

Melbourne rally participants speak in defence of Assange and Manning

By our reporters
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Around 130 workers, students, young people, professionals and retirees attended a Socialist Equality Party rally in Melbourne on July 14 to demand that the Australian government take immediate action to free WikiLeaks' publisher and journalist Julian Assange and whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

Many participants were keen to speak with *World Socialist Web Site* reporters after the event, outraged at the vindictive and anti-democratic vendetta being waged against Assange and Manning for their heroic role in exposing US-led war crimes, diplomatic intrigues and mass surveillance.

Taylor, a student from Victoria University who studies the humanities, said: "I believe in standing up for Assange. He represents our democratic rights and freedom of speech and our right to hear the truth. He is anti-imperialist, opposing war and war crimes. I've been aware of him for a long time. When he released the 'Collateral Murder' video I thought that the footage was horrendous. I was sick to my stomach that innocent people were being killed."

He added: "The American and other ruling elites tried to distract us from all of this with the sex allegations. I would say a lot of people know Assange but they don't know of his actual situation. If you aren't a follower of independent or left-wing media you can't know about him due to the mass media.

"If Assange's extradition goes ahead it could lead to more crimes. This isn't just about Assange, it's about the US trying to protect and cover-up its illegal actions. It will be an open door if we don't resist this—we need to stand up and mobilise and protest against what is happening."

Arthur, a warehouse worker, told the WSW: "I think Assange was putting a spotlight on organisations and governments that civilians might not approve of if

they knew what was going on. I think it's important to have awareness of these issues—if you are not aware you cannot act. We have the right to know.

"This is like a witch hunt trying to destroy Assange. I think the industrial military machine is behind this, and governments who have world domination on their agenda. The Australian government is in alliance with the US and whatever the US wants the Australian government does. One of the principal values is meant to be freedom. That is what we are meant to stand by, and that means knowing what is going on in your community."

Charmaine, who said she has been following WikiLeaks' publications from the organisation's founding in 2006–07, said: "I just noticed a lot of discrepancies in the mainstream media. The things that we were seeing with WikiLeaks and the things we were seeing in the mainstream media didn't match up, so with further research how could you not support WikiLeaks?"

"Freedom is important for every Australian, for every citizen of every country in fact, and I think that if we don't unite now we are going to lose all our freedoms. It wasn't until recently that I've felt I have to come out and show my face and get involved because it just can't go on."

Speaking about WikiLeaks' exposure of US-led war crimes, including the "Collateral Murder" video footage from the illegal Iraq War, Charmaine said: "You just can't get that picture out of your brain once you've seen it can you? It's disturbing and I'm not having it done in my name. Julian's fought for us, he's given everything for us, and now we've got to pay it back."

Asked what she would say to Assange if he were able to read a report of the Melbourne rally, Charmaine

replied: “We’re here, we’re not going anywhere, and we’ll be here as long as it takes.”

Hector, a geographer originally from Spain, attended the rally after seeing street posters advertising the event. “When I moved to Australia for the first time, I was checking for myself some WikiLeaks documents and I did have access to the videos that have been mentioned in this rally, of the US military shooting civilians,” he said.

“Something like that was really disturbing to me and it shocked me profoundly. I was also shocked by the Ecuadorian embassy’s declaration against Assange, and by his arrest. It all smelled very, very awful to me. It’s against the law in the first place. People here said at the rally that this is setting a precedent, where there will be no places where journalists are safe, so it’s through a fear strategy. Investigative journalists are going to be scared to release any information.”

Alan, a philosophy student at RMIT University, told the WSWS: “I think it is important that the speakers mentioned the bravery of Chelsea Manning. We shouldn’t forget that Assange is a Melbourne boy—a person that is now not even able to look after his immediate needs. He was brave enough to tell us to keep the fight going, not just for him, but because it is a general issue.

“I thought the last speaker [Cheryl Crisp] spoke really well. She raised that there is an international defence campaign through the Fourth International. She also made a good point that it is not about the character of Donald Trump—workers have to see these people as their enemies.”

Jerem, an ocean archaeologist, told the WSWS: “I came to the rally because the treatment of Julian Assange is disgusting and it is a real tipping point if he is extradited to the US—it can happen to anyone. The alleged crimes that he is supposed to have committed never occurred in the US, so how can he be put on trial under its judicial system? This is a bad turn for global democracy. The role of the government here and the Labor Party is despicable, they are useless; they’re lap dogs to the US.”

Jerem continued: “The call for a Global Defence Committee is a good idea. It is essential for solidarity to be shown globally, because individual governments are not going to make a difference now that the Ecuadorian government has betrayed their initial

standpoint. I don’t believe any government will stand up for Assange. I think that it comes down to normal people standing and fighting for Assange and Manning’s freedom.

“Chelsea Manning is incredibly brave. After spending so long in prisons to know how horrible that isolation was, and then for her to come out again to defend Assange with the treat of indefinite detention—she has willingly accepted that. That is a really positive example to people all around the world.

“I think in the West we are being betrayed by our media who haven’t been doing their job for a long time. I don’t know whether it has been always like this or it is a recent occurrence. If this is the promotion of willful ignorance to the general population, then it amounts to complicity with the crimes governments are committing.

“Assange has shone the light on what is going on, exposed the propaganda when the governments are trying to develop support for the drive toward war. Once the drive toward war is put under the spotlight, the arguments for war fall away quickly. I think that is the main reason Assange is being targeted—so governments have free range to do whatever they want.”

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