

The working class must mobilize to free Julian Assange!

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For nearly six years, Julian Assange, who exposed the crimes of the US military and intelligence apparatus, has been imprisoned in London, trapped in the Ecuadorean embassy under increasingly onerous and precarious conditions. For more than two months, he has been denied any contact with the outside world, unable to receive visitors, make phone calls or access the Internet.

The perpetrators of this crime are not the governments routinely denounced as “rogue regimes” by imperialist powers and targeted for military aggression, but the imperialist powers themselves—principally the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States.

Now, the Ecuadorean government of Lenin Moreno is in active negotiations with the UK to push Assange out. Following last year’s elections, Moreno has moved to seek a rapprochement with the US, which would involve handing the journalist over to the torturers and war criminals in Washington.

Assange is being attacked because he exposed before the world military atrocities, assassinations, the murder of journalists, and CIA plots to sabotage and subvert democracy all over the world. He took seriously his calling as a journalist by asserting the right of the people to know what their governments are up to.

Assange faces enormous odds. He confronts a conspiracy of some of the most powerful states and the most reactionary interests in the world.

In the United States, the Democratic Party has placed the persecution of WikiLeaks and Assange at the center of its anti-Russia campaign, which has been used to demand an escalation of war in the Middle East and aggression against Russia, and to censor the Internet. In the attack on Assange, these two aims are combined. Leading Republicans, meanwhile, have openly called

for Assange’s transfer to Guantanamo Bay and even his assassination.

However, as the United States and Britain are making Assange’s detention all the more draconian and intolerable, a new force has entered the arena of world politics: the international working class, which has opened up new possibilities for his defense.

From teachers in the US, to the masses of North Africa, to truck drivers in Brazil, rail workers and youth in France, airline workers in Germany and auto workers in Romania, the international working class is engaged in an expanding wave of social struggle.

This movement by masses of workers against inequality, oppression and class exploitation is, by its very logic, bound up with the fight to defend democratic rights and the struggle against war.

The recent strike wave by teachers in the US has demonstrated that access to the Internet and the exchange of information is a critical condition for the development of the class struggle. It is not only that the working class is important to the defense of democratic rights, but democratic rights are vital to the working class!

In order to organize and take forward their struggles, workers must be able to freely communicate, express their views, and, most importantly of all, know the truth. This connection must be made conscious, and thus the basis for a struggle.

As the working class has been drawn into struggle, an opposite phenomenon has emerged among organizations that initially praised Assange as a hero and lionized him as an international celebrity, but have since treated him as a pariah.

Characteristic of these forces is the International Socialist Organization, which quintessentially expresses the outlook of the upper-middle class pseudo-

left. After Assange was accused by Swedish prosecutors on trumped-up charges of rape in November 2010, the ISO issued a defense of Assange entitled “Why we stand with WikiLeaks.” It denounced the accusations of rape levelled against him as “cynical and opportunistic.”

The article went on to cite a statement in the *Guardian* by the group Women Against Rape that declared: “There is a long tradition of the use of rape and sexual assault for political agendas that have nothing to do with women’s safety. In the South of the US, the lynching of Black men was often justified on grounds that they had raped or even looked at a white woman.”

It concluded that “the prosecution of Assange is part of a government war on dissent.”

This statement now stands as an indictment of the ISO, which has totally abandoned Assange to the mercy of the American and British states. By 2012, the ISO had changed its tune, declaring “Julian Assange must face rape charges” and accusing Assange and his supporters of having “refused to take the rape allegations seriously.”

And that has been the ISO’s position ever since. For the past six years, the ISO has not issued a single statement on Assange’s detention. A similar assessment can be made of the New Anti-capitalist Party in France, the Left Party in Germany, the Democratic Socialists of America and countless other pseudo-left organizations.

Even the *Intercept* has published scurrilous attacks on Assange, accusing him in February of 2018 of not only “sexism and misogyny,” but also of “anti-Semitism.” The *Guardian*, which worked closely with WikiLeaks in 2010 and in 2013 published the leaks from Edward Snowden, has been at the forefront of a lying campaign to eject Assange from the Ecuadorian embassy.

What accounts for this transformation? The inflexion point came with the Libya war and the beginning of the US regime-change operation in Syria. Those events heralded a shift in the politics of the affluent upper-middle class parties that had previously claimed to oppose the war in Iraq, and, as in the Occupy Wall Street protests of 2011, paid lip service to social inequality.

In the ensuing period, pseudo-left groups such as the ISO have become the most vocal proponents of US

regime-change operations in the Middle East and have fixated on issues of lifestyle and sexual identity. This has culminated in the reactionary #MeToo campaign, which in many ways has its origins in the frame-up of Assange.

Identity politics became a means of establishing an ever more direct alliance between the affluent upper-middle class and American imperialism. Australia’s Socialist Alternative publicly denounced “knee-jerk anti-imperialism,” while the “left” academic Juan Cole pronounced NATO’s efforts at “getting rid of Qaddafi’s murderous regime” to be “worth the sacrifices in life and treasure,” declaring, “If NATO needs me, I’m there.”

The struggle to defend Julian Assange, and the defense of all democratic rights, must be waged in opposition to all such middle-class propagandists for imperialism. If Assange is to be free, it is the working class that will secure his freedom. Assange will find in the masses of workers and youth throughout the world far more dependable allies.

To this end, a critical initiative has been taken by the Socialist Equality Party of Australia. It is calling for a renewal and expansion of the fight for Assange’s freedom in a demonstration on June 17 in Sydney, which will be followed by a vigil organized by WikiLeaks supporters in London and other cities on June 19.

The June 17 demonstration will demand that the Australian government extend to Assange the rights that should be available to him as a citizen and secure his return to Australia with guarantees against indictment and extradition to the US.

We call on workers and youth all over the world to promote, publicize and take part in the international initiatives in defense of Julian Assange.



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