

Join the Sydney rally this Saturday demanding freedom for Julian Assange!

Oscar Grenfell
27 June 2019

The Socialist Equality Party (Australia) has called a rally this Saturday, 12 p.m. at Sydney's Martin Place Amphitheatre, in defence of Julian Assange.

The demonstration will demand that the Australian government take immediate action to prevent the WikiLeaks founder's extradition to the United States, where he faces life imprisonment or the death penalty, and secure his complete freedom. It will call for the immediate release of the courageous whistleblower Chelsea Manning, who has been jailed by the Trump administration for over a month because of her principled refusal to give perjured testimony against Assange.

All workers, students, young people and defenders of civil liberties should join the Sydney rally and promote it as widely as possible.

The persecution of Assange for his role in the exposure of US war crimes, diplomatic conspiracies and mass surveillance operations is the spearhead of an attempt by governments internationally to suppress opposition to militarism and war, and to abolish fundamental democratic rights.

The urgency of actions in defence of Assange is demonstrated by the speed with which the global conspiracy against him is proceeding.

Less than three months after Assange was violently arrested on April 11, the British government has greenlighted court hearings on his extradition next February. They will be a legal farce, conducted in a kangaroo court whose sole purpose is to dispatch the WikiLeaks founder to the US.

As a WSWs international editorial board statement last week explained: "Only by organizing protest actions on an international scale—meetings, rallies, demonstrations, and public conferences—will it be possible to frustrate and defeat the plans of reactionary governments, their intelligence agencies and political agents to silence and destroy Julian Assange."

The Sydney rally is part of this worldwide campaign. It will be based upon the perspective outlined by the WSWs statement, which called for the formation of a Global Defence Committee to mobilise the immense strength of the working class to secure Assange's and Manning's freedom.

Alongside leading members of the SEP, the Sydney protest will be addressed by prominent defenders of democratic rights.

They will include Emeritus Professor Stuart Rees, the former head of the Sydney Peace Foundation, who in 2011 presented Assange with the organisation's Gold Medal for "peace with justice"; filmmaker James Ricketson, who was freed from a Cambodian jail after a public campaign against his incarceration on bogus espionage charges; and Mark Davis, a Walkley Award-winning investigative journalist who interviewed the WikiLeaks founder several times in 2010 and 2011.

The Sydney rally will be livestreamed to an international audience on the SEP's Facebook page. It will be followed by demonstrations in Brisbane on July 6 and Melbourne on July 14.

The protests will indict successive Australian governments for their central role in the US-led vendetta against Assange. All of them have refused to fulfil their obligations to Assange as an Australian citizen and journalist. Instead, they joined the campaign against him.

In 2010, when the Obama administration began the ruthless persecution of WikiLeaks over its exposure of historic war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, and Washington's global meddling operations, the Greens-backed Labor government of Julia Gillard rejected calls to intervene in defence of Assange.

In fact, Gillard denounced WikiLeaks as a criminal organisation and pledged to assist the efforts of the US government and intelligence agencies to destroy it.

This has been the line of every Australian government

since.

For seven years, they backed Britain's threats to arrest Assange if he left Ecuador's London embassy, where he sought political asylum in 2012. This was despite United Nations bodies repeatedly ruling that the Britain's siege of the embassy building and its pledges to detain the WikiLeaks founder had resulted in Assange's arbitrary detention.

Australia's current Liberal-National Coalition government and Labor Party opposition have continued to back the international conspiracy against Assange since his illegal expulsion from the Ecuadorian embassy on April 11.

Coalition and Labor MPs made worthless statements about providing Assange with unspecified "consular assistance." This commits them to nothing. They have continued to level scurrilous attacks against the WikiLeaks founder. With the assistance of the Greens and the corporate media, they suppressed any discussion of his plight during the official campaign for the May 18 federal election.

Neither the government, nor Labor, has even condemned the Trump administration's decision to lay charges against Assange, which carry a maximum sentence of 175 years' imprisonment. They have thereby signalled their support for dispatching Assange to rot in an American prison, for the "crime" of having exposed illegal wars.

As Nils Melzer, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, stated last month, by their refusal to defend Assange, Australian governments are responsible for the psychological torture he has suffered. They will be no less culpable for any harm that comes to Assange in the future, in Britain's maximum security Belmarsh Prison, or if he is extradited to the US.

Australian governments have been able to deny Assange his rights as a citizen only because of the enthusiastic support of the corporate media for the attacks against him.

Journalist Peter Greste spoke for all the mainstream publications when he responded to Assange's arrest with a scurrilous article declaring that the WikiLeaks founder was "not a journalist." Greste and other commentators are hostile to Assange because he has not functioned as a mouthpiece of corporate media conglomerates and the intelligence agencies, as they have.

An even more pernicious role has been played by a host of organisations, including the pseudo-left outfits, the trade unions and self-styled civil liberties groups, which once claimed to defend Assange but quickly abandoned

him.

All of them lined up behind the bogus Swedish sexual assault allegations, which have formed a central component of the CIA campaign against the WikiLeaks founder. They have covered up the fact that the Swedish "preliminary investigation" has been dropped twice, that Assange has never been charged and that no evidence has been presented that he committed any crime.

The line-up of the political and media establishment against Assange stands in stark contrast to the attitude of millions of workers, students and young people who rightly view the WikiLeaks founder as a hero who is being persecuted for exposing the truth.

This latent support must be transformed into a political movement, consciously fighting for Assange and Manning's freedom. It is clear that the Australian government and the Labor opposition will take no action in defence of Assange, unless they are compelled to do so by a mass movement from below.

The importance of this struggle is ever-more clear. The unveiling of the US Espionage Act charges against Assange has opened the floodgates for a global assault on journalists and brazen attempts to criminalise opposition to the mounting danger of US-provoked war.

Already, the Australian Federal Police has raided journalists over the exposure of war crimes in Afghanistan and mass government spying, and the French government is seeking to prosecute reporters for revealing its complicity in Saudi Arabia's genocidal assault on Yemen.

These attacks must be answered by workers, students and young people. As the WSWS statement concluded: "No one who is seriously committed to the defense of democratic rights can stand on the sidelines. The case of Julian Assange is a critical twenty-first century battleground in the defense of free speech, truth, and the fight against exploitation, dictatorship and war, the basic evils of the world capitalist system."



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact