Demand freedom for Julian Assange! Join the demonstration in Sydney on June 17!

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The Socialist Equality Party has called a demonstration in Sydney on Sunday June 17 to demand that the Australian government act immediately to secure the freedom of WikiLeaks' editor and Australian citizen Julian Assange. We call on all workers, students and organisations that defend freedom of speech, democratic rights and civil liberties to take part. The grave danger facing Assange requires the broadest mobilisation.

Assange's situation stems directly from the Australian government's refusal to protect one of its citizens from persecution by other governments. Canberra has instead trampled on Assange's rights in the most reprehensible manner.

The American state accuses WikiLeaks and its personnel of "espionage" for publishing leaked data in 2010 that exposed the extent of its war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan and its sinister intrigues around the world. Last year, WikiLeaks published further material that exposed CIA operations to hack and spy on Internet and other communications.

If Assange were put on a show trial in the US, he could face decades of imprisonment, or even the death penalty, for doing what a journalist should do: provide the world with the truth.

In late 2010, the Australian Labor government of Prime Minister Julia Gillard took no action when a Swedish prosecutor initiated a politically-motivated investigation into allegations that Assange "may" have been involved in sexual assault. Under conditions of a furious campaign against WikiLeaks for the damning information it was publishing about US war crimes, the aim of the slander was to both discredit Assange and justify a warrant for his extradition to Sweden for "questioning." If he were detained in Sweden, Assange and his lawyers rightly feared he could have faced rendition on to the US.

Instead of defending Assange, Gillard and her Labor ministers denounced WikiLeaks for "illegal" actions and declared they would assist the US to prosecute him.

Denied any protection by Australia, Assange was forced to seek political asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy in London on June 19, 2012, after a British court rejected his last legal appeal against extradition to Sweden. For six years, he has been effectively imprisoned in the embassy by the insistence of the British government that if he leaves the building it will arrest him on a charge of absconding on bail. The British government, moreover, has refused to give any guarantee that it would not facilitate his extradition to the US.

This was despite the finding of a United Nations working group in February 2016 that Assange had been arbitrarily detained in contravention of his human rights, and should be allowed his freedom.

In May 2017, Swedish authorities, after finally agreeing to question Assange in Britain, dropped their investigation. No charges were ever laid against the WikiLeaks editor.

The Australian government of Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, however, refused to intervene and demand that Britain drop its pursuit of Assange over bail-related issues and allow him to leave the London embassy.

Instead, all evidence would suggest that Australia is part of the gang of major powers that has pressured the Ecuadorian government to turn against Assange. On March 28, the Ecuadorian embassy cut off his ability to communicate with the outside world or even receive personal visitors, apart from his lawyers.

After six years of confinement inside a small building, with no direct sunlight and deprived of

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necessary medical treatment, Assange's health was already severely compromised before the immense pressure of almost total isolation was inflicted on him. Reports indicate that Assange is being pressured by Ecuador to leave the embassy, or that the Ecuadorian government may even renege on its grant of asylum and hand him over to waiting British police.

Under conditions in which the British government will not relent on its determination to charge Assange, or guarantee he will not be extradited to the US, the full culpability of the Australian government and the broader political and media establishment is evident.

The Australian state has undeniable means at its disposal to extricate an Australian citizen and journalist from persecution. It can act to return him to Australian territory and provide him with an unconditional guarantee that he will not be extradited.

There are obvious recent precedents.

Australian journalist Peter Greste was arrested by Egyptian authorities in December 2013, along with other Al Jazeera employees, on framed-up charges of "damaging national security." He was subjected to a show trial and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment.

In response to immense public outrage in Australia, the government, backed by Washington and the United Nations, called for Greste's release. Intense diplomatic pressure was applied on Egypt. On February 1, 2015, Greste was released and deported back to Australia.

Earlier, in 2007, under the pressure of widespread anger over the imprisonment of Australian citizen David Hicks in the US concentration camp at Guantanamo Bay, the government entreated the Bush administration to release him.

If the British government continues to insist on railroading an Australian citizen into an American prison or worse, then there are a wide range of actions that the Australian government can take to secure his return to Australian jurisdiction.

It would only do so, however, under conditions of the greatest pressure produced by the mobilisation of the working class. Under both Labor and the Liberal-National Coalition governments, the Australian state has demonstrated its hostility to Assange and WikiLeaks.

Canberra's priority is defending the US-Australia military alliance and its network of relations with the American and British political, military and intelligence establishment. Australian governments have supported or participated in every criminal US-led war in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, and no less support the suppression of media organisations such as WikiLeaks.

The attack on Assange and WikiLeaks is a particularly sharp expression of the broader campaign to censor or outright silence all opposition to social inequality, repression, the militarist policies of the imperialist states and the ever-mounting danger of war between nuclear-armed great powers.

The fight to defend Assange is an essential part of the fight to defend all democratic rights against the lurch toward dictatorial forms of rule in country after country. It is part of the fight for the international unity of the working class in a common struggle for its mutual interests.

In stark contrast to the hatred of Assange and WikiLeaks in the establishment, millions of workers and youth internationally consider their actions to be courageous and noble efforts to expose the lies that surround US-led wars and political intrigues.

In 2010 and 2011, numerous organisations and thousands of individuals across Australia, reflecting this global sentiment, issued public statements of support for Assange and WikiLeaks as the US-led persecution developed.

The demonstration on June 17, called at this critical moment, provides such organisations and individuals with an opportunity to step forward again. We urge all defenders of democratic rights to add their voices to those of the SEP and WikiLeaks defenders such as journalist John Pilger, and join a fight to build the mass political campaign that would be necessary to compel the Turnbull government to secure Assange's freedom.

Organisations that endorse and intend to participate in the June 17 demonstration should inform the SEP at sep@sep.org.au.

Free Julian Assange! Return him to Australia!
Sunday, June 17, 1:00pm
Sydney Town Hall Square

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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