Educators internationally must stand up for Julian Assange

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Below is the speech delivered by Sue Phillips, national convenor of the Committee For Public Education (CFPE) to the rally to free Julian Assange organised by the Socialist Equality Party of Australia on June 17 at Sydney's Town Hall Square. The CFPE seeks to unite teachers, both nationally and internationally, in the struggle for public education as a basic social right for all young people.

On behalf of the Committee For Public Education, I would like to state our opposition to the malicious and anti-democratic treatment of the courageous whistleblower Julian Assange.

The attack on Assange is not an isolated incident, but part of a global assault on the most basic and fundamental rights of young people and the international working class.

The criminal role of the Australian, US, Swedish, British and now Ecuadorian governments, is of a piece with the general assault on freedom of speech, internet censorship, and the drive to authoritarianism and war.

In fact, the very same governments desperate to silence Assange—those of Trump, May and Turnbull—are also carrying out a relentless assault on the right of students and educators to a fully-resourced public education.

As universities everywhere are being corporatised and militarised, academic freedom and free speech is being threatened.

In public schools, teachers and students are being subordinated to business requirements through high stakes testing, the narrowing of curricula and the never-ending assault on teacher wages, conditions and jobs.

The vast majority of students no longer have the basic social right to a fully resourced, high quality, enlightened education, which lies at the very foundation of a democratic society.

The right of students to participate in an education system that encourages the development of critical thinkers, curiosity, creativity and intellectual debate, that allows students to express their own opinions and ideas, is being eliminated.

What governments and business fear is the emergence of a new generation of Julian Assanges or Edward Snowdens, young men who have shown great courage and principle to speak out and to expose the truth.

What business and government are demanding is a generation of youth, educated in the spirit of passivity, conformity and obedience, to acquire only the most basic skills—in other words, to be "work-ready," for the military, or for mind-numbing, low-paid, jobs.

Last week teachers and education support staff at Footscray City College in Melbourne passed a resolution, endorsing this rally here today, and demanding the Turnbull 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.

The resolution has provided a political lead to educators internationally, expressing the sentiment of millions of teachers and academics, who over the last 6 months have shown great determination, taking strike action to defend wages and working conditions in public schools and universities. Their action against social inequality is at the forefront of an international upsurge in the class struggle, a movement that is critical for Assange's freedom.

In February–March this year, 30,000 teachers and educators in West Virginia took strike action against poverty level wages, for decent health care and against the deplorable, under-resourced conditions in working class schools. The 9-day strike was initiated through social media and initially outside the unions, who were

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desperate to stifle the strike and block any unified action with teachers in other states.

Through the internet, Facebook and social media, teachers were able to discuss, share information, organise their struggle and communicate with educators in other countries.

The ability to act and organise independently, outside the control of the official organisations, struck fear into governments, unions and the high-tech companies such as Google and Facebook that are a central part of the bogus campaign of so called “fake news” and “Russian meddling.” Its aim is censoring the internet and outlawing political dissent.

Although the unions managed to sell-out and end the West Virginia strike, the rebellion of educators continued to spread to Oklahoma, Kentucky and Arizona, across the US, inspiring teachers globally.

Thanks to the continuous and detailed coverage of the WSWS, and the intervention of the Socialist Equality Party in the US, teachers here were able to learn of the West Virginia strike, to see the commonality of our struggles and conditions, and express resolutions of international solidarity. Without the WSWS, teachers here in Australia would not have known of the strike due to a conscious blackout by the official media.

The right of teachers, students, and workers to freedom of speech, to have access to independent information and an uncensored internet, to be able to communicate, discuss, debate and organise, is a fundamental democratic issue.

The defence of Assange is intimately related to the fight for the democratic and social rights of students and educators, and the rights of the working class.

Educators internationally must stand up for Julian Assange and continue the fight for his freedom.

We urge teachers and students to circulate the leaflets available at this rally demanding freedom for Assange as widely as possible at your workplaces, universities and schools and pass resolutions defying the silence surrounding Assange’s persecution.

More information on the Committee For Public Education is available at its Facebook page here.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

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