

SEP (Australia) forum in Melbourne demands freedom for Assange

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) held a joint forum in Melbourne last week to demand the immediate release from prison of WikiLeaks journalist Julian Assange.

Around 40 people attended in person and online, including workers, retirees, and university students. Many of these had recently joined the SEP as electoral members, supporting its campaign for formal party registration to ensure there is a socialist, anti-war party on the ballot at the next federal election.

Taylor Hernan, a member of the IYSSE in Melbourne, chaired the meeting, which was addressed by longstanding SEP member Will Marshall. The speakers detailed the 14-year US-led pursuit of Assange, because of his courageous exposure of war crimes. They explained that with the WikiLeaks founder closer to being extradited to his persecutors in the US than ever before, the critical issue was to mobilise the working class for his freedom, as part of the struggle against imperialist war.

A lively discussion followed the opening report. Participants asked questions about the attempted Swedish frame-up of Assange on bogus allegations of sexual misconduct, the level of support among ordinary people that Assange had won through his work, how to build an antiwar movement, and the SEP's plans for the next election campaign.

The meeting unanimously passed the following resolution:

“This forum demands the immediate and unconditional release of imprisoned journalist Julian Assange.

“The WikiLeaks publisher has been subjected to more than a decade-long US-led vendetta. Successive Democrat and Republican administrations, backed by

successive Labor and Liberal-National Australian governments, targeted Assange because he exposed the rampant criminality of US imperialism in Iraq, Afghanistan, and around the world. Attempts to railroad Assange into prison in the US—or kill him in the effort to do so—aims at silencing him, destroying WikiLeaks, and deterring any other whistleblowers and journalists from revealing further state criminality.

“This forum condemns in the strongest terms the Labor government of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, which is maintaining the filthy record of its predecessors in collaborating with the bogus US prosecution under the Espionage Act. Albanese's statements that ‘enough is enough’ and that the case ought to be concluded are nothing more than hot air. Underlying this occasional rhetoric is support for Washington to proceed.

“The latest court proceedings in the UK underscore the urgency of the fight to free Assange. Last week, the High Court in London rejected most of the grounds of Assange's appeal and permitted the US to issue ‘assurances’ that could nullify the remaining grounds and clear the way for a speedy dispatch to the US gulag.

“This forum urges the widest mobilisation in defence of Julian Assange. The campaign cannot be based on futile appeals to the Australian, British, and American governments. Instead it must be oriented towards the building of an independent defence campaign in the working class. The essential task is to link the WikiLeaks publisher's defence to the mass movement against war. The eruption of militarism and aggression fuelling the pursuit of Assange is at the same time producing a mass radicalisation among workers and young people revolted by the genocide in Gaza and the threat of a wider war internationally. We call for

resolutions defending Assange to be moved in workplaces, union meetings, and student and youth meetings, and the widest involvement in demonstrations and other actions organised to demand his freedom.”

Afterwards, Victoria University student **Gracie** told the WSW: “I thought the forum was great and really informative. A lot of the information, especially the details, I hadn’t heard about before. I have been aware of Julian Assange since I was young, seeing Free Assange graffiti in the city and hearing my parents, who are Assange supporters, have conversations about him. I think his contribution is massive. You can see that in his persecution—if what he revealed wasn’t valuable and didn’t need to come out, he wouldn’t be persecuted by imperialist governments as hard as he has been.

“Julian has been placed in really appalling and dehumanising conditions and that will have taken a horrible mental toll on him. It’s a further attack on free speech. The US government wants to make an example of him—this is what happens if you speak out against capitalism and imperialism.”

Gracie drew a connection with Israel’s genocide in Gaza, backed by all the imperialist powers including Australia. “I think it’s absolutely appalling,” she said. “People can follow it more closely through social media and seeing people on the ground, of videos coming out from there, there’s no hiding it and yet, the Israeli state is still able to get away with it. Governments do not care, because it’s a step in their plan towards war and further imperialism. I think the protests are fantastic in that you can see the passion of general people. They show that people know that what’s happening is wrong. But there needs to be a step beyond that—a shift in perspective.”

She spoke about her support for the SEP’s campaign to secure electoral reaffiliation. “I think an electoral ballot is where people often look if they know that things are wrong and they need to change but they don’t really know where to start. So I think a genuinely socialist party having exposure on an electoral ballot is important. Especially for workers who vote socialist, they might be prompted to look further into it and you gain another person who genuinely wants social change.”

Another Victoria University student, **Crystal**, said:

“All of the governments benefit from Julian Assange being silenced, that is why none of them are doing anything about it. If you approached just about anybody on the street and said, ‘Hey, what do you think about what’s going on?’, they are going to say, ‘I don’t agree with it, Julian Assange has to be freed.’ There’s an agreement that this is wrong—but no government is going to do anything as they benefit from the situation. The working class, and the people in a very general sense, we deserve to know what is happening, we deserve to know the crimes that our governments are willing to take part in.”

She added: “Linking it back to Gaza, we are seeing literal textbook war crimes, textbook genocide happening in front of us, and nothing is happening.” Crystal said this was part of a developing world war. “It is brewing in the distance, but everybody is liking to pretend that it’s not happening, even when all of the governments are directly involved.”

Crystal concluded: “I grew up working class myself, and came from a cycle of poverty and still am in a cycle of poverty. I remember being a teenager, a high school aged girl, reading about WikiLeaks, reading about Julian Assange, about this man who is doing more than I could ever imagine to expose the truth. We collectively have a right to know, and I believe very strongly that the importance of people like Julian Assange cannot be understated, the importance of people like him who do put their entire lives on the line very literally, to fight for what they believe in, and to expose the truth. If we lose him, what are we going to lose next? If they can put him away, put him to death, drive him to suicide, which is what they want to do, who are they going to do it to next? Who are they going to silence next?

“I believe in socialism, I believe in what the party fights for. I feel like being able to do my part, especially as a younger person, is important. Younger people are among the ones most suffering under capitalism.”



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