

VIDEO: SEP (Australia) meeting—“Free Julian Assange! Oppose imperialist war!”

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party (Australia) held an important public meeting Sunday, entitled “Free Julian Assange! Oppose imperialist war!” The politically strong event had an audience of more than 100, in Sydney, and online around the country and overseas.

Underscoring the international character of the meeting, the first speaker was Thomas Scripps, a leading member of the SEP in the UK, who has written extensively on the persecution of Assange for the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The second report was delivered by Oscar Grenfell, also a prominent writer for the WSWS, and a member of the SEP (Australia) national committee. The meeting was chaired by Cheryl Crisp, national secretary of the SEP in Australia. A complete video recording of the meeting is published below.

In opening, Crisp said that the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) has waged a campaign to defend Assange over more than a decade, because “for the socialist movement, the truth is necessary to enable the working class to fight for its interests.”

Crisp explained that “one can only really understand the unrelenting pursuit and persecution of Julian Assange if it is placed in its objective context, the deepening crisis of capitalism, which expresses itself most sharply in war.

“While capitalism exists, there will be wars ... but the conditions which create war also create the conditions for capitalism’s overthrow and there is a power that can defeat capitalism, the international working class.”

Scripps emphasised that the British high court ruling last week, granting Assange the right to appeal his extradition to the US, was no cause for renewed illusions that the bourgeois legal process could be relied upon to free the WikiLeaks publisher. As Scripps remarked, “If legal and democratic rights had been properly observed and acted upon by the courts, Assange would never have been imprisoned in the first place.”

Instead, as the ICFI has argued from the beginning, “Assange’s real liberators are those with the sharpest interest in overturning the imperialist world order and defending democratic rights, and with the social power to do so: namely, the international working class and youth.”

Scripps noted that, today, this was not a “purely potential force, but a real movement which is underway.” This was exemplified by the millions who have demonstrated against Israel’s genocide in Gaza, and the complicity of governments worldwide, developments which are radicalising broad layers of workers and youth.

Scripps said: “It is to that process that the Assange campaign must turn, by seeking to expand the anti-war movement—especially into the workplaces—and by explaining to its participants how vital it is that

they inscribe Assange’s name on their banners.”

Grenfell placed the persecution of Assange—guilty of nothing more than exposing the war crimes of the US government and its allies—against the present backdrop of Israel’s imperialist-backed genocide, the US-NATO proxy war in Russia, escalating military preparations against China and the broader descent towards a (nuclear) third world war.

Under these conditions, “neutralising Assange, WikiLeaks and anti-war journalism is a strategic imperative” of US imperialism. The Labor government has refused to fight for Assange’s freedom, “continuing a complicity of Australian governments that has spanned more than a decade,” because it is totally committed to these war plans.

Grenfell explained that the same sort of “big lie techniques” used against Assange are now being employed in the frame-up and prosecution of Bogdan Syrotiuk. The Ukrainian Trotskyist, and the WSWS, have been fraudulently smeared by the Ukrainian secret police as agents of the Putin regime.

In fact, as a leading member of the Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists (YGBL), Syrotiuk has fought to unify Russian and Ukrainian workers and youth on the basis of opposition to both the fascistic NATO-backed Zelensky and the reactionary Putin regimes.

Grenfell emphasised that the fight against Israel’s genocide, imperialist war and for the freedom of Assange and Syrotiuk cannot be based on “moral appeals to governments” as pseudo-left groups insist:

“Our perspective is the opposite. We fight for the independent mobilisation of the working class against all of the governments. That is the only viable strategy to free class war prisoners and fight war.”

Following the reports, the meeting featured a lively discussion. Questions addressed by the panellists included the role of the unions and pseudo-left in facilitating the attacks on Assange, illusions in political figures such as George Galloway, and the persecution of Australian whistleblower David McBride.

WSWS reporters spoke to several of those who attended the meeting on Sunday.

Albert, a bank worker originally from India, said that he discovered the WSWS last October and reads everything it publishes on Julian Assange. He said it was important how Sunday’s meeting discussed many issues—from Assange, the political role played of George Galloway in Britain, Australia’s media union and the campaign for the release of Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk. These are “all interlinked and all relevant,” he said.

Albert said “the consequences [Assange] faces are way out of

proportion to what he has done... He is talking about what people, according to the government, should not be talking about and that's why he has been put in jail. Everything seems so unjust and unfair."

Referring to the warnings issued by the WSWs that the NATO war against Russia, the Gaza genocide, and the build-up for war against China are the initial stages of WWII, he said:

"The analysis and the conclusion are crystal clear and that's why I follow the WSWs. Its arguments and analysis are about what is really happening, without a filter or propaganda. It's not just a media article but like a real research paper. You get a very clear context..."

"I fully support what you are talking about and wanting change in the world. Your articles have made me understand this reality. I don't think any other party has done anything like this.

"Marxism is new to me, but I am interested, and I'm aligned with that kind of theory, it sounds logical. The world is divided between classes, rather than nationalities," he said.

Steve, a 30-year-old IT worker from Queensland and attending his first SEP event, said the meeting was "very interesting."

"I hadn't thought much about the connection between Assange's detention and the war in Ukraine, but this was explained very well. I agree that Bogdan should be freed. I hadn't really thought about anti-war opposition in Ukraine itself, so it was good to know that it exists. "I also appreciated that your meeting had an international scope. [Thomas Scripps] the speaker from the UK spoke extremely well and I think got the core issues on Assange across to the audience in a clear, understandable way," he said.

"It's correct to say that these are serious attacks on basic rights, especially freedom of speech, and in both cases that Assange and Bogdan have been framed up. War isn't in the interests of the ordinary people fighting it. I can't say I'm surprised at all these governments choosing to arrest them. It's to silence them."

Asked about the Gaza genocide, imperialist war and the escalating assault on basic rights, he said: "It's definitely a structural issue. I don't think individual politicians matter so much when you've got a system that is so bad at its core.

"I'm obviously against what's happening in Gaza, and I agree it's the US and its allies that are backing Israel and allowing this to happen. It's horrible, I hope we can change it but I'm not sure what can be done. I think that a call for a general strike [in Australia and elsewhere] to shut down arms shipments to Israel is the right approach. It needs to be done. The unions haven't bothered to stand up for Gaza.

"I also agree with what you said about Corbyn and his failure to defend Assange. I don't think Corbyn is a bad person—he's a reformist—but I think we need something more radical. He was weak and, even if he meant well, he didn't do anything to help Assange and Labor is now even worse. Keir Starmer is just like Rishi Sunak. There's no difference between them. If Labour wins the election in the UK, they won't do anything to save Assange.

Anika, 30, travelled from Newcastle, about 150 kilometres north of Sydney, to attend her first SEP meeting.

"I've been absorbing quite a lot about the situation from a range of news sources since 2020; from the mainstream media as well as independent outlets, and from people that aren't considered news sources at all. When I saw people campaigning with a 'Free Assange' poster in Newcastle, I went over and had a conversation. I thought this meeting would be something worth checking out.

"What I got from today's meeting was the need for transparency of information. That's been something that's lacking where I live. I'm

from Windale, which is one of the well-known social housing areas in Newcastle. People are probably not thinking enough and only accessing cable TV, as opposed to trying to get proper information. The mainstream media feels almost like a dumbing down attack on the population.

"I'm a single parent, I have two kids myself and was raised by a single mother as well, and she's still working at 68 as a nurse. I dropped out of high school at the beginning of year 9, which is why I'm teaching myself and learning about things. It's been a huge insight in seeing how the media keeps people ignorant and tries to bring people down.

"What Assange and WikiLeaks have exposed has been invaluable information for mankind to be aware of. I think the whole prosecution and case against Assange is symbolic of everything wrong with society and the current world we're accustomed to.

"The whole socialist ideology is definitely something I'm supportive of."

Linda, a Sydney artist and former film actor, said the unions had increasingly aligned themselves with the government and corporations: "One of the starkest examples of this is the case of Julian Assange. The Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, which is supposed to safeguard the rights of media professionals and uphold the principles of press freedom, has completely abdicated this duty.

"Instead of defending whistleblowers, such as Assange, and others who have risked their careers and personal safety to expose corruption, malpractice, and other societal issues, the MEAA has prioritised maintaining favourable relationships with governments. The union is more concerned with preserving its political standing and access rather than challenging governmental abuses of power. As a result, the essential role of journalism in making power accountable is compromised, and the vital flow of information hindered.

"One of the most salient points in the meeting was how it explained how and why the unions have simply become the puppets of governmental and corporate entities. This affects not only the rights of workers but extends right through to the functioning of democracy itself."

Khe, a Macquarie University student from China, said: "The least that everyone should do is to get involved with the SEP's campaign for the release of Julian Assange and come to meetings like this. Before Labor got into government it promised it would do various things, but they've done nothing to change the status quo for Assange. This is because Labor doesn't want to rock the boat with America's government and its upper class. To get into power, Labor looks to the support of rich and so they pander to them.

"The meeting was incredible for me because it explained a bunch of important things that I hadn't thought about and especially about the real danger of nuclear war. I knew about this in a general way, but the meeting showed how close to us this danger really is," he said.



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