

SEP Australia national secretary demands Australian government act to free Julian Assange

14 June 2018

The following statement was made by James Cogan, national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia), to a press conference in Sydney on June 13.

The Socialist Equality Party has organised a political demonstration in Sydney Town Hall Square at 1pm this Sunday June 17 in defence of WikiLeaks' editor Julian Assange.

On Sunday, we, alongside journalist John Pilger, will raise one central demand:

The Australian government must immediately exercise the undeniable diplomatic power it has, and the undeniable legal discretion that it has, and intervene on behalf of Julian Assange, an Australian journalist and citizen.

It must work to secure his immediate and unconditional freedom from his enforced confinement inside the Ecuadorian embassy in London.

Julian Assange must be free to leave the embassy and immediately, if he chooses, to leave the United Kingdom and return to Australia.

Assange must be given a public guarantee, by both Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Labor Party leader Bill Shorten, that any application by American authorities to extradite him to the United States will be rejected by Australia.

The Australian government committed considerable resources to winning the freedom of Al Jazeera journalist and Australian citizen Peter Greste from false imprisonment in Egypt.

It must do the same, if not more, to prevent Julian Assange falling into the clutches of the Trump administration and the American courts.

Trump's attorney general Jeff Sessions has openly stated that Assange's arrest is a "priority." WikiLeaks, an award-winning media organisation, was last year

labelled a "non-state hostile intelligence agency" by former CIA director Mike Pompeo, who is now Trump's secretary of state.

The US government wants to put Julian Assange on trial on charges of espionage for publishing leaks that exposed to the world US war crimes, diplomatic intrigues, and numerous corporate abuses.

The vendetta against him has vastly intensified under Trump. In March 2017, WikiLeaks began publishing the Vault 7 leaks that have exposed the truly Orwellian dimension of the operations of the CIA to hack into phones, PCs, servers, smart televisions and even vehicle computer systems, so that it can spy on the communications of tens of millions of people in the United States and around the world.

In the wake of the Vault 7 leaks, the US state apparatus is even more determined to silence WikiLeaks and silence Assange.

Julian Assange has committed no crime under Australian or even American law. The attempt to smear him with allegations of sexual offences finally collapsed in May 2017, when Swedish prosecutors, after questioning Assange in November 2016, abandoned their politically-motivated investigation.

The only offense that Julian Assange has committed, if it can be even called that, is to abscond on bail when he sought asylum with Ecuador after British courts repeatedly dismissed his well-grounded concern that extradition to Sweden to answer "questions" was nothing more than a pretext to remove him to a country where he could be rapidly extradited to the United States.

I will conclude by stressing two points:

Firstly, the situation facing Julian Assange is extremely grave. For six years, he has endured what the

United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention condemned as far back as in December 2015 as “deprivation of liberty” and a “violation” of his human rights.

He has been denied access to essential medical treatment and even direct sunlight by the British government.

Since March 28, 2018 he has faced the added psychological stress of being denied any communication with the outside world, including with his family in Australia, and denied even personal visitors apart from his legal representation, by the actions of the Ecuadorian government.

A conscious attempt is being made by the Trump administration, the British government and now the government of Ecuador, to try and break Julian Assange, force him out of the embassy and compel him to admit to crimes that he did not commit.

Every attack on freedom of speech and an independent and fearless media is a blow against the greater struggle of the working class against corporate exploitation, government austerity, widening social inequality and the ever growing danger of great power war.

I appeal to workers in every workplace in Australia and internationally to convene meetings, pass motions in support of Assange and WikiLeaks, and send delegations to Sunday’s demonstration in Sydney or the June 19 events in the country in which you live.



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