

Australia: Students and workers demand release of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning

Our reporters
20 February 2020

Socialist Equality Party members and supporters have been campaigning over the past week in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Newcastle for the forthcoming rallies to demand the immediate release of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and US whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

Last Saturday the SEP and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) club at Griffith University held a lively hour-long speak-out in Inala Plaza, a Brisbane working-class suburb. They were joined by members of the Julian Assange Brisbane Facebook Group.

SEP and IYSSE members and supporters who spoke on a megaphone, and a speaker from the Facebook group, won a warm response from shoppers, local residents and young people. They explained the necessity to free Assange and Manning in order to defend free speech and basic democratic rights.

Speakers emphasised the contrast between the groundswell of popular support for Assange, as evidenced by the recent petition to parliament signed by over 280,000 people, and the silence of the media and political establishment. They explained the need to build a mass movement in the working class and among young people to defend Assange and Manning. Numerous people signed up to participate in the campaign and to attend the Brisbane city rally on February 29.

On the same day SEP members held a speak-out, followed by a powerful march, in the Newcastle suburb of Toronto, about 130 kilometres north of Sydney.

Danielle Dunkley, one of several who addressed the Toronto speak-out, said: “WikiLeaks has a 100 percent record of accurately authenticated publications...

Assange is being persecuted for telling the truth. My favourite quote of Assange’s is this: ‘If wars can be started by lies, then peace can be started by truth.’...

“Assange is facing 175 years in American prison over WikiLeaks disclosures that date to 2010,” she continued. “It’s important to note that these charges do not relate to the disclosures relating to the 2016 elections or to the bogus Sweden sex offence allegations.”

Dunkley ended with the appeal: “Don’t shoot the messenger. Jail the war criminals, not journalists. Free Assange!”

“There are a million reasons why Assange should be freed,” Ezekiel said after the event. “Trillions are spent on war, which creates refugees, kills children and workers but the people who make these wars happen are roaming free whilst Assange is being murdered by the state.

“It’s a slow painful and torturous death, but they are killing Assange for telling the truth. We must have the truth because we have a goal to end war, and freeing Julian Assange is absolutely paramount to the fight against war,” he said.

Mitchell, a chiropractor, said “the freeing of Assange is vitally important, because the public are unaware of the situation. You’ve got Assange in jail for exposing what their governments are doing. People have a right to know what the government is doing and have to be answerable to the people.

“The only reason that the government has been able to get away with their treatment of Assange so far is because the public is largely unaware.”

SEP members also held a speak-out in the western-Sydney suburb of Liverpool.

Sandy, a 15-year-old high school student who has family in Iraq, explained to SEP members why she opposed the persecution of Assange.

“Assange has been illegally jailed because he tried to speak the truth and that is what no one else understands, and is what really pisses us off as young kids. If he can be arrested for doing such a thing what will happen to us if we want to speak the truth?”

“The Australian government’s refusal to defend Assange,” she said, “is horrible [because] he’s an Australian citizen. I truly think it is unfair, but we can defend Assange. The government will probably try to silence us but because of social media they can’t if all of us are combined.”

IYSSE members and supporters in Melbourne won strong support for Assange and Manning from students participating in orientation week events at Victoria University’s Footscray Nicholson campus on Wednesday.

Jude said, “We need people like Assange and Manning to keep telling the truth. They are fighting for our freedom. We need them and we need to free him for all of our freedom.”

Anna, originally from Vietnam, had not heard of Julian Assange before meeting the IYSSE. When Assange’s role in revealing US war crimes was explained, she said: “Freedom of speech is very important. I come from Vietnam. Many years ago the US invaded my country and they destroyed everything. They made Vietnamese people kill each other. We need freedom of speech to help stop these things happening.”

Hope, a Victoria University (VU) teacher, denounced the imprisonment of Assange. “The US is after Assange because he broke news they didn’t like. It’s important to free him because if he goes to America, we’ll never see him again and that will be it for freedom of speech.”

Liban and Nimo, siblings and health science students at VU Nicholson, spoke about Assange and Manning. Assange “is someone who knows what is right. I stand for what he believes in—that people should look after each other and tell the truth,” Liban said.

Nimo added: “Assange is pretty brave for standing up for what he did. Not a lot of people would have the courage to do that.” The US is persecuting the WikiLeaks founder, she said, “because he was being

honest. He was true to himself and others as well.” If Assange is extradited, she warned, “then there will be no more freedom of speech.”

VU student Mandeep told IYSSE members the WikiLeaks founder “didn’t do anything wrong to humanity or the world” and that he was “in favour of setting him free.”

Assange had been imprisoned, he explained, “because he exposed America’s dirty war—how they make money from petroleum and that they are trying to grab especially Middle-Eastern land for the natural resources.”

We urge all those who agree with the fight to free Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning to join the rallies in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, Wellington New Zealand and in cities around the world.

Sydney

Saturday February 22, 12:00 p.m.
Parramatta Town Hall
182 Church Street, Parramatta

Melbourne

Sunday February 23, 2:00 p.m.
State Library of Victoria
Then march to Federation Square

Wellington, New Zealand

Sunday, February 23, 3:00 p.m.
Cuba Street (intersection with Left Bank)
Wellington

Brisbane

Saturday February 29, 2:00 p.m.
Reddacliff Place, Brisbane
(corner Queen and George Street)



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