

Students in Berlin support this Saturday's rally to defend Julian Assange

Our reporter
14 May 2019

For the past week, the Socialist Equality Party (Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei, SGP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) have campaigned throughout Berlin for this Saturday's rally to demand the freedom of persecuted whistleblower and journalist Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning.

The rally on Saturday will take place in front of the British embassy in Berlin at 11 a.m. local time and feature international speakers, including SEP (UK) National Secretary Chris Marsden, as well as leading members of the SGP in Germany.

As part of the International Committee of the Fourth International's (ICFI) European election campaign, the rally follows the meeting held in London last Sunday in defence of Assange and Manning, organised by the Socialist Equality Party (UK), which was attended by 150 people.

Campaigners have distributed thousands of leaflets across Germany's capital city and put up hundreds of posters in workplaces, universities, and shopping centres, and have won an extremely positive response. The great majority of those we have spoken to have expressed their support and appreciation for Assange, Manning and WikiLeaks.

Casey, who is studying in Berlin on exchange from the United States, became involved in the campaign after attending an IYSSE meeting at Humboldt University in defence of Assange last month. "I'm participating in this campaign because I believe it's important to get out as many people as possible to show support for Assange's rights, which will send a message to the elite that the working class will not be so easily intimidated by their tactics," she said.

"WikiLeaks was created to act as a source of true information because the mainstream media won't. All

the imperialist countries are using Assange as an example, to say that if you try to speak out, we will use our system not only to silence you but maybe kill you. The whole point of the Espionage Act is to silence people. It's supposed to apply during times of war, but the United States is constantly at war."

She added that it was important to "raise awareness about the persecution of Assange and Chelsea Manning because it has either been ignored or obscured in the media, creating a lot of confusion around who Assange and Manning are, what they've done, and why the working class should be concerned about their persecution." This went "hand in hand with the efforts to demonise him and make it seem like it doesn't matter if he is persecuted anyway," which was the reason for the Swedish sexual assault allegations that were officially re-opened yesterday.

"The response on campuses thus far has been largely positive," Casey said. "Many of the people I've encountered have expressed support for Assange and Manning, and those people I've encountered who had not heard of Assange are shocked to learn that he is being targeted for his actions, once the situation is explained to them."

"This is a manifestation of the system of capitalism because it needs to silence people so that it can operate," she concluded. "While we mobilise people to defend Julian Assange, I think we must seek to channel this toward a movement of people connected by their class and opposed to exploitation under capitalism."

Alex, 21, is studying at Technical University in central Berlin. He spoke to an IYSSE campaign team yesterday. "Assange should be free," he said. "I heard about the video in Iraq that was published by WikiLeaks. It's been in the back of my head ever since."

He said, “As I understood it, Manning may have been under confidentiality, so it was illegal for her to publish this. But it was for the cause—it was righteous because the cause was so significant. There was a similar case around the Pentagon Papers. The public pressure to defend the publishers was even bigger then because people were on the streets and fighting against the war. So, if Assange gets the backing of the people, it’s possible he will be freed. It should be that way.

“This is what the media is for. If they don’t expose the crimes like this, who is supposed to?”

Alex had just heard about the re-opening of sexual assault allegations by Swedish prosecutors that day, and said it was “a very strange correlation that he had been accused of assaulting someone right after publishing files showing US crimes in military operations.

“What I credit Assange for is that he lays open information that shows governments say one thing to the public and do another to get a reason to go into a war. We need journalists who will risk their own lives to expose such things. If I was in that position, I don’t know if I could have done the same—it was extremely brave.”

Carsten, who is studying engineering at the Technical University of Berlin, said he was “for everything that Assange has done. I’m also in favour of Edward Snowden and other whistleblowers. It’s important to protect them in this day and age.”

“The Iraq video was the first time I heard about him,” he said. “I saw the aftermath of what happened in Iraq. ... They were torturing civilians. The US government is doing this because they’re afraid. They’re afraid of WikiLeaks. They want to make clear that if you publish true facts, then bad things will happen to you.”

At the Free University of Berlin, IYSSE campaigners spoke with Razar and Anahita. They both are studying in sociology on exchange from Iran.

“It’s important for freedom of speech, and all activists in the world have to support Assange’s freedom,” Razar said. “We need such people, rather than [Facebook CEO] Mark Zuckerberg. I saw the video that he and WikiLeaks published of an American helicopter in Iraq attacking ordinary people.”

Razar also said he is concerned about the growing war danger in the Middle East: “People like [John] Bolton and others are trying to do something. The

Iranian people are now used to this situation, but I hope that this is not going to lead to a war.”

Jay, 26, who is studying philosophy and political sciences at the Free University, said: “What Assange did was no crime. He was telling the truth. Why is telling the truth a crime? I saw the video of ‘Collateral Murder.’ This is why we are supposed to have the separation of powers, and the fourth part is supposed to be the media. But the media today is being used in the wrong way” and not performing that role.

“Back in the day, 40 years ago, the journalists of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* were not arrested for publishing the Pentagon Papers,” he added. “It is hypocrisy that they do not support Assange today.”

The IYSSE and SGP urge all students, young people and workers, and all those committed to the defence of democratic rights, to attend this Saturday’s rally in Berlin, and to take a stand in defence of free speech and against militarism and war. Share the event on Facebook here.

Details:

Freedom for Julian Assange Rally
Saturday, May 18, 11:00 a.m.
British Embassy in Berlin
Wilhelmstrasse 70/71, 10117
Berlin, Germany



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact