

Attendees at meetings in Australia and NZ support campaign for release of Assange and Manning

By our reporters
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Workers, students, professionals and retirees who attended meetings over the past two weeks in the Australian cities and towns of Toronto, Brisbane, Sydney, and in Wellington, New Zealand, spoke with WSWS correspondents about why they defend WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange and American whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

Guy, an electrician, came to the meeting in Toronto, a major town in the Central Coast region to the north of Sydney. “What’s happening to Julian Assange affects us all,” he said. “He has told the truth and he has exposed the war criminals and that’s why the US wants him. We’ve got to get out there, march in the streets and demand his freedom. I’ve become really disillusioned with the whole political system, because as far as I can see it seems like a scam. I think the whole system has got to change.”

Chris also spoke to the WSWS after the Toronto meeting. He said: “The Afghan files and Iraq files show their reports back to the U.S government, saying we ‘screwed up,’ we killed all these people unintentionally. You can understand why they’d be furious that these documents got out and the sway they had on public opinion. People might think ‘maybe the US isn’t doing the right thing fighting in these wars that are supposedly for democracy.’”

“I got most of my info on Assange about six or seven years ago and I’ve noticed that there’s been almost no reporting since then. They trumped up these sexual allegations from Sweden. One of the women came out saying that she was pressured by police, who wrote out the charges and then pressured them to make these statements. There was enough of a smear campaign in Australia to cast doubt over whether Assange was a

good guy or a bad guy.”

Eddie, a retiree, said after the Toronto meeting: “Assange represents freedom, knowledge and the truth. The elites have all the power, they have the TV, they have the radio and the newspapers—they have the media.

“Until Assange came along, we didn’t know that there was a helicopter gunship shooting journalists in the street. That was the turning point, and it is thanks to Assange—who put all that information into the media—and his source Chelsea Manning. We owe them to do all in our power to make as much noise as possible, to alert the rest of the people in the world who still live with horse-blinders because they don’t know.

“How many people died in the Iraq war? How many innocent children, innocent women and men? And of course, the soldiers too. Why are we fighting those wars? Because they can sell their weapons, for profit and greed. On one side we have capital, and they get away with murder. On the other side, here we are. I came here because I saw you with your free Assange T-shirts and here I am. This is what we’ve got to do.”

In Brisbane, **Alyssa** and her daughter **Rachael**, a high school graduate, explained why they came to the meeting. Alyssa said: “Ever since I was a teenager, around my daughter’s age, I’ve known about Julian and been very proud of him... I found out about this meeting by a supporter of Assange sending a message on Facebook and social media. I learned about it this morning, so I came, and I brought Rachael along as well!”

Asked about the growing support for Assange in the working class, Alyssa replied: “I think there’s a lot of support in Australia. However, a lot of people have

been misinformed, and have only heard about him [Assange] from the allegations.”

Rachael added: “A lot of students don’t know about Julian Assange, but everyone at school knows about the video with the helicopter gunship killing those civilians [the “Collateral Murder” video] so even though they don’t know his name, they know about what he’s done.”

Asked what would happen if Assange were silenced, Alyssa noted: “If it succeeds then it will silence dissent. It sets a precedent for court cases and other prosecutions and I worry what effect that will have upon the next generation.”

Beau, a young construction worker, said he had heard about Assange a few years ago and came to the meeting because he had seen an SEP campaign.

“The defence of Assange is really important,” he said. “There are so many other things that are important as well, so I am here to try to help bring all the ideas together. We need millions, if not billions, of people to support this cause.”

Beau commented: “There is no trust in governments anymore. My advice to people is to learn independently. Do as much research as you can. That’s probably something Assange would say himself. Don’t watch commercial TV news. That’s just a programming for your mind.”

After the meeting in Wellington, New Zealand, the WSWS interviewed **Deb**, a customer service worker who had travelled from Otaki, north of Wellington. She explained she had decided to attend the event after discovering coverage of the campaign to free Assange on the WSWS.

Deb agreed that Assange’s persecution reflected the growing fear among governments around the world over rising class struggle and hostility to capitalism. “They don’t want any more war crimes to be exposed, they want to intimidate people not to inquire about what governments are doing, and not to look at what WikiLeaks exposes,” she said.

“I urge people to go to your website and to WikiLeaks, to find an unbiased picture. We owe Assange so much for the truth that he has given to us, that helps us understand the political system. The murders by the US military have been horrendous.” She denounced the “media blackout and the smears that have darkened Assange’s reputation. It’s brutal.”

Marcel, a dance student, said he recently began researching what is happening to Assange after discussions with his father and reading articles by independent journalist Caitlin Johnstone. “I found out today that the persecution of Assange is illegal,” he said. “All the smears that he’s a rapist have nothing to do with it. Julian Assange tells the world about what the US government is doing behind the scenes. It’s just government transparency, that’s all it is, and the fact that they don’t like him for doing that says a lot.”

Marcel denounced the imprisonment and “financial torture” of Chelsea Manning. He said: “It doesn’t look as bad on paper as physical torture but it’s just as harmful. You can ruin someone’s life.” He added that he had read that “10 or 14 days of solitary confinement can cause brain damage.”

In Sydney, the WSWS interviewed **Rachelle**, who has worked in human resources. She said: “The meeting was informative and representative. There was a lot of different people. I think the resolution that was put forward was what everyone was hoping for as the outcome of the meeting.

“I think what has been done to Assange is horrible. They are just taking away his basic human rights. I am totally against what is happening and I think it is disgraceful. He has done nothing wrong. He has done what any journalist would do, or anyone that is investigating that area would do.

“I think that international governments that are involved in any corrupt activity would want to suppress any information that would expose them. Assange has been bringing awareness to people like us, normal civilians who would never be aware of these things. The mainstream media wouldn’t really be showing these things.

“I really think that there should be more demonstrations and more campaigns to heighten awareness about what is happening.”

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