

Australian workers and youth speak out in defence of Assange at SEP rally

Our reporters
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On Saturday, the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) held a rally, attended by around 200 workers and youth, in defence of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and the courageous whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

The event was addressed by leading SEP members, along with Emeritus Professor Stuart Rees and documentary filmmaker James Ricketson. It will be followed by a protest in Brisbane this Saturday and a demonstration in Melbourne on July 14.

The sentiments of those who attended the Sydney rally were an indictment of successive Australian governments which have refused to take any action in defence of Assange, who faces extradition to the US and the prospect of life imprisonment for WikiLeaks' lawful publishing activities.

WSWS reporters spoke to some of those in attendance.

Pilar, a worker originally from Peru, said: "The locking up of Julian Assange is an injustice because what he was doing was for us. He has been put in a cage. That means our freedom is with him. The world has to know that it's not just about Julian. It's about the freedom they have taken from us. So if those who have locked him up win, then we lose.

"Every human being around the world will lose. Our freedom is compromised. So everyone has to fight for him. If he gets out of this, then our freedom will have a hope.

"At the rally today I learned that there is a lot of injustice around the world. I knew about Julian but I did not know about Chelsea Manning, the girl who has lost her freedom because she doesn't want to do whatever the authorities demand. This shows that there are people who have a conscience. They can't be part of this circus. She's a hero.

"I agree with your campaign to have a global fight

against the extradition of Assange. Every single person has to go behind Julian. If something happens to Julian, what is going to happen to us? Where is humanity going? The only thing that we have is freedom, but we must fight for it."

Jonathan an engineer from Colombia, stated that he "liked all the speeches. The last one by Nick Beams was quite inspiring. He brought it all together. This is a very good way to spread information. It is a genuine and noble position, these socialist and Trotskyist ideas.

"It is important to defend freedom at all cost. These are attacks on freedom, so if we allow it to escalate, it's going to get to the point where no one is free anymore.

"They are attacking Assange because he's getting all the secrets from imperialist countries, like the US, and making them available for everyone to know. That's why they want to systematically kill these free thinkers."

Marina, a marketing employee from China, said: "The political perspective is really interesting. When you think about the arrest of the Huawei executive in Canada, it was done for the interests of the US and its allies.

Jonathan and Martina had previously attended meetings of Socialist Alternative. SEP campaigners noted that the pseudo-left party had done nothing to defend Assange, and supported US-led regime-change operations in Syria and Libya.

Jonathan responded: "We shouldn't be supporting the intervention of the US in Syria. I'm not in agreement with that. I'll ask them about it. I won't support that because I don't like imperialism."

Paul, a retired criminal lawyer, said: "The terrible thing to me about what has happened to Assange is that the Australian government has done absolutely nothing. He is a citizen of this country and he deserves

incredible protection because he is such a precious person. He has disclosed things about the world that we need to know. To think that someone so brave is going through so much trouble is a very bad reflection on our government.

“Also I think that these national laws about secrecy in the government are only there to protect the state and its power. The September 11 attack gave the state a great opportunity to grab more control over its citizens and that’s what has happened.

“Governments have been overrun by moneyed interests and by those that can afford to get themselves into very good positions and make more money by getting contracts and favours off the government. Wages aren’t rising, social services are reducing. I think something very big is going to happen soon because it can’t go on like this forever.”

Mags travelled almost 3,000 kilometres from the Northern Territory to come to the rally. She stated: “I feel so passionate about what is happening with Julian Assange. There is a conspiracy of governments joining forces to silence him, to humiliate him, to persecute him. He’s a truth teller and he has exposed war crimes and has embarrassed governments, and now they want revenge.

“They want to silence him. They want his blood and it’s absolutely unforgivable what they are doing to him.

“It should be the war criminals that are being jailed, not an innocent, courageous journalist, who is a humanitarian. I think he is one of the greatest peacemakers of our time. He has been compared to Mandela and it’s an absolute travesty that he is in prison and for telling the truth. It is a terrible indictment on the human race for doing this.

“And Manning as well. Fining her a thousand dollars a day because she won’t testify against him. She is such an outstanding courageous woman. They are fining her because she won’t lie about him. They want her to lie about Assange!

“I have travelled thousands of kilometres from the Northern Territory. After seeing Julian being dragged like that from the embassy I researched everything I could find about him obsessively to dig down to get to the real truth of what he is about. What he stands for, his anti-war stance, and I can’t rest until he is a free man. That is how I feel about it. So I had to come as soon as I knew that there were rallies taking place.

“The Socialist Equality Party is the only one standing up for him and fighting for his freedom. So I just knew I had to get involved. No other political party, none of the human rights groups are acting. Amnesty is doing nothing! Getup is doing nothing! The Greens, that I’ve always voted for since I was 18, are doing an absolute minimum lip service. So I think it is fantastic what the SEP is doing.”

Diego, who is from Mexico, said: “I’ve been following the situation facing Julian Assange since he was arrested and dragged out of the Ecuadorian Embassy in London. His imprisonment is an obvious attack on freedom of speech. He shouldn’t have been arrested and people all around the world have to speak out against it.

“Assange is standing up for free speech and freedom of the press. We have to fight for his release. The way he is being treated is completely unjust and unfair.

“It is very sad and very bad that the Australian government is refusing to defend one its citizens, whose democratic rights are obviously being violated. The government has refused to lift a finger to defend Assange. They just don’t care and I’m very angry and disappointed about this.

“If the Australian government thinks that the USA is a friend of the Australian people it is making a very big mistake. The USA doesn’t respect the sovereignty and democracy of other countries and is always interfering in other countries. It tries to be the policeman of the entire planet but it has no right to do this and it has no right to extradite Julian Assange to America.”



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