

Defend Julian Assange

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A critical moment is approaching in the protracted vendetta by the US government and its allies against the WikiLeaks organisation and its editor Julian Assange.

The legal avenues to prevent Assange's extradition from Britain to Sweden to face allegations of sexual assault are rapidly being exhausted. On May 30, the majority of a seven-judge bench of the British Supreme Court rejected his appeal against rulings that a Swedish-logged European Arrest Warrant should be enforced.

Assange's lawyers are expected to seek a re-opening of the appeal before a deadline on June 13. The British judges, however, are unlikely to accept the defence argument that their ruling was based on legal points not raised during the hearing. His lawyers could further attempt to appeal to the European Court of Human Rights, but that also is given little prospect of success.

Assange's extradition to Sweden will almost certainly result in criminal charges and his detention. It will also establish the conditions for US authorities to unveil a secret grand jury indictment on charges of espionage and file a warrant for his extradition from Sweden.

The existence of the secret indictment in Virginia in 2010 was confirmed in leaked emails by Fred Burton, a vice-president of the private intelligence company Stratfor. Burton wrote in February 2011: "Not for Pub—We have a sealed indictment on Assange. Pls protect... Assange is going to make a nice bride in prison. Screw the terrorist. He'll be eating cat food forever."

This intense hatred of Assange in US ruling circles is the product of WikiLeaks' public exposure of the sinister machinations and crimes of the US government and governments around the world. The website published information that revealed US atrocities in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as hundreds of thousands of American diplomatic cables documenting anti-

democratic intrigues that go on every day in the corridors of power internationally.

The response of the US political establishment has been vicious and relentless. Assange has faced public death threats. Vice President Joseph Biden accused him of being a "high-tech terrorist." WikiLeaks has had its Internet domains shut down and its financial operations blocked. Its employees and supporters have been subjected to state harassment and surveillance.

Alleged whistle-blower Bradley Manning, accused of funneling classified information to WikiLeaks, has been detained without charge for more than two years and is to be dragged before a military court martial in November. Manning faces life imprisonment for espionage and "aiding the enemy", as would Assange if he were prosecuted on the same charges.

The Australian Labor government has openly collaborated in the persecution of Assange, an Australian citizen. Before any charges or trial, Prime Minister Julia Gillard branded his actions in publishing diplomatic cables as "illegal." The attorney-general threatened to cancel his passport and demanded that Britain enforce the Swedish extradition warrant. Should Assange manage to return to Australia, the Labor government last month amended legislation to remove any barrier to extraditing Australian citizens on "political offences" committed in other countries.

The treatment of Assange, Manning and WikiLeaks is part of a far broader assault on democratic rights internationally under the guise of the "war on terror." Fundamental rights such as freedom of speech and association are being criminalised by governments intent on protecting the interests of the corporate elite amid a deepening global crisis of capitalism. The police state methods being used to persecute Assange will be directed more broadly against masses of working people as they enter struggle against austerity and the drive to war.

The collapse of any commitment in ruling circles to basic democratic rights is most graphically revealed by the response of the so-called liberals and lefts. Across Europe and in the US, this milieu has in the main refused to defend Assange, and many have given credence to the politically motivated allegations of sexual assault against him by a right-wing Swedish prosecutor. Among the pseudo-radicals, the press of the International Socialist Organisation in the US and the Socialist Workers Party in Britain has aired the view that Assange should not be defended because he is accused of rape. Concerns that the Swedish charges are bogus were dismissed as “a conspiracy theory.”

In Australia, the Greens and pseudo-left organisations “defend” Assange by claiming that the Gillard government can be pressured “to do more” to assist him. This campaign serves to cover up the role of the Labor Party in aiding and abetting the efforts of the US and its accomplices to railroad Assange into an American jail. Such a perspective can only disorient and demoralise the large numbers of people who oppose the hounding of Assange. The position of the Greens party is particularly cynical. At no point has its ostensible concern over democratic rights led it to question, let alone break, its deal to keep the minority Labor government in power.

The defence of Assange and WikiLeaks must be animated by an understanding of the political and class forces at work. Democratic rights are under attack by governments around the world because the financial and corporate elite can defend its profits and wealth only through the active suppression of opposition within the working class. Democracy, in other words, is incompatible with the continued existence of the failed capitalist order.

The fight to defend Julian Assange and democratic rights more broadly is inseparably bound up with the mobilisation of the working class in Britain, Australia, the US and internationally against the profit system and its political defenders. There are no shortcuts through protests and appeals to the powers-that-be. What is necessary is the development of an independent political movement of the working class that fights to establish workers’ governments committed to the reorganisation of society on the basis of human need, not private profit, and genuine democracy in every aspect of economic, political and social life.



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