

Australia: Rally to defend Julian Assange held in Broadmeadows, Melbourne

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) organised a rally on Saturday in defence of WikiLeaks' Julian Assange, in the working-class Melbourne suburb of Broadmeadows.

The event drew a small but determined crowd of SEP members and supporters, local workers, and WikiLeaks' supporters, one of whom drove for nearly an hour and a half to be involved. The rally was organised ahead of an SEP public meeting in Broadmeadows yesterday, and upcoming meetings in Sydney and Brisbane this Wednesday, May 15.

Held a week before the May 18 federal election, the rally was addressed by SEP candidates Peter Byrne, standing for the lower house seat of Calwell, of which Broadmeadows is a part, and Tessa Pietsch, the party's lead Senate candidate in Victoria. SEP National Committee members Sue Phillips and Patrick O'Connor also spoke.

Pietsch told the rally: "Julian Assange and his media organisation, WikiLeaks, has played a profound role in the politicisation of an entire generation. The revelations of imperialist war crimes, governmental spying, and the deep corruption within the capitalist profit system seriously impacted the way that young people see and understand the world.

"WikiLeaks, through its publishing of government spying, war crimes, and deep-rooted corruption, taught our generation that the government does not always tell the truth. In fact, the government purposely and consciously works to conceal the truth from its citizens. So-called 'national security' and 'humanitarian intervention' by the US and her allies, including Australia, have been outed as complete and utter lies."

Byrne spoke of the social crisis within the Calwell electorate, with the Broadmeadows area having an official unemployment rate of 25 percent. He noted that

thousands of residents were Iraqi, Syrian, and Kurdish refugees, victims of US imperialist operations in the Middle East that WikiLeaks had helped expose.

"Julian Assange is widely regarded as a hero by working people," he said. "The sustained smear campaign against him, taken as good coin within certain middle-class circles, has gained little traction within the working class."

Byrne appealed to workers and young people to support the SEP's campaign ahead of the May 18 vote. "We call on you not just to support and vote for us, but to join our party and take up the fight for international socialism."

Rally participants spoke with *World Socialist Web Site* reporters.

Catherine, an administrative worker from the eastern suburb of Hawthorn, attended the rally after learning about it on Facebook. "I have been following the situation with Julian Assange since he was taken so brutally out of the Ecuadorian embassy last month," she explained.

"I was so shocked watching what happened. I could not believe it was the same person. I have to plead a little bit of ignorance that I only had a rudimentary knowledge of who he was. When I saw this old man dragged out of the embassy, I was thinking, is that the same quite suave WikiLeaks' guy from a few years ago?"

"I couldn't believe it was the same person and that has led me to learn more and more. Ever since then I have been absolutely devastated about what has happened to him. I now have a real passion to do what I can. As a normal citizen I feel I have limited ability to do much but I want to do whatever I can do."

Catherine continued: "I didn't follow anything when he was in the embassy, I am quite new to it. I remember

things back in 2009-2010, it was huge, the WikiLeaks' revelations, but then it seemed to all go a bit quiet. I wasn't conscious of what was happening and it kind of got shushed up a bit and I didn't have the curiosity to explore further. Unless you wanted to know you weren't going to be told.

"I fear the situation once again is going to get buried. I think most Australians would care about this if they knew. I think it is our job to let people know, let's get people out on the street, let's have a public outcry because that is the only thing that will get listened to. If this all gets swept under the carpet god knows what is going to happen to him.

"Since the scenes at the Ecuadorian embassy I have been immersed. Every day I have come home from work I have read articles—everything I can get my hands on. My take away from today is that there is only one party that has the guts to talk about this in the elections, only one party. That has given me something to think about—I definitely got a lot out of the rally today."

Alan said: "Julian Assange should be given the protection of the Australian government and brought home to save him from the American persecution that's surely going to happen if they get hold of him for exposing their murderous actions on unarmed civilians overseas.

"I thought it was out of order the way he was dragged from the embassy... It smacks of bullying and discouraging whistleblowers. You can see journalists around the world being jailed for the same sort of thing. It's what guilty governments would do. The media has gone all out in blackening Assange's name—it's certainly not justified, he should be getting a medal for his exposures."

Torricks, whose father was born in Lebanon, is an electrician who resigned membership of the Labor Party in 2003 in protest over its collaboration with the US-led, illegal invasion of Iraq.

"WikiLeaks showed us many, many things," he explained. "The destructive power of the regimes... you know the Iraqi massacres, the American government's willingness to carry out atrocities. With Edward Snowden as well, these are people who have always been heroes. Always in history, the people who have the courage to stand up knowing that there could be consequences to pay, yet they stand up for the

community to let people know."

The authors also recommend:

SEP election meetings in Sydney and Brisbane
Vote Socialist Equality Party! No to War and Austerity! For Socialism and Internationalism!

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