

Workers and youth defend Assange and democratic rights at SEP (Australia) meetings

Our reporters
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Workers, students and retirees attending Socialist Equality Party election meetings in Melbourne and Sydney last weekend denounced the Australian government's role in the US-led persecution of Julian Assange and explained why they were supporting the SEP.

Anita, a retail worker from the south-eastern Melbourne suburb of Sandringham came to the SEP's election meeting following a recent discussion in her workplace lunchroom.

"Everybody was talking about Labor and Liberal, and [Clive] Palmer and all of those but people were not very happy about it," Anita said. "We were asking, what kind of choice is there? And a bunch of uni students said that there is a choice, the Socialist Equality Party.

"I thought, what's the SEP? They told me it was a party of the working class, educating students and workers, which was really nice to hear, so I Googled it. But nothing relevant came up! I now know that this is because of Google's censorship which was discussed in the meeting. It's not right.

"I am a very passionate supporter of Julian Assange. It's very good that somebody's doing something. All the other parties, especially the major parties like Labor and Liberal, and the Greens—and Palmer who seems to be the big thing at the moment—are saying nothing about Julian.

"Why is Assange in jail but not Blair, Bush or Howard? They went to Iraq, went into someone's backyard and bombed them. The US goes there, bombs the hell out of them, creates a big vacuum, then there's ISIS. They are the criminals who should be in jail. The Australian government should be totally ashamed of itself."

Porter, a first year University of Melbourne student, said: "The meeting was really interesting. It was good to meet the candidates up close and hear them speak about the broader issues facing workers and young people. The analysis was absolutely correct. The persecution of

Assange and Manning is an attack on the democratic rights of everyone.

"I'd heard of WikiLeaks when I was a kid and admired Assange. I was only 9- or 10-years old, but I saw the [Collateral Murder] video and was disgusted. Politicians have a vested interest in keeping these kinds of people behind bars, so it will require a broad mobilisation of people to save Assange and defend our rights."

Frank, a retired worker from Newcastle, attended the Sydney meeting after reading WSWS for about three weeks. "I came here to support Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning," he stated. "Their treatment by a huge number of organisations in the world has been disgusting."

"I subscribed to the WSWS Newsletter on the basis of Assange and found that no other political parties in Australia were covering it. I'm traditionally a Greens voter and supporter. I emailed [Greens leader] Di Natale's office and the response I got was less than encouraging. I've decided that the only party trying to look after the best interests of Assange and Manning is the SEP and I fully support the international aspect of your efforts.

"I am an internationalist. In so many matters today, we are not a series of sovereign countries but are an international group of people living on this planet.

"From the globalisation of trade, to climate change and so on, we are not a group of tribes, but one species on a fragile planet, dictated to by some very bad people.

"A telecom worker here, working in a pit, is little different from a telecom worker in China working in a pit. There's a commonality in their work, and a commonality in their aspirations and needs for justice.

"The meeting today showed me there are so many like-minded people and I was impressed by the number of intelligent questions. It's clear for those that want to see that we live in a very disjointed world, where fairness has

gone out the window.”

Michael, a taxi driver and long time reader of the WSWs, was attending his first SEP event. “I thought the discussion today was great and I’m impressed with the organisation,” he said. “It’s one thing to be hot under the collar about issues and to be vocal, it’s quite another to be organised enough to convey those beliefs into meaningful action. That’s where I see this organisation coming into it.”

During the Q&A session Michael asked about the corporate and anti-democratic nature of the unions. “I agree completely with your analysis of the unions,” he said.

“I joined the Transport Workers Union in the early eighties after being a waterside worker in Auckland and spending five years in the NSW railways. I’d seen a fair spectrum of how the unions operate. I’ve also experienced the TWU through working as a taxi driver.

“It’s a situation where the workers are sold right down the drain by all kinds of forces within the union movement and the periphery of the union movement, the Industrial Relations Commissions, the Fair Work Commission. After three decades of involvement I have been absolutely disgusted.”

The persecution of Assange and Manning, Michael said, “Is all to do with the power structures that hold this whole edifice together. It’s all about the nexus between government and big business.”

Joyce, a pensioner, commented: “I’m very upset about the treatment of Julian Assange. It’s very sad that someone is persecuted just for telling the truth. We have a right to know. I’m disgusted at the media, which is smearing him and telling lies. The government is ignoring Julian Assange and they should be ashamed of themselves. If we don’t have information and we don’t have the truth and know what the government is doing, how can we fix the problems of austerity and poverty?”

“I’ve always followed the SEP on Facebook, but because they are defending Julian Assange I’ve become more interested. I think its role is wonderful and I’m giving the SEP my first preference vote. It’s the only party in Australia that will defend Julian Assange.

“There has been a deafening silence from the media and the government about Julian Assange. I have been putting up on social media ‘shame on the Australian government for not protecting one of its own.’”

Tom, a truck driver from Sydney’s western suburbs, said: “I’ve been defending Julian Assange for a long time, since he first started getting hounded by the Swedish

government. I’m concerned about human rights and a lack of freedom all over the world, along with the spread of fascism. For governments, Julian Assange is public enemy number one because he tells the truth.

“But what Julian Assange and WikiLeaks have published is simply information from governments themselves. It is therefore correct information. Governments are worried about workers learning the truth because it will impinge on their market share. The truth will get governments nowhere. Labor, Liberal and the Greens think people are idiots and they want people to stay idiots.”

Robyn, a young factory worker, said: “The discussion at the meeting was very clear and relevant. I don’t think there’s any other forum that’s available where this kind of information—the clear censorship of information relating to human rights violations, the violation of domestic law and international law—is being discussed,

“I came because the defence of Assange and Manning is a central international issue that the world has to be focused on. There are war crimes committed to this day. Assange and a lot of whistle blowers out there are willing to release information that we have a right to know about.

“There are wars and there are famines. The face of the planet is being destroyed and the social fabric is being torn apart. I understood that America is everywhere, causing havoc all around the world, but it took me up until now to properly understand what imperialism really is and that its hunger for power and self-enrichment is at the expense of everyone else.”

Authorised by James Cogan for the Socialist Equality Party, Suite 906, 185 Elizabeth Street, Sydney, NSW, 2000.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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