

Australian voters speak out

Mass support for Assange as workers and youth oppose militarism and war

By our reporters
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Socialist Equality Party (SEP) campaigners interviewed scores of workers and youth at polling booths where the party ran candidates in the lower house electorates in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria during last Saturday's Australian federal election.

Labor, the Liberals and the Greens, along with the corporate media refused to discuss any of the major political questions confronting millions of ordinary people during the short four-week election campaign. Nothing was said about the widening chasm between rich and poor, Australian involvement in the US-led preparations for war against China or the imprisonment of WikiLeaks journalist Julian Assange.

By contrast, hundreds of workers passionately endorsed the SEP's campaign to secure the release of Assange and US whistleblower Chelsea Manning, describing the two as courageous individuals, heroes, legends and similar appellations.

There was enormous support for Assange and Manning in Calwell, the working class electorate in north-western Melbourne that is home to many refugees and immigrants from countries devastated by US imperialism, including Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan.

Amgad said: "I feel very strongly about this—I feel 100 percent positive about Chelsea Manning and Julian Assange. It's a question of American imperialism. They are pushing for war in Iran, look at John Bolton, look at that fool Trump. There is no moral backbone amongst any politicians in any country.

"Nothing Julian Assange did was wrong in his publications as a journalist. Why isn't Rupert Murdoch in jail? There is free speech, but not for all. What is happening to Julian Assange is a free speech violation and it's happening in a Western country, not Saudi Arabia. One thing we have to do is make this the Australian government's biggest responsibility, and get Julian brought back here."

Matt, a Bangladeshi IT worker, said: "Julian did the right thing. That's the real truth. The sad reality is that big, powerful people always run the world. Obviously they didn't like that he brought to light many things. I'm always against war. The media and politicians just spread hate for their own monetary benefit. There are two groups in the world: one is the ruling class, the other is the general class. The ruling class manipulates us in any way they want."

Franklin, a taxi driver originally from Sri Lanka, said he was "extremely concerned" about Assange. "Julian Assange is the man that should be free and those that committed the war crimes behind bars. The US government is the criminal. Assange is being treated this way because he spoke the truth. The man that speaks the truth is in jail and the ones that carry out the crimes are free and counting their millions. Every war, wherever it is fought, is all about profit."

Khalid, a worker, originally from Lebanon, said: "If Julian is sent to the US, he will never see the light again. I think he is an honest man. All he

did was to tell the people the truth... and he shouldn't be in jail. We, as citizens, should have the right to know what's going on, where our money goes, what our government is doing."

Khalid supported socialism, he said, because it was antiwar. "Wars are not about people, they're about money. That's why the US is now threatening war against Iran—so the Arab countries will run and buy guns from the US. Every time they go to war, it is to make money."

Khalil, an engineer said: "Assange is in prison because he revealed their dirty secrets—all their influences in the Middle East, their bad deeds and the political dirt. Governments weren't happy and they accused him of hurting their security—this is what governments do and it is what is happening in the Middle East, and is being done by the rulers there. I'm with Assange."

Mehdi, a construction worker originally from Afghanistan, said: "My country has been in war for the last 30 to 40 years. I've seen war and all the disadvantages and bad things in war and I'm against it. I really like this man Assange. He leaks all the internal policies of the USA and international politics. Whenever America or NATO intervenes in a country it is to help the governments not the people."

Hamid, originally from Algeria, opposed the persecution Assange. "On the one hand, the western powers say that they are promoting human rights, democracy and freedom but on the other they are abusing freedom of speech. I don't think they have any justification for arresting Assange. He tried to reveal what they were hiding," he said.

"I have great respect for Assange. Without him we don't know what is going on underneath. Everyone knows that the USA makes reasons to justify where they intervene, especially if there is oil. A long time ago they used the pretext of human rights—that a country wasn't complying with human rights—and go to war with that country. Now they are not even using that. They don't even care."

Feristah, a teacher, voted for the SEP, as did her daughter **Eve**, a lawyer. "Your slogan 'No to militarism and war!' was appealing. The Liberal government has spent a lot of money on preparing war with China. If you talk about going to war, you'll end up going to war. I think countries like the US, France, Germany, the UK are dominating world politics," Feristah said.

"Look at Venezuela. What is Trump doing there? What are we doing there? Why are we interfering? If they hadn't been interfering in Syria as they have been for years, the world wouldn't have to deal with 10 million Syrian refugees."

Eve defended Assange. "His only 'crime' was to let people know of the dirty work that these governments get up to. These countries are no longer accountable for their actions. We need to take ownership of Assange, he hasn't done anything wrong. It's sad that he's lost so many years of his life confined to such a small space. He's a hero at many

levels. They're out to get him in any way shape or form—he's a victim of great power politics."

These sentiments were repeated in the western-Sydney electorate of Parramatta.

Zabi, 50, originally from Afghanistan, said he voted for the SEP.

"What they are doing to Assange is horrible. It's an attack on freedom of speech, against journalism. Now, all journalists are threatened because of what they are doing to Julian Assange...."

"The ideas presented by the SEP are in line with my ideas, my way of thinking, the way things are going. I don't like the other parties—the Liberals, the Labor party, the Greens. Their track records, their history are totally opposite from the way I think. They are for the corporate wealthy and supporting military interventions.

"The US will do anything to maintain its control, their number one position in the world. Sadly, Australia is a follower. Whatever the US dictates, Australia follows without thinking what is in the best interests of Australia."

Ioana, 28, said the election was "a joke" and added: "The fact that they haven't mentioned war means that something big is going to happen around the world because people are getting angry and fed up..."

"I know about Julian Assange and I think everyone has a right to voice what they believe in and the truth should be out there. He's been unfairly treated, almost worse than an animal, and there are no human rights. He should be free..."

Jay, a 34-year-old western Sydney construction worker, said Assange should be released. "He's a legend and wants to expose what the big players are doing. There should be more people like him. Each of the big players is trying to cover themselves..."

"This is an attack on freedom of speech. And now we are in danger of a new war in the Middle East where more innocent people are going to be slaughtered, people displaced all over the world.... The big players are after oil, resources. They don't care about ordinary people like us."

Merwais, a Western Sydney University student, praised Assange and spoke about the danger of war. "All the organisations, publications and journalists that have abandoned Assange and attack him are run by private business funds. They don't follow the facts and don't want to damage their reputation even if that means hiding the reality, he said.

"The world is becoming more destabilised and what's happening in the Middle East is spreading and now the US wants to intervene into Iran. Whatever Iran is doing is better than a US intervention—look at the disaster the US created in Iraq. It's much worse than what it was like under Saddam Hussein. The strategy the US is using to inject their government and culture is not working. It's leading to colonialism and if precautions are not taken it will lead to World War III."

Isaac voted for the SEP in the Hunter electorate after meeting party campaigners in a local shopping centre. "None of the real issues have been discussed by any other of the parties in this election. The issue of war and the dangerous situation now present is not discussed. Yet this danger of war is affecting people everywhere including in Australia.

"The governments here will not act on our concerns about war because they know if they back away from support for the US war drive they will quickly be made accountable by US so they remain totally committed. Assange has let people know about what the US has done, and is doing, and now he is being persecuted for it. He should be supported by everyone."

Lachlan, another Hunter voter and a bushland regeneration worker, said Assange has "done great things and doesn't deserve the punishment he's been getting and shouldn't be extradited to the US or Sweden."

Governments are "preparing for war" everywhere, he said. "There's so much going on behind closed doors that we don't know about... There's lots of evidence of America trying to interfere in the politics of foreign countries for their own economic gain, and Australia goes along with it.

What's needed is a complete overhaul of government. I don't know what I'd put in place of that, but I lean towards socialism. I think anything would be better than capitalism."

Zameel, a low-paid aged care worker who had just finished night shift, spoke to SEP campaigners in Oxley, a working-class electorate in Queensland.

"I hope you [the SEP] do very well. I'm all for a socialist campaign, for equality. Corporate capitalism obviously isn't working at the moment."

Zameel was outraged over the persecution of Assange and Manning. "They're heroes, especially Chelsea Manning, for refusing to testify for the second time," he said. "That takes true guts. And people recognise that.

"It's a travesty the way the Australian government has treated Assange. The inaction by both the major parties is pathetic. For Julia Gillard to call Assange a criminal made her a bit of a fool, considering the secrets he uncovered, some of the program he helped disclose."

Peter, a public servant, was passionate about the defence of Julian Assange. "Knowing the decline of journalism, we need people like him," he said. "He's informing society, and the Australian government should step in and defend its own citizen. Exposing the workings of the government is not a crime. He's a part of the media and helps preserve our civil liberties, which generations of people fought for.

"Every thinking person realises that we are heading toward a one polar world, with one prevailing view, and everyone is supposed to fall into line and be obedient, despite the fact that we are supposed to have freedom of speech. So the one who speaks out is an enemy of the state. How democratic is this?"

Colin, an unemployed labourer, was disgusted by the election campaign. "The two parties [Liberal-National and Labor] are the same," he said. "They don't care about people, and voting won't change the system, which is stupid and useless."

Referring to Assange and Manning, he said: "Manning is so courageous for refusing to testify against Assange, which is my understanding of why they've jailed her. Both Assange and Manning have a much higher moral strength and argument, in my opinion, than Trump and his administration... Julian Assange should be brought home to Australia and treated like a celebrity, given a hero's welcome."

Asked about the SEP's slogan "No to militarism and war, for internationalism and socialism," Colin said: "I'm against all the flag-waving you see. There should be no national boundaries. I agree that people ought to be able to live wherever they want. There's no difference between countries ... I think people in all countries are basically the same and I agree they need to fight together against the corporations."

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