

“The government is after him because he’s telling the truth”

Detroit autoworkers call for Julian Assange’s freedom

Will Morrow
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Detroit autoworkers have issued statements opposing the ongoing persecution and threatened extradition of Julian Assange by the US government and its allies and calling for his freedom.

Reporters for the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with GM workers in Lake Orion and Chrysler workers at Warren Truck assembly plant yesterday afternoon and distributed copies of the May 28 statement, “For international action to defend Julian Assange!” Despite the total silence of the United Auto Workers (UAW) union about Assange, many workers expressed their opposition to his persecution, as well as the broader effort by the ruling elite to silence political dissent and censor the Internet.

Shawn, who has been working Warren Truck for just over a year, said, “I think what Assange and WikiLeaks are doing is a very just thing. We have laws in place for this: Freedom of information and freedom of speech; that we should have knowledge of what they [the government] are doing. Assange should not be extradited or persecuted for doing an honest thing.”

Shawn said the “reason they are targeting” Assange was that “it’s not beneficial for them if this information gets out. A lot of people will know what’s happening and that will inspire change. They do not want change. Many people are unaware of what is happening now. The more people know just how bad things really are, the more they will want to act.”

He continued, “The working class has been made to believe one thing when it really was not true. All the things they put into the news that everyone sees are lies. Weapons of mass destruction? It was all for the oil. It was all for their [Iraq’s] resources. The government said: ‘We will do whatever we want.’”

Shawn said that the WSWs campaign demanding Assange’s freedom “is a great thing. “Everyone should be aware of this. The more people are aware, the more we can get out and continue this.”

The autoworker also thought that the persecution of Assange was part of a broader attack on the Internet. “The Internet is everything,” he said. “It is our connection to everyone and our source of information. Different governments censor what is allowed on their Internet. I believe it’s horrible and wrong and an invasion of our rights. We have a right to look at what we want. This is touching on really fundamental constitutional rights and it’s wrong. It’s wild to even think about it.”

Many other workers stopped to give brief statements in support of Assange as they rushed into the Warren Truck afternoon shift. “I think we have to defend him,” said one worker with six years at the plant. “This is not right.” Another autoworker said, “Everyone needs the truth to be told. Just look at what the government is doing to us now.”

Brandon, who has two years at the plant, said Assange “should be freed and let go. He’s being targeted because he’s exposing what our government shouldn’t be doing—from its surveillance on the population to its corruption.”

Brandon also said efforts to censor the Internet had to be opposed by the working class, because “it’s the only way we can communicate with each other. It’s the one last vestige where we can talk and read about what we want to. The newspapers don’t matter anymore because the corporations control them and tell us what we should see.

“Even Facebook is starting to do it now and control

what is shown to us,” Brandon added, referring to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg’s statements that the company was seeking to reduce “viral videos” which are “polarizing” and do not make viewers feel good. “Videos should make you feel bad! If you get people annoyed about something they can take care of the problem. People have to be able to make the choice about what they want to see: Flint still does not have clean fresh water!”

Brandon said the strikes by teachers across the United States showed the power of social media communication and its importance for the working class. “That’s why the strikes happened,” he said. “It wasn’t about what the union was doing because the unions were just doing nothing and just being corporations. It was about the teachers walking out one by one. That forced the strike to happen. And then the unions sold it out in the end anyway. But it spread to Kentucky, Oklahoma and other places. People are just going to get fed up and walk out everywhere, and that’s what we need.”

He commented that the Internet was seen as a threat by the ruling classes because “we can speak to workers everywhere. We’re all the same people.” While the UAW tells workers that its enemies and competitors are other workers in Mexico, Brandon said, “We should be fighting together to increase their wages so they get up to our wages, so that the companies wouldn’t be able to threaten to just move everywhere because everyone was getting the same thing.”

Todd, a 25-year-old worker, said, “They are afraid of the truth. People are being enlightened by what Assange has revealed.” Todd referred to the video published by WikiLeaks, entitled “Collateral murder,” showing a US helicopter shooting Iraqi journalists in 2007. “The war in Iraq was really about oil, money and control. That’s why they went after Gaddafi in 2011 as well.”

Todd had not previously heard that WikiLeaks had published transcripts of Hillary Clinton speaking before Wall Street bankers. “But I think there is always a good cop-bad cop type of routine,” he said. “I always hear about how the Democratic Party is more for the working class. But I think it’s all a game of charades just to control us.” Referring to the Democratic Party’s claim that Russia was seeking to use WikiLeaks to sow opposition in the US, Todd asked, “What does Russia

have to do with the wage differences here? There is so much inequality in this country.”

An autoworker from GM’s Lake Orion plant said, “More people should get behind his cause because Assange speaks for the people. The last thing you need is to silence a guy that speaks out. It is scary how close we are to authoritarianism. They don’t want people to speak up.”

“You could be the next WikiLeaks,” he added, referring to the efforts by Google and other tech giants to censor the *World Socialist Web Site*. “If they censor people on the Internet, forget about it. It is the one tool that workers can use to communicate.”



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