

Workers and students demand freedom for Assange at Melbourne protest

Our reporters
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A couple of hundred people attended a Melbourne protest on Sunday demanding freedom for Julian Assange. Smaller gatherings were held in other capital cities as part of events internationally marking the 51st birthday of the WikiLeaks publisher.

For three years, Assange has been imprisoned in Britain's maximum-security Belmarsh Prison, where his health has significantly deteriorated.

Days before the events, Assange's lawyers filed a final legal appeal through the British courts against an order for his extradition to the US, which UK Home Secretary Priti Patel approved last month. If Assange is dispatched to the US, he faces 18 Espionage Act charges carrying a total maximum sentence of 175 years imprisonment, for exposing American war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan and other abuses by the US and its allies.

Speakers at the Melbourne rally warned that this prosecution was a frontal assault on freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Several noted that the Labor government of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has rejected demands to use its full legal and diplomatic powers to secure Assange's freedom as a persecuted Australian citizen.

Some speakers, however, represented outfits that themselves bear responsibility for Assange's plight.

Greens Senator Janet Rice told the rally about calls she had made for the previous Liberal-National government to defend Assange. She bemoaned Albanese's refusal to take action. But the Greens have consistently rejected calls, including from within their own ranks, for a public party campaign for Assange's freedom.

Before the May 21 federal election, Rice withdrew a motion for a Senate inquiry into the role of Australian governments in the assault on Assange's rights,

because Labor had indicated its opposition. The Greens remained silent on the WikiLeaks founder throughout the election campaign, instead appealing for a power-sharing arrangement with Albanese.

Dave Noonan, the national secretary of the Construction Forestry Energy and Mining Union (CFMEU) condemned the persecution of Assange, but made no direct mention of Albanese or the government, because the CFMEU is a Labor-aligned union. Together with all the other unions, it has done nothing to advance the fight for Assange's freedom.

The Socialist Equality Party, which has a long record of fighting for Assange's freedom, is holding a public meeting this Sunday, 3pm (AEST), to discuss how to take forward this critical struggle. The meeting will explain the connection between the persecution of Assange, the drive to war and the assault on the social and democratic rights of working people.

Above all, the meeting will emphasise that the emerging movement of the working class is the constituency for securing Assange's freedom and all democratic rights. [Register here!](#)

WSWS reporters spoke to several participants at the Melbourne rally.

Khadija, a 34-year-old international studies student at RMIT university, said: "I have come here today because Julian is in prison and he shouldn't be. This has been going on for too long. He is there because he exposed America's crimes to the world. The Australian government supports his persecution because it is aligned with the US.

"The imperialist wars are benefiting all the corporations that are profiting from the misery of the world. The wars are based on lies. They pretend that these wars are in the name of freedom and to defend our interests, but it is never to defend the interests of

people.

“We are constantly being lied to and manipulated. Julian is being punished because he gave us proof of that. We all want the same things. We want to be healthy, we want to be happy, looking after our own. States manipulate us to get a certain outcome to happen so that it serves their interests. Most of the time these interests are based on money and greed and lies. I think we need to realise that.

“I have been ready for a revolution for a long time, and I am not scared of the consequences I may face. I know that no change can ever happen unless it is through revolution. There is no way of changing things through the institutions that are in place because they are benefiting from the injustice.”

Kane, a gardener, explained: “I have always been interested in media and politics and I’ve been following the Julian Assange case ever since it started. I came here searching for answers. I thought the whole case would be nothing. I thought it was an open and shut case. They have nothing on Assange.

“The US was embarrassed about the crimes Julian Assange exposed. The US is saying: ‘You are not allowed to report on our war crimes!’ The US is declaring that it is not answerable to any human rights principles.

“The media is kowtowing. I don’t understand why. Now in the war in Ukraine, we see so much censorship. They must feel forced to do that because their argument is weak.

“The whole orchestra is disgusting. After the US withdrew its troops from Afghanistan, the huge arms corporations, like Lockheed and Raytheon, reassured their stockholders at their AGMs that ‘we have places to go’ and that there was no concern about future profits. They knew that the war in Ukraine was coming.”

Gavin, a hospitality worker, commented: “If we don’t say something now it’s just going to get worse. It’s got to the point where they should have seen sense by now. He’s being extradited in the face of all the protests, the arguments, United Nations Rapporteur Nils Melzer’s report, all the people that have come out and said it’s an absolute joke. He exposed the war crimes of the US.

“The powerful, it’s their crimes he’s exposing. People should be protesting. People should be here

protesting. People have come out and said ‘enough’s enough’ but what are they really doing?

“The media is shockingly compliant and spitting in the face of their own interests. Workers should do whatever they can, including protest. It’s hard because both sides of politics are doing as little as each other. There are only very minor differences.

“There was an opportunity when Labor was in power before and they did nothing. In 2010 [then Labor Prime Minister] Julia Gillard said Assange should be charged, that he should have his passport taken away. Why? He hadn’t broken any Australian law. He had done a good thing. He had done a righteous thing. There’s a conspiracy of silence against Assange. It’s up to people to do something.”

Sophia, a nurse, said: “I want to support Julian Assange and fight for his freedom. I think the trial is a farce and the witch hunt against him is just an atrocity against democracy. It serves the interests of America and the industrial-military complex and the warmongers and the war machine. Mostly the American government because of their atrocities in Iraq and Afghanistan and their war crimes abroad.

“Albanese said two years ago in principle he supports Assange or some bullshit. It means nothing. Albanese won’t even say Assange’s name. That’s a total tactic to dehumanise him further. I hope that there’s more public support because we need a lot more public support.”

Register for the SEP meeting this Sunday here.



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