

Australian workers and youth speak-out in support of Julian Assange

Our reporters

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Over the past several weeks, Socialist Equality Party (SEP) members and supporters have campaigned widely in working-class areas of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Newcastle to promote public meetings this month in defence of imprisoned WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and the courageous whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

On Saturday, the SEP held a speak-out in the main pedestrian mall of Parramatta, a working-class hub of western Sydney. Dozens of workers, students and youth expressed their support for Assange, and anger over the refusal of the Australian government to defend him as a citizen and journalist.

Nick Beams, a writer for the WSWWS and longstanding SEP leader, relayed warnings from Assange's friends and family that his medical situation has declined so dramatically that they fear he may die in Britain's Belmarsh Prison. Beams stated that the US attempt to extradite and prosecute Assange was aimed at setting a precedent for the victimisation of anyone who exposed war crimes and government wrongdoing.

He stressed that it was the sharpest expression of a turn by governments internationally towards authoritarianism, amid an upsurge of class struggle and an explosion of militarism. He called for the development of a political movement of the working class to fight for the freedom of Assange, Manning and all class war prisoners.

WSWS reporters spoke to a number of those who stopped to listen.

Ethan, a local high school student, had heard about the abuses perpetrated against Assange in his legal studies class. "Even though Assange is a citizen, Australian governments have done nothing to defend him," Ethan said. "I think governments are more concerned with maintaining their alliances with western powers than protecting their own citizens."

"WikiLeaks exposed the crimes committed by America, I think that the Australian government fears being exposed for similar things. The wars now are about securing power, resources and preventing people or powers who are not with the imperialist powers from getting into power. Governments will continue to say that they are for democracy and human rights, but they are really abusing other people's human rights."

Asked about the broader assault on press freedom, Ethan

stated: "When the government does something illegal, the easiest thing for them is to cover it up. That's the worst thing you could do in my view. The right move would be to admit it, prosecute those responsible and make a transparent change. I think if enough people get up then we can make a change, but it's not possible without the majority speaking up. It's the working class who are the majority."

Others gave short video statements in support of Assange, including **Nivi**, a young worker:

And **Mohammed**, a student:

WSWS correspondents also spoke to participants at a Sydney rally in support of the mass demonstrations in Lebanon.

Jodie, a teacher, said: "I believe Assange is wrongly jailed, I'm with you 100 percent. If he had the intelligence to release important information to the public, as he did, then in my opinion he is a genius and somebody who should be celebrated."

"The politicians are attacking him to defend themselves and defend secrecy. That's what we're asking for in Lebanon, transparency, and Julian Assange is a symbol of transparency. They jailed him for standing up for what the human race wants and for the future of our children."

"People will eventually speak out to defend Assange. The world is in an ugly place right now. What Assange stands for, that's what all these revolutions around the world stand for. But people have to be educated. Some people see him as a criminal because they saw him jailed and they don't know the story behind the man. They need to know the real story."

In Toronto, SEP campaigners won widespread support for a public meeting that is being held this Saturday in the regional working-class centre of Newcastle.

Jennifer, a retired worker, stated: "Assange is not a criminal. Some journalists would have it that he is not a journalist, but he is. He is reporting to the public, he is getting the message out, he is making a stand as a journalist. I think anyone being persecuted for something that they see as good for the people and the public is wrong."

"The Australian government is responsible for his imprisonment because he is an Australian citizen. Australia is dictated to by America. He was just projecting his voice in a strong way."

After purchasing a ticket to the meeting, Jennifer said: "I

think workers and young people should come to the meeting and fight for the freedom of Assange, because he represents freedom of speech that we all have the right to in a democracy. I mean, aren't we a democracy or are we becoming more fascist, more controlled?"

Jennifer drew a link between the recent climate change protests and the fight for Assange's freedom. She commented: "Only people coming together—people power—will change this situation. Climate change and Assange go hand-in-hand. We are out here saying 'this cannot happen.' Just as with climate change, we have protests saying you can't do this, this is a serious matter and we need people voicing their opinions and demonstrating. The writing is on the wall, with what happened in the 1930s. Closing down the papers, closing down freedom of speech, we can't allow that to happen again. We live in serious times."

In Brisbane, **Sue**, a worker, spoke out during a SEP campaign at the West End markets. "Assange should be freed!" she declared. "All journalists should be freed, to give us non-Murdoch news."

Supported by several of her friends, Sue said: "The whole thing is political. It's not just Assange. He is at forefront of defending democracy. Journalists should be free to report. And in Australia, criticism of the government should not be squashed. Criticism of the government and any politician should be encouraged, for democracy's sake."

At the Inala Plaza shopping centre, **Ferraz**, a university student from Mozambique, said journalists like Julian Assange needed to be able to tell the truth, especially about capitalism. "Julian Assange has revealed some of the secrets of this governmental system," he said. "We must have journalists to tell us the truth. No one is better placed to do that."

"This is about capitalism. Money is the problem. For example, most of the countries in Africa are in debt because they have received money from Western countries. Investors come and give governments money for their programs, but in the end the government realise the price they must pay and that means cutting the services of the people. Most people don't know the full story and the best ones to tell them are the journalists."

In Melbourne, **Damian**, an audio-visual worker, said: "What's happening to Assange is a travesty. They're keeping him in isolation with no change. The guy is obviously sick. He needs sunlight for a start. The fact is they're not letting him outside so he can recover."

"If the world didn't have whistleblowers, publishers and people who stand up to corporations and governments that are doing the wrong thing, we'd all be living under some kind of totalitarian government. The world needs people like Julian Assange."

An SEP forum in Melbourne on Sunday unanimously passed a motion resolving "to continue to fight to build the international mass movement required to secure the liberation

of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning."

Afterwards, **Raphael**, a university student from Taiwan, explained: "Before I spoke to the SEP, all I knew was that Assange is under political persecution by western countries because of WikiLeaks. Democracy is only working for the powerful. Governments are lying to ordinary people."

"WikiLeaks revealed a lot of political scandals about governments from Britain, to France, to Russia and China. All these come to the same thing. People have the right to speak out. They also have the right to know how and what the government are doing."

"The governments are trying to hide the truth and lie to the people. That's why they are unfairly persecuting Assange and confining him to prison. We need to fight for our rights, fight for Assange, and fight for other human rights' champions."

Gerry, who sells the "Big Issue" homeless magazine, said: "I came here today because I think it's really vital that everyone gets together and supports Julian and fights for his freedom. They are persecuting Julian and Chelsea Manning for shining a spotlight on the vast crimes of United States imperialism, so as to shut up any future whistleblowers. They are making an example of Julian and Chelsea to deter anyone else from opening their mouth."

"This is just another step towards full-blown fascism, by shutting down the truth, shutting down dissident websites and shutting down independent media. I think people need to get out in the streets and support Julian. I also think they need to put as much pressure as possible on their local members of parliament, even though the MPs are all hopeless."

"I commend the Socialist Equality Party for your integrity and for your ethical standing up for truth and justice and opposing what's being done to Julian Assange. I note that there are a lot of other alleged socialist groups who have been completely and totally silent, which I just find disgusting. I find it outrageous that they can completely turn their backs on what's happening with Julian."



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