For international action to defend Julian Assange!

The ICFI and WSWS international editorial board
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The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the *World Socialist Web Site* International Editorial Board call for urgent action to be taken around the world to defend WikiLeaks' editor Julian Assange. After fighting for close to eight years against relentless persecution by the US government and its allies, the Australian-born journalist is now in tremendous danger of falling into their clutches.

The American ruling class and its counterparts internationally are hostile to WikiLeaks and its editor because he published leaked information that exposed before the world their war crimes, anti-democratic intrigues and corruption. The US government is determined to silence Assange and intimidate all principled journalists and whistleblowers by hauling him before a show trial and convicting him of fraudulent charges of "espionage." Assange now faces the risk of lengthy imprisonment, or even the death sentence, for revealing the truth.

In 2010, while in Britain, Assange exposed the criminality of the United States. Soon after, a Swedish prosecutor made vile allegations against him to the effect that he may have committed sexual offenses. The allegations were part of a conspiracy to silence him and undermine WikiLeaks' considerable international support. Assange was forced to fight attempts to extradite him to Sweden, from where he could have been rendered to the United States. In June 2012, he was compelled to seek political asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy in London when a British court handed down a politically motivated rejection of his final legal appeal against extradition.

In late 2016, Swedish authorities agreed to question Assange in London and then, last year, abandoned their purported investigation without ever laying a single charge. The British government, however, in collaboration with Washington, has refused to drop its intention to prosecute and imprison Assange for absconding on bail while seeking political asylum.

The situation has now reached a critical turning point. The Ecuadorian government, which bravely provided Assange with political asylum in 2012, has capitulated to intense US and British pressure. On March 28, nine weeks ago, it cut off all of Assange's communications and his ability to receive visitors.

Media reports suggest that the Ecuadorian government is exerting immense pressure on Assange to "voluntarily" leave its embassy. Even before he was almost completely isolated, Assange's medical condition had seriously deteriorated. He has suffered nearly six years of effective imprisonment, without sunlight and inside a very small area. If he refuses to leave, statements from Ecuadorian officials indicate they are engaged in cowardly discussions with Britain to renege on his asylum and hand him over to British police on charges of absconding on bail.

The American CIA and other police-intelligence agencies are waiting in the wings to move in with their extradition warrants. Underscoring the determination of the American ruling class to shut down whistleblowers and hide its crimes from the world, the CIA has labelled WikiLeaks a "non-state hostile intelligence agency," while the US government has declared Assange's arrest a "priority."

Demonstrations, protests, speak-outs and other public events should be organised around the world to defend Julian Assange.

The ICFI and WSWS endorse the vigil being prepared by WikiLeaks' supporters outside the Ecuadorian embassy in London June 19—marking the sixth anniversary of the date he entered the building. Vigils are being organised in other cities as well.

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The Ecuadorian government must restore Assange's rights to communicate and receive visitors. Having granted him political asylum, it does not have the right to hand him to his persecutors. The British government, for its part, must drop the charges against Assange for jumping bail, a necessary action he took only out of legitimate concern that he would be extradited to the US. He must be allowed to leave the Ecuadorian embassy and leave the UK.

The Australian section of the ICFI, the Socialist Equality Party, has called a demonstration at Sydney's central Town Hall Square at 1:00 p.m. on Sunday, June 17. The demonstration has been endorsed by well-known journalist John Pilger and other principled defenders of WikiLeaks. It will demand that the Australian government immediately act to secure Assange's unconditional freedom and return to Australia. It will also demand that Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's government guarantee his protection from any attempt to extradite him to the US.

Successive Australian governments have treated Julian Assange's rights as an Australian citizen, which they are obliged to uphold and defend, with utter contempt. From the outset, Canberra was *obligated* to protect Assange, an Australian journalist, from persecution by the US government because he had exposed its war crimes and human rights violations.

Instead, starting with the Labor Party government headed by Prime Minister Julia Gillard, Canberra has thrown Assange to the wolves.

Gillard openly collaborated with the Obama administration in witch-hunting and persecuting WikiLeaks. The Labor government denounced its publication of leaked information revealing US war crimes as "illegal." It declared, moreover, that it would assist the US in any criminal prosecution of Assange.

For its part, the Coalition, while in opposition, made token criticisms of Labor's ruthless treatment of the WikiLeaks editor. Once it took government, however, it continued the previous government's collaboration with the US against WikiLeaks.

The reason is simple. The Australian ruling establishment and the ultra-rich, along with all their political parties, consider the Australia-US military alliance to be far more important than the democratic rights, or even the lives, of Australian citizens. Moreover, Australian governments have supported or participated in every US-led war crime in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, and are no less anxious to suppress media organisations such as WikiLeaks.

The working class, students and every organisation that defends freedom of speech and democratic rights and liberties can accept this situation no longer. The attack on Assange and WikiLeaks is only a particularly sharp expression of the broader campaign of censorship and repression aimed at silencing opposition to the ruling elites and their policies of social inequality and war.

The demonstration on June 17 in Sydney must be the starting point for a mass political campaign to defend Julian Assange.

Any claim that Canberra is powerless to intervene is a lie. Assange could be immediately granted Australian diplomatic status and issued a diplomatic passport, picked up from the Ecuadorian embassy by Australian embassy vehicles, passed through British immigration protected by diplomatic immunity and boarded on a flight to Australia.

We urge all defenders of WikiLeaks and of democratic rights to circulate information about the June 17 demonstration as widely as possible. Organisations that endorse and intend to participate in the demonstration should inform the SEP (Australia) at sep@sep.org.au. Endorsements will be published on the WSWS beginning tomorrow.

Free Julian Assange! Demand his return to Australia!

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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