

SEP candidates address election meetings in Australia to defend Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) held election public meetings in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, Australia's three largest cities, last weekend, called to defend jailed WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and whistleblower Chelsea Manning. The meetings were attended by students, unemployed youth, workers and retirees.

SEP election candidates outlined the anti-war, socialist and internationalist program the party is advancing in Australia's May 18 election. Speakers warned that the imprisonment of Assange and Manning was an attack on the democratic rights of the working class and an integral part of the preparations for further imperialist wars.

The Sydney meeting, which was livestreamed on Facebook, was addressed by Oscar Grenfell, the SEP's candidate for the lower house seat of Parramatta, John Davis, one of the party's Senate candidates for New South Wales, and SEP National Committee member Nick Beams.

In Melbourne, the speakers were Peter Byrne, the SEP candidate for the lower house of Calwell, Tessa Pietsch for the Senate, and SEP National Committee member Patrick O'Connor. In Brisbane, the meeting was addressed by Mike Head, the party's candidate for Oxley, and SEP Assistant National Secretary Cheryl Crisp.

In Sydney, Grenfell explained why the SEP's election campaign was centrally raising the defence of Assange and Manning. He reviewed WikiLeaks' powerful exposure of US war crimes, and the lies and corruption by governments and corporations internationally. The struggle to secure the release of Assange and Manning was critical, he said, and

inseparable from the political fight that must be waged by the working class in defence of freedom of speech and its own basic democratic rights.

Grenfell denounced the media slanders against Assange and the bogus allegations that he was a Russian agent. "These lies," he said, "are part and parcel of a broader McCarthyite campaign, which has been used to restrict access to socialist and anti-war publications, including the WSWS, and to expand the preparations for war."

The speaker explained the role of one Australian government after another in assisting the persecution of Assange. The political establishment "is committed to the US alliance, to participating in American imperialism's wars, and to suppressing those who expose them."

Senate candidate John Davis told the meeting that Assange and WikiLeaks had played a profound role in his own politicisation and that of an entire generation.

The revelations of imperialist war crimes, government spying and the deep corruption within the capitalist profit system, he said, "has seriously impacted the way that young people see and understand the world we live in... A teenager today has never known a world in which the United States is not at war in the Middle East. WikiLeaks has played a crucial part in exposing the criminal nature of these wars."

SEP national committee member Nick Beams said Assange's arrest was "a turning point in world politics." It was another demonstration that the ruling elites everywhere were moving to establish dictatorial and authoritarian forms of rule.

The speaker reviewed the deepening crisis of the capitalist profit system and the increasingly vocal

ruling class concerns about the growing leftward movement of the international working class and the increasing interest, especially among young people, in socialism.

“The growing support for socialism is of profound significance,” Beams said. “It arises because socialism expresses and is lodged in the elemental drive of the working class, a revolutionary class—not just an exploited class—to reconstruct society on new foundations.”

Beams concluded by warning, however, that the working class required a socialist and internationalist perspective and a revolutionary party to provide the necessary leadership. He urged those in attendance to participate in the SEP’s election campaign and to join the party to build the revolutionary socialist leadership that the working class urgently needed.

Extended question and answer sessions followed the reports at all the meetings, and a combined total of more than \$2,400 was donated to the party’s election fund.

In Sydney, the discussion continued for over an hour. Audience members asked about the right to political asylum and its historic origins, the support for Assange in Ecuador, media censorship, and the refusal of the trade unions, including the journalists’ unions, to defend the WikiLeaks publisher.

A Transport Workers Union member denounced the lack of democracy in the unions and told the meeting that it was not possible to defend Assange through these organisations. Another audience member was applauded when she denounced the British judiciary’s brutal and biased treatment of Assange.

Cathy Vogan, from the *Consortium News* website, explained the illegal character of Ecuadorian President Moreno’s repudiation of Assange’s right to asylum.

Veteran US journalist and current editor-in-chief of *Consortium News* Joe Lauria said most corporate media journalists had become “transcribers for the state.” He referred to recent US-government attempts to shut down hundreds of web sites and independent news services.

At the Melbourne meeting, which was attended by workers from the Calwell electorate and a contingent of IYSSE members from the University of Melbourne, questions were asked about the role of the media in censoring oppositional voices, what SEP candidates

would do if elected to parliament, and on the historical origins of the SEP and its affiliation to the International Committee of the Fourth International.

Two people determined to fight for Assange’s freedom drove from Moe, a de-industrialised town in the Latrobe Valley, 140 kilometres away, to attend the meeting. It was the first time they had attended an SEP event.

Members of the audience at each meeting took bundles of the SEP’s election manifesto to distribute. The Melbourne meeting’s literature stall sold all of its available copies of *Why Are They Back?*, Christoph Vandreier’s book about the re-emergence of fascism in Germany.

The authors also recommend:

Workers and youth defend Julian Assange and democratic rights at SEP meetings
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