

The political lessons of the March 3 Free Assange rally

5 March 2019

The March 3 rally in Sydney organised by the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) represented a significant step forward in the fight to secure the freedom of persecuted WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange.

Hundreds assembled in person at Martin Place Amphitheatre and were addressed by both SEP representatives and leading defenders of Assange, WikiLeaks and freedom of speech: journalist and filmmaker John Pilger, civil rights advocate Professor Stuart Rees and *Consortium News* editor-in-chief Joe Lauria.

The campaign for the rally won the active endorsement of other significant independent journalists, prominent artists such as Pink Floyd co-founder Roger Waters, and the most unwavering defenders of Assange and WikiLeaks in Australia and internationally, including Julian's mother, Christine Assange. In the face of blanket censorship by the Australian political and media establishment, the rally was promoted through social media and independent news web sites.

On March 3 itself, via Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, thousands of people followed the rally from various parts of the world. Over the past 48 hours, reports and comments on the event have been viewed by tens of thousands of people. The speeches, or extracts from them, have been published by a range of sources and are circulating widely.

Upcoming rallies on March 10 at the State Library in Melbourne and outside the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where Assange is being arbitrarily detained, are now being promoted with the same enthusiasm and determination.

As SEP national secretary James Cogan concluded on March 3: "Those of us here today and online represent the beginning of a mass campaign. We are sending a clear message to Julian Assange today and he will hear it—you are not alone, you have not been abandoned, you have not been forgotten. You will be freed."

The demonstration won a powerful response on the basis of the unambiguous and principled political perspective upon which it was called. The rally was not based on appeals to the political establishment, but for independent action by the working class, to demand that the Australian

government use its diplomatic and legal powers to secure Assange's immediate return to Australia, with guaranteed protection against extradition to the US.

The SEP, the Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), has insisted that the fight for the freedom of Julian Assange is inseparable from the broader struggle by the working class internationally against the capitalist profit system—the source of the attacks on democratic rights, staggering levels of social inequality, neo-colonialism and the growing danger of world war.

Democratic rights—including the rights of publishers like Assange and freedom of speech—can be defended only by the independent political mobilization of the working class in opposition to the pro-capitalist political parties and capitalist state.

The working class has a vested interest in the existence of a genuine "fourth estate," which provides truthful analysis, news and exposures of state propaganda, corruption and abuses. But as there can be no socialism without democracy, there can be no democracy without socialism.

The American state apparatus and its agencies launched a vendetta in 2010 to frame up Assange with criminal charges, precisely because the US and other governments feared that WikiLeaks' publication of whistleblower leaks would contribute to an eruption of mass discontent from below. Those fears were confirmed when cables published by WikiLeaks triggered an uprising by the working masses of Tunisia, which in turn played a role in the revolutionary upheavals in Egypt in February 2011 that brought down the US client regime of Hosni Mubarak.

The defence of WikiLeaks by the WWSW and the ICFI since 2010 has been based on the clear understanding that the attempt to silence Assange and rail-road him into a prison cell, or worse, has above all been motivated by the determination of the ruling elite to try and keep the working class ignorant, disorientated, divided and suppressed.

As James Cogan stated on March 3, Julian Assange is, in the most profound sense, a class war prisoner.

Cogan's speech drew attention to the two inter-connected

processes that are transforming the situation, and which are crucial to winning Assange's freedom.

Firstly, the working class is coming forward in a powerful resurgence of the international class struggle after decades in which it has been suppressed. Following major developments in 2018, the first months of 2019 have witnessed the ongoing “yellow vest” movement that has shaken the French government to its core, the eruption of strikes by teachers across the US, a rebellion by auto parts workers in Mexico, and ferment among workers in China, India and Brazil, to name only a few examples.

On a rapidly expanding international front, workers are signalling that they are not prepared to accept any longer the conditions they face, and the future they and their children are being offered under capitalism. The working class is going to fight for a decent living standard, for democratic rights and for an end to the threat of climate change and world war.

Secondly, the re-emergence of the working class, and the initial demonstrations of its power, has strengthened that section of the intelligentsia and professional middle class who have stood firm in their adherence to democratic principles and who have genuine concern for the fate of humanity. This layer was represented in the international campaign for the March 3 rally by a range of people—including journalists, artists, lawyers, academics and educators, doctors, scientists and IT professionals—who participated in myriad different ways.

The class struggle is not an abstraction. It is the objective driving force of social change. A broad political and industrial movement of workers internationally, guided by a socialist perspective, in opposition to militarism and social inequality, defending democratic rights and demanding freedom for all class war prisoners, is both possible and necessary. The impact it would have on the demand that the US, British and Australian governments cease persecuting Assange is palpable.

The attraction of the progressive layers of the middle class to the working class is in stark contrast to those organisations that deny the class struggle, and, instead, promote the reactionary nostrums of identity politics, which seeks to divide workers according to gender, race, sexual preference, nationality and ethnic background.

Within Australia and internationally, the pseudo-left organisations have refused to raise one word in defence of Assange. They represent a reactionary tendency, based in the upper echelons of the middle class, which is hostile to any challenge to the existing capitalist order, from which they derive privilege, position and wealth.

The demonstrations are the initial stages of a renewed struggle to free Julian Assange, which will most likely be

protracted and difficult. The more support that is expressed for Assange, the more slander and vilification will be directed against him and his defenders by the state apparatus and the establishment media.

The way forward requires the expansion of the fight to raise the political consciousness of workers and young people. The working class must be made aware, through patient explanation of the issues at stake, that the defence of Assange and all independent media, is critical to their interests and their struggles, above all, to prevent the catastrophe of war.

If WikiLeaks had not published the leaked Iraq and Afghanistan war logs and the trove of US diplomatic cables in 2010, or the Vault 7 leaks exposing CIA hacking and spying in 2017, they may never have seen the light of day. If anti-imperialist news outlets like the WSWS were not continually highlighting and warning of the dangers of war, the establishment media would have free rein to keep the population in the dark.

The critical lesson from the struggle thus far to free Assange and against censorship and state repression, is the indispensable role of politically educated and organised Marxist and revolutionary leadership, which is what the ICFI represents.

We urge all those who are drawing far-reaching conclusions about capitalism and the need for socialism to contact the SEP and ICFI.

the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) Political Committee

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>