

IYSSE holds meetings in defence of Assange at Australian universities

By our reporters
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Over the past weeks, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party, has held a series of meetings at Australian university campuses in defence of persecuted WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

Meetings have been held at Western Sydney University, the University of Newcastle, on the New South Wales central coast, the University of Melbourne and Victoria University. The events have been attended by dozens of students, along with workers and other young people.

At the events in Newcastle and at the University of Melbourne, students passed motions pledging to take up a fight for Assange's unconditional freedom and to wage a campaign aimed at preventing his extradition to the US, where he faces concocted charges carrying a maximum sentence of 175 years imprisonment.

At the University of Melbourne, IYSSE President Evrim Yazgin explained that Assange is "being targeted to set a precedent for journalists and anti-war figures who expose imperialist crimes in a period where the US and other imperialist powers are preparing ever-greater war crimes."

Yazgin condemned the refusal of the federal government to defend Assange, as an Australian citizen and journalist. He reviewed the abandonment of the WikiLeaks founder by the Greens, the pseudo-left and a host of self-styled civil liberties advocates. He insisted that the working class was the constituency for the fight to free Assange and to defeat the onslaught on civil liberties.

There were lively discussions at each of the campuses after the main report was delivered.

Ira, a University of Melbourne student specialising in humanitarian law, said: "In the current geopolitical

scenario our government is following America rather than standing up for our individual rights. There was a mass movement for David Hicks. It can happen. I think we need a mass movement, home grown everywhere."

Theresa, a second-year literature and philosophy student, commented on the recent media blackout on Assange. "It was nice to hear people [here] talking about Assange because I feel like I heard about it a lot in the media a while ago but now it's been silent. The media is backed by, and depends upon, the elite, and it's against their interests to discuss Assange.

"Without media coverage it's hard for people around the country and around the world to keep it in their consciousness. And when you look at it in the context of the raid on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation then it's extra concerning.

"There's a pattern beginning to emerge and that's pretty terrifying. That someone telling the truth can be punished, and the people punishing them can get away with it and silence this man, is scary. They tell us that capitalism is leading to liberty but really state repression is on the increase."

Leah said: "It's really important that we build a community around fair treatment and freedom for Assange and it's great that you are actually out here rallying support for him. To be a part of that is really great."

At Victoria University, **Nikki**, a political science student declared: "Julian is a hero and he's done a lot of good for the public. We need to fight for him through what you guys are doing now."

Nelson, a student from Honduras, said: "I came to the meeting today because I've heard about social movements in universities. My country also has many similar problems and we need young people to fight for this kind of socialism.

“This is an important movement because it’s an organisation around the world that wants to open the eyes of the working class and to heal different troubles in every country... It’s possible to build mass protests to defend Assange.

“This meeting has helped me a lot and I now have a good concept of what a socialist program is.”

At the University of Newcastle, **Brent**, a 25-year-old student, said Assange was being persecuted in order to “intimidate” ordinary people.

“It’s to show people that this is what will happen to you if you step out of line,” he said. “Not many people remember the days when we were downloading files from WikiLeaks and other sites in 2010 and 2011.

“The movement was very strong during that period [but] since then there has been a whole crackdown on alternative news sources. Many websites that were formerly okay have either been bought out or taken down. This is internet censorship and Google’s new search algorithms have done this as well. I remember searching different topics such as ‘war’ years ago, but a lot of the good websites that used to come up don’t appear anymore.”

Frank, a retiree, said that the attacks on Assange were a “warning that we are slowly sleepwalking to totalitarianism.” These are the actions of a state, he added, which “wants to subject everyone to their view of the truth. This goes against every principle of freedom of information, speech and discourse. They see Assange as a real threat to their program and seek to eliminate him under all circumstances. He is their worst nightmare.”

Dick, a worker from Toronto, said the government attacks on Assange were “absolutely absurd.... We’re supposed to have freedom of speech and freedom of the press, but we don’t.”

The attacks on the WikiLeaks founder, he said, show that the “government can’t stand the thought of any resistance or any opposition to their policies... I was very surprised by the response of the Labor Party and the Greens. They’ve done nothing whatsoever to help Assange or to defend him.”

Robert, a hospitality worker in Sydney, said: “Labor, the Liberals and the Greens are not supporting Assange. They’ve painted a picture of this guy that darkens his character and what he’s done. They all want to keep their secrets, and since he’s exposed

some, they’re out to get him. Western democracies no longer support free speech.

“There are some journalists who condemn what is occurring but the majority of the consumer media is pretty cheap and nasty. We are dominated by the Murdoch press...”

“We need to stand up, make as much noise as possible and make it known that the people object. There will be further attacks on journalists, it won’t stop. They’ll continue to apply the strong arm and try and frighten the people.”

Mane, a psychology student from Western Sydney University, denounced the Australian government. She said that the sexual allegations against Assange were bogus but were being used to “trick people’s minds [and] get people to think that we don’t want this person, that he’s a danger...”

“I’ve always spoken out for freedom of speech and freedom of rights and I don’t think that anyone who speaks the truth should be prosecuted or arrested because they are standing up for what they believe in. It is just wrong! Assange was a journalist and through WikiLeaks he was doing his job and showing the public about what was happening in the world.

When asked what young people should do, she said: “I always think back to a quote from Martin Luther King who said: ‘Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.’

“What is happening to Julian Assange is an injustice to him and his rights and freedom of speech. Young people should join together and fight for what is true and what is honest. That would be a great start to fighting against the wars and for human rights.”

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