

In the face of mounting threats, the working class must defend Julian Assange

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25 October 2018

The fight to defend Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, who is being pursued by Washington for daring to make public classified documents exposing war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan and the plots hatched by US officials and embassies around the world, is now at a critical juncture. The mobilization of militant and active solidarity on the part of workers and youth all over the world is of utmost importance.

Assange is facing an escalating threat that he will be handed over to the British authorities and ultimately extradited to the United States to face trumped-up charges of espionage, punishable by life imprisonment and even the death penalty.

He has spent the last six years as a de facto prisoner in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he sought asylum in 2012 to escape a conspiracy by the US, British and Swedish governments to have him arrested on fabricated charges of sexual molestation in order to pave the way for his extradition to the US. While Sweden has since dropped the groundless accusations against Assange, the British government is still seeking his arrest for violating the terms of his bail, when he entered the embassy to escape the clutches of the US government.

The Ecuadorian government is now signaling ever more openly that it is dropping its defense of Assange and seeking to drive him out of its London embassy and into the hands of the waiting British political police. This position was spelled out Tuesday by Ecuadorian Foreign Minister José Valencia in an interview with the Reuters news agency.

“Ecuador has no responsibility to take any further steps,” said Valencia. “We are not Mr. Assange’s lawyers, nor are we representatives of the British government. This is a matter to be resolved between Assange and Great Britain.”

Valencia added that his government was “frustrated” by the filing of suit on Assange’s behalf in an Ecuadorian court challenging the conditions imposed on his asylum. “There is no obligation in international agreements for Ecuador to pay for things like Mr. Assange’s laundry,” he said.

The US and British media have picked up on this theme,

portraying the restrictions imposed by the Ecuadorian government as trivial matters such as laundry and cleaning up after a pet cat. In reality, Assange had been subjected for more than five months, beginning on March 28, to conditions more onerous than those imposed on prisoners condemned to solitary confinement in maximum security lockups.

In an attempt to silence the WikiLeaks editor and prevent him from making any comment on world political developments, Ecuadorian authorities cut off all of his communications and visits, outside of his lawyers, preventing him from communicating even with his own children and parents.

This total isolation came on top of confinement inside the small embassy, without access to direct sunlight, for over six years. The clear intention is to break Assange and force him out.

A “special protocol” dictated by the Ecuadorian government, aside from the petty demands that Assange pay for his food, telephone calls, medical care and laundry, restricts him from expressing any views that constitute “interference” in the “political matters” of any government in the world. It also makes clear that he and his communications, as well as anyone who visits him, will be subjected to uninterrupted surveillance, with the results shared with US and British spy agencies,

In other words, the government in Quito is acting as the servile enforcer of US imperialism. It is pursuing Washington’s goal of silencing WikiLeaks and preventing Assange from continuing to pursue his calling as a courageous and resourceful journalist, who has dedicated himself to revealing before people all over the world secrets that have been kept from them about war, mass surveillance and anti-democratic conspiracies on the part of capitalist governments and the financial oligarchies that they defend.

Rafael Correa, who as Ecuador’s president in 2012 granted Assange asylum, has no doubts about the ultimate aim of his hand-picked successor, President Lenín Moreno. “I believe they are going to turn over Assange to the US

government,” Correa told RT in an interview published Wednesday.

He went on to denounce the conditions that have been imposed on Assange. “They try to humiliate Assange, but only humiliate themselves,” he said. “These rules really go against the human rights. They are trying to isolate Assange and to push him to abandon our embassy.”

Correa pointed out that the government in Quito is responsible for defending Assange, not only as someone to whom it gave asylum, but as a citizen of Ecuador after he was granted citizenship in 2017.

Such principles appear to hold little sway over the government of Lenín Moreno, which, in sync with other Latin American regimes identified with the so-called “Pink Tide” and “Bolivarian Revolution,” has turned sharply to the right. Its principal concern appears to be cementing a rapprochement with US imperialism, which is demanding Assange’s head as the price of admission.

This was spelled out bluntly a week ago in a bipartisan letter to Moreno drafted by Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a senior Republican on the House Foreign Relations Committee and its former chairperson, and Eliot Engel, the panel’s ranking Democrat. The two affirmed that Congress was “eager to move forward in collaborating with your government,” but that the precondition was resolving “the status of Julian Assange.”

Assange, the letter continued, is “a dangerous criminal and a threat to global security, and he should be brought to justice.” It concluded that “it will be very difficult for the United States to advance our bilateral relationship until Mr. Assange is handed over to the proper authorities.”

Yankee imperialism has delivered its marching orders, and by every indication Lenín Moreno is falling into line.

Also ratcheting up the pressure for Assange’s arrest is the investigation headed by Special Counsel and former FBI Director Robert Mueller into alleged “collusion” between the Trump election campaign and Russia. According to recent reports, the probe is focusing intensely on an alleged connection between WikiLeaks, Russia and Roger Stone, a right-wing Republican operative tied to the Trump campaign.

The attempt to drag Assange into an alleged Russian conspiracy to manipulate the 2016 US presidential election is based on amalgams, distortions and outright lies. They stem from WikiLeaks’ publication of troves of emails from the Democratic National Committee, which exposed that body’s efforts to rig the party’s 2016 presidential primaries in favor of Hillary Clinton and against her challenger, Bernie Sanders, and from Clinton campaign chief John Podesta, which included transcripts of speeches to bankers documenting Clinton’s role as a stooge of Wall Street and a

warmonger.

There is no evidence whatsoever that WikiLeaks obtained the emails from Russian sources. The underlying case against Assange is that he made available to the American public inconvenient political truths that were supposed to be kept secret.

The intensification of the US government’s pursuit of Assange is supported by both the Democrats, who have made the Russia “collusion” narrative a centerpiece of their pro-war agenda, and the Republicans, some of whom have called for the WikiLeaks founder to be assassinated or sent to Guantanamo.

The entire coterie of pseudo-left organizations, including the International Socialist Organization and the Democratic Socialists of America, have taken their lead from the two big business parties, abandoning any defense of Assange while supporting the kind of US regime-change operations that the WikiLeaks editor helped to expose.

Why is Washington stepping up the pressure for the surrender of Assange? It is not the result of any new “offense” committed by the WikiLeaks journalist in exposing US imperialism’s crimes. He has been held incommunicado in the Ecuadorian embassy for months.

Rather, it is bound up with the drive by the US government and the major technology corporations to impose a regime of censorship on the internet, blocking the access of a broad public to antiwar, anti-government and socialist views. Preparing for war abroad and repression at home, the ruling establishment wants to lay its hands on Assange in order to set an example that those who dare to expose its secrets will be punished. The aim is to silence and intimidate all those who are fighting against war, social inequality and the assault on democratic rights.

The mounting threats against Julian Assange must be answered by the broadest possible international mobilization to demand his immediate and unconditional freedom. Mass protests and strikes must be prepared against any attempt to arrest or extradite him.

The only social force upon which such a campaign can be based is the international working class, which alone can wage a consistent battle in defense of democratic rights as part a broader struggle to secure its social rights and oppose war, inequality and the capitalist system.



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