

Australian teenagers call for support for Julian Assange

By Mike Head
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Three young people who recently completed high school have issued a call, via the *World Socialist Web Site*, for all youth and people to come to the defence of the jailed WikiLeaks founder and journalist Julian Assange.

The three, Rachael, Ebony and Omar, are now working in low-paid retail or hospitality jobs. They first learned of Assange and his persecution from Rachael's mother, who invited her daughter to a Socialist Equality Party (SEP) public meeting in Brisbane on November 23. This was part of a series being held by the SEP in Australia and New Zealand to demand freedom for Assange and the courageous whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

Rachael then asked her two friends to come to a forum on Assange at Brisbane's Queensland state parliament house. There they told the WSWS they wanted to issue an appeal for the defence of Assange and Manning. Their experience, and passionate response, typifies that of many young people and workers who are becoming increasingly aware of, and outraged by, the brutal treatment of the pair, many through the coverage and analysis provided by the WSWS.

Australia's Liberal-National government, like the Labor Party government before it, has continued to refuse to use its clear legal and diplomatic powers to protect Assange, an Australian citizen. This is despite a growing global outcry against his imprisonment and psychological torture in a notorious London prison and threatened extradition to the US on unlawful US Espionage Act charges that could see him jailed for life, if not executed.

Rachael, 17, is a fast food attendant. Ebony, 17, is a supermarket worker. Omar, who recently turned 18, is a waiter. They and their friends had never heard of

Assange previously—they had only seen the “Collateral Murder” video broadcast in 2010 by WikiLeaks showing two US military helicopter gunships killing civilians, including journalists, in Iraq—so they said they wanted to spread the word. Their call was made in the form of asking the WSWS to present questions for them to answer.

Why do you feel so strongly about Julian Assange's persecution?

Rachael: Because, it's violating human rights and he's an Australian.

Ebony: It's just human rights and he's not having any human rights.

Omar: He's not being given his human rights, which is a right, so it's extremely illegal what they [the US, British and Australian governments] are doing to him, and it's not okay.

Why is it so important for people to support and speak out in defence of Assange and Chelsea Manning?

Rachael: Because they are not being given their human rights. The only way to help Assange is a mass of people having his back and supporting him so that they have to release him because the people are against it.

Ebony: He can't speak for himself, so we have to speak for him.

Omar: Because he's being mostly denied visitors and he can't even talk to people if he wants to and he's being locked in confinement for 23 hours a day, so everyone else has to speak up and support him. If not, then they get away with what they are doing to him.

Why is it especially important for young people to voice their concern?

Rachael: Because the whole population, not just older people, are supporting him and young people make up

a large part of the population and they should have a say (in what happens around the world).

Omar: Young people have to protect their rights as well, and we can use social media to help.

What would be the future for free speech and media freedom if Assange were extradited to the US and locked away for life?

Rachael: It sets a precedent for future cases. So that means that judges will look back and say someone else has to be treated the same way because that's fair then. So I guess we won't have the right of free speech, which is also a human right, which means our human rights will be just all messed up and the truth won't be allowed to be told.

Ebony: It will ruin future human rights; that's really bad.

Omar: Then the governments will just let us publish what they want to put out there. Rather than having freedom of speech, it will just be whatever the main power wants to put out and show the public audience, and then they get away with murder and other things.

What is the connection between this campaign and the rising struggles around the world by workers and young people against social inequality, government corruption, corporate power and climate change?

Rachael: Because Assange was helping people to know the truth.

Ebony: And the government should want people to know the truth.

Omar: It will scare people from showing the truth.

Rachael: So, governments will get worse over time if journalists can't tell us the truth, and the problems that are happening in overseas governments will end up happening here. If your government is supposed to be a democracy, then that's what it should be. It should be the people making the decisions and voting leaders in, and that way people who tell the truth won't get hurt.

Can we trust the parliamentary establishment, or does the movement have to come from below?

Omar: The movement would have to start from below and build up enough mass so that the parliamentary establishment can't resist listening to the people.

Ebony: They can't arrest everyone, so that's why you need to get lots of people to spread the word.

Rachael: I trust some of the government but mostly it is corrupt.

Omar: Well we don't even know how much of the government is corrupt because they cover it up.

Is this mainly an Australian issue, or a global one?

Rachael: This is a global issue but in Australia we're under the British Commonwealth and we're allies with America, so the wealthier countries, America and England, affect us.

Ebony: It's a global issue but because Julian is an Australian then if he is extradited it will set a precedent that any Australian can be shipped off to China or somewhere else and may never be seen again.

Omar: It's a global issue.

Any other comments you would like to make?

Ebony: Julian should be allowed to be free and needs to be free because it's human rights and he's not getting given any human rights and that's obviously illegal. So this is why people are trying to get together to support him.

Omar: And if so many people know about it then why is he still being treated that way?

Ebony: Yeah, why is it still an issue? It should have been resolved years ago because it's been going on for too long.

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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