

Australian workers and youth speak out at vigils for Assange's birthday

Our reporters
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Dozens of workers, students and young people took part in vigils across Australia marking WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange's forty-eighth birthday. The events in Sydney and Melbourne were addressed by Socialist Equality Party (SEP) representatives, along with prominent public figures and defenders of democratic rights.

The vigils will be followed by SEP rallies demanding freedom for Assange in Brisbane, this Saturday, and in Melbourne, on July 14.

WSWS reporters spoke to some of those who attended the vigils. Their sentiments, in support of Assange, were an indictment of the Australian government, and the entire political establishment, which has abandoned the WikiLeaks founder, despite the fact that he is an Australian citizen.

In Melbourne, Chris, a public sector worker, said: "At the end of the day, we need the ability to get information out to the public. Without education and knowledge we're not in a position to further our development as a society. It's super important. I wouldn't be the person I am today without the internet and it's got to continue to serve me and future generations to come."

"There are probably lots of geopolitical agendas behind the attacks on Assange. They claim it's national security and these kinds of things. Morally, it is wrong. Free speech and having the opportunity to get information out there is really important."

Chris denounced the escalating drive to military conflict. "War is a zero-sum game and we should be looking for opportunities where it is not a zero-sum game," he said. "Having an open-source internet and having these institutions around so that we can educate ourselves is going to help everyone find it."

Julieanna, a teacher, stated: "I have supported

Assange since the first time I heard about him asking for asylum. Before Assange had asylum he was shackled with an ankle bracelet. Sweden wanted to extradite him. He skipped bail and was a political prisoner. It alarmed me what was going on. I teach children to question things and to speak up—here is a man who is being imprisoned for doing this.

"Here is this man with information about war crimes and he is the one on trial. What is going on? What worries me is, what are they doing to him while he is detained? I don't trust them. Look what they're doing to journalists. They're showing them that they have to stay in their place."

Alisha, her daughter, said: "Youngsters aren't involved enough. There needs to be more awareness. We need to look deeper and not just accept the media. Assange has been so smeared our generation doesn't question enough. We need to look at how one thing connects to another. We have to see that."

Morgan, a 23-year-old university student, said he supported Assange because, "The things he has done have changed the world. The people who hate him are usually the people who are in power. When people in power commit a crime, there has to be someone who's not in power to show that they are committing a crime. There's a saying that goes, if the people above are watching us, then who's watching them? If someone at the top abuses their power, then someone from below needs to stand up.

"Edward Snowden, as well as Julian Assange, saw that collecting people's information unnecessarily is an abuse of power. Information is power, and if you have all the information about every single person around the world, then that is absolute power which is in your hands. It's just not right morally for a few people to have control over all of that."

In Sydney, Anthony, an office worker, said: “I came here today because I support Julian Assange. He’s in jail and the war criminals are free. There needs to be change. The two major parties in most western countries are supporting wars all around the world.

“Labor tries to fool people that they are a party of the working class. They are nothing like it. They just try to be the Liberals in a lighter vein. They try to present themselves as an alternative. But it’s not much of an alternative, it still supports the war machine, it still supports America’s foreign policy.”

Ian, who produces science and technology vlogs, declared: “Julian Assange is illegally imprisoned for doing the same things as the people at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, who were raided a few weeks ago by the federal police.

“He reported that war crimes and murders were being done by American soldiers. Just like the ABC reported the same things were being done by Australian soldiers. Everybody rallied behind the ABC journalists but they are staying away from Julian Assange because of the giant smear against him by the US. It suits our politicians to do whatever the US says.

“It’s 100 percent political. If it wasn’t, you would have Australian politicians doing what they did for the other Australians that the Americans have tortured. Assange should be brought home. We were willing to do it for David Hicks, why not for Julian Assange?”



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