Join the Sydney rally this Saturday
demanding freedom for Julian Assange!

By Oscar Grenfell
27 June 2019

The Socialist Equality Party (Australia) has called a rally this Saturday, 12 p.m. at Sydney’s Martin Place Amphitheatre, in defence of Julian Assange.

The demonstration will demand that the Australian government take immediate action to prevent the WikiLeaks founder’s extradition to the United States, where he faces life imprisonment or the death penalty, and secure his complete freedom. It will call for the immediate release of the courageous whistleblower Chelsea Manning, who has been jailed by the Trump administration for over a month because of her principled refusal to give perjured testimony against Assange.

All workers, students, young people and defenders of civil liberties should join the Sydney rally and promote it as widely as possible.

The persecution of Assange for his role in the exposure of US war crimes, diplomatic conspiracies and mass surveillance operations is the spearhead of an attempt by governments internationally to suppress opposition to militarism and war, and to abolish fundamental democratic rights.

The urgency of actions in defence of Assange is demonstrated by the speed with which the global conspiracy against him is proceeding.

Less than three months after Assange was violently arrested on April 11, the British government has greenlighted court hearings on his extradition next February. They will be a legal farce, conducted in a kangaroo court whose sole purpose is to dispatch the WikiLeaks founder to the US.

As a WSWS international editorial board statement last week explained: “Only by organizing protest actions on an international scale—meetings, rallies, demonstrations, and public conferences—will it be possible to frustrate and defeat the plans of reactionary governments, their intelligence agencies and political agents to silence and destroy Julian Assange.”

The Sydney rally is part of this worldwide campaign. It will be based upon the perspective outlined by the WSWS statement, which called for the formation of a Global Defence Committee to mobilise the immense strength of the working class to secure Assange’s and Manning’s freedom.

Alongside leading members of the SEP, the Sydney protest will be addressed by prominent defenders of democratic rights.

They will include Emeritus Professor Stuart Rees, the former head of the Sydney Peace Foundation, who in 2011 presented Assange with the organisation’s Gold Medal for “peace with justice”; filmmaker James Ricketson, who was freed from a Cambodian jail after a public campaign against his incarceration on bogus espionage charges; and Mark Davis, a Walkley Award-winning investigative journalist who interviewed the WikiLeaks founder several times in 2010 and 2011.

The Sydney rally will be livestreamed to an international audience on the SEP’s Facebook page. It will be followed by demonstrations in Brisbane on July 6 and Melbourne on July 14.

The protests will indict successive Australian governments for their central role in the US-led vendetta against Assange. All of them have refused to fulfil their obligations to Assange as an Australian citizen and journalist. Instead, they joined the campaign against him.

In 2010, when the Obama administration began the ruthless persecution of WikiLeaks over its exposure of historic war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, and Washington’s global meddling operations, the Greens-backed Labor government of Julia Gillard rejected calls to intervene in defence of Assange.

In fact, Gillard denounced WikiLeaks as a criminal organisation and pledged to assist the efforts of the US government and intelligence agencies to destroy it.

This has been the line of every Australian government since.

For seven years, they backed Britain’s threats to arrest Assange if he left Ecuador’s London embassy, where he sought political asylum in 2012. This was despite United Nations bodies repeatedly ruling that the Britain’s siege of
the embassy building and its pledges to detain the
WikiLeaks founder had resulted in Assange’s arbitrary
detention.

Australia’s current Liberal-National Coalition government
and Labor Party opposition have continued to back the
international conspiracy against Assange since his illegal
expulsion from the Ecuadorian embassy on April 11.

Coalition and Labor MPs made worthless statements about
providing Assange with unspecified “consular assistance.”
This commits them to nothing. They have continued to level
scurrilous attacks against the WikiLeaks founder. With the
assistance of the Greens and the corporate media, they
suppressed any discussion of his plight during the official
campaign for the May 18 federal election.

Neither the government, nor Labor, has even condemned
the Trump administration’s decision to lay charges against
Assange, which carry a maximum sentence of 175 years’
imprisonment. They have thereby signalled their support for
dispatching Assange to rot in an American prison, for the
“crime” of having exposed illegal wars.

As Nils Melzer, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture,
stated last month, by their refusal to defend Assange,
Australian governments are responsible for the
psychological torture he has suffered. They will be no less
culpable for any harm that comes to Assange in the future,
in Britain’s maximum security Belmarsh Prison, or if he is
extradited to the US.

Australian governments have been able to deny Assange
his rights as a citizen only because of the enthusiastic
support of the corporate media for the attacks against him.

Journalist Peter Greste spoke for all the mainstream
publications when he responded to Assange’s arrest with a
scurrilous article declaring that the WikiLeaks founder was
“not a journalist.” Greste and other commentators are
hostile to Assange because he has not functioned as a
mouthpiece of corporate media conglomerates and the
intelligence agencies, as they have.

An even more pernicious role has been played by a host of
organisations, including the pseudo-left outfits, the trade
unions and self-styled civil liberties groups, which once
claimed to defend Assange but quickly abandoned him.

All of them lined up behind the bogus Swedish sexual
assault allegations, which have formed a central component
of the CIA campaign against the WikiLeaks founder. They
have covered up the fact that the Swedish “preliminary
investigation” has been dropped twice, that Assange has
never been charged and that no evidence has been presented
that he committed any crime.

The line-up of the political and media establishment
against Assange stands in stark contrast to the attitude of
millions of workers, students and young people who rightly
view the WikiLeaks founder as a hero who is being
persecuted for exposing the truth.

This latent support must be transformed into a political
movement, consciously fighting for Assange and Manning’s
freedom. It is clear that the Australian government and the
Labor opposition will take no action in defence of Assange,
unless they are compelled to do so by a mass movement
from below.

The importance of this struggle is ever-more clear. The
unveiling of the US Espionage Act charges against Assange
has opened the floodgates for a global assault on journalists
and brazen attempts to criminalise opposition to the
mounting danger of US-provoked war.

Already, the Australian Federal Police has raided
journalists over the exposure of war crimes in Afghanistan
and mass government spying, and the French government is
seeking to prosecute reporters for revealing its complicity in
Saudi Arabia’s genocidal assault on Yemen.

These attacks must be answered by workers, students and
young people. As the WSWS statement concluded: “No one
who is seriously committed to the defense of democratic
rights can stand on the sidelines. The case of Julian Assange
is a critical twenty-first century battleground in the defense
of free speech, truth, and the fight against exploitation,
dictatorship and war, the basic evils of the world capitalist
system.”

Google is blocking the World Socialist Web Site from
search results.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

http://www.wsws.org