's why I fear for Julian Assange. I can imagine what might happen to him and that's why we need to fight on his behalf.

"Obviously people like Julian Assange are trying to break through the capitalist system, especially the suppression of truth that goes on via spin from governments... He's up against the capitalist system that is

in most, probably all, cases wrong. It needs to be cut back a lot, or shut down, or torn down maybe, so that all people can live with equality, whether they're from the so-called lower end of society, or the higher end."

Jane, who lives in the western suburbs, said: "I came today to support human rights, especially the right to speak the truth. Since I was young, we've always been told to tell the truth. A lot of people who are survivors of any injustice know that when you do get the courage to speak the truth, you are often not listened to.

"Those who have carried out the crimes and injustice against us need to face justice. The attacks on Assange are an attack on all of our rights. I've always been a fan of Assange since I saw the 'Collateral Murder' video showing US troops shooting Iraqi civilians and journalists. It blew my mind. He's been brave enough to show us all this information, and he's still fighting.

"I had to research the issue of the Swedish investigation into 'sexual assault.' I know how mainstream media always lies. I looked at all the documents, because I would not support anyone who had committed sexual assault.

"But Assange was never charged with anything, even after Swedish prosecutors interviewed Assange. The UK government was putting pressure on them to continue the investigation, for political reasons. The UK, the US and the Australian government are all in on it together, because they want to cover up all of these wars.

Tony, a retired worker from Lake Macquarie, near Newcastle, said: "Journalism today is under terrible assault. All the major media outlets fabricate lie after lie. More broadly, we are living in a world that not only looks like George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* but surpasses it.

"Take what was revealed by the Vault 7 files and Edward Snowden. The Pentagon has means of digitally controlling cars and other technologies. Facebook is integrated into the intelligence agencies, handing over tens of millions of people's information. YouTube and Google are being actively censored and people are actively being spied upon."

Asked about the Australian elections, Tony said: "I think people have no choice. The greatest disappointment for me has been the Greens. Like all the other parties, they have exhibited the biggest cowardice when it comes to the American alliance and Assange and Manning."

Moe, who is looking for full-time work, said that he had been following WikiLeaks for a number of years. He expressed appreciation for Assange's role in exposing the

US-led regime-change operation in Syria, where his family is from.

He commented: "When Assange was evicted, there was a protest the next day in Sydney. I couldn't go because I had work. I regretted not going, so I wanted to make sure I came to this. I felt like we have to come to events like this.

"It's not just about Assange, it's about all of our freedom of speech, and the information WikiLeaks has provided us to know what happens in the chambers of our governments, who they work with, and how the military controls us.

During the campaign for the rally, **Olivia**, who is studying at Western Sydney University to be a primary school teacher, said: "The US and Australian governments are wanting to prosecute someone for exposing the horrors these governments have done, but the governments shouldn't have committed the horrors in the first place. How can you prosecute someone else for something you have done? It's not right. People need to know the truth.

"I think that, governments that try to prosecute someone for the crimes they have done, says a lot about those governments to be honest. I think the young people are waking up and starting to really stand up, about all sorts of things."

The Socialist Equality Party is making the demand for freedom for Assange and Manning central to its federal election campaign, and holding public meetings in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane this weekend, to build a political movement to force the Australian government to secure Assange's return to Australia with a guarantee against extradition.

The fight being conducted by the SEPs internationally to free Assange and Manning will be taken forward in this weekend's 2019 International Online May Day Rally organised by the International Committee of the Fourth International and the *World Socialist Web Site*. We urge everyone to register and participate.

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