

The Australian government must act to free Julian Assange

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The Socialist Equality Party and its candidates are issuing a clear demand in the federal election: The Australian government must immediately act to secure the release of Julian Assange from Britain and provide for his safe passage to Australia with a guarantee against extradition to the United States.

Assange's brutal arrest by the British police on April 11 and the attempts to extradite him to the US are an attack on the working class.

The WikiLeaks founder and publisher has committed no crime. He is being pursued by the most powerful governments in the world for his role in the exposure of illegal wars, mass surveillance operations and sordid diplomatic intrigues affecting the lives of hundreds of millions of people.

The Trump administration's request for Assange's extradition is nothing less than an extraordinary rendition operation.

If Assange is dispatched to the US, on bogus computer hacking charges, he will likely face additional charges over WikiLeaks' lawful publishing activities, carrying a maximum sentence of life imprisonment or the death penalty. He would be at the mercy of the war criminals and CIA torturers WikiLeaks has done so much to expose.

The political establishment in every country is using the persecution of Assange to deepen the assault on the democratic rights of ordinary people.

If Assange is prosecuted in the US, it will set a precedent for the jailing of journalists everywhere who expose government crimes and wrongdoing. It will mark a new stage in the open repudiation of freedom of the press and free speech.

The persecution of Assange is aimed at sending a message to workers and young people: if you oppose militarism, war, social inequality and job cuts, and if

you take social and political action against the powers-that-be, you will face state repression.

Governments everywhere know that millions of workers are opposed to their plans for war, along with their assault on social rights and civil liberties. Representing a tiny corporate oligarchy, they have seen the re-emergence of major class battles over the past year, including strikes by teachers in the US, factory workers in Mexico, hundreds of millions of Indian workers, and the Yellow Vest protests in France.

The ruling classes are terrified. They are responding by promoting extreme right-wing forces to attack the working class, and by turning to dictatorship. The persecution of Assange is at the cutting edge of this turn to authoritarianism.

Successive Australian governments, and the entire political establishment, have played a linchpin role in this global assault on democratic rights.

If the federal government fulfilled its obligations to Assange, an Australian citizen and journalist, the attacks against the WikiLeaks founder could not have proceeded as they have.

Beginning with the Greens-backed Labor government of Julia Gillard, every Australian government has refused to defend Assange, instead collaborating in the US-led vendetta against him. In 2011, Gillard falsely declared that WikiLeaks had committed "illegal acts," lining up with a campaign that included calls from senior US politicians for Assange's assassination.

The parliamentary parties are hostile to Assange, because they are committed to the US military alliance, and to participating in all of American imperialism's predatory wars.

As it has participated in the attacks against Assange, the political establishment has aligned Australia with a massive US military-build up throughout the Asia-

Pacific in preparation for war against China.

State and federal governments, whether headed by Labor or the Liberal-Nationals, have stripped whistleblower protections, expanded state surveillance and passed draconian laws targeting social and political opposition.

The attitude of the major parties to Assange has been demonstrated by their refusal to oppose his arrest and the extradition proceedings.

Coalition ministers have made empty claims that Assange will be provided with unspecified “consular assistance,” committing them to nothing. Labor deputy leader Tanya Plibersek shared a tweet slandering Assange as a “foreign agent,” and denouncing his supporters as “cultists.” Corporate reporters, who make their living by repeating government lies, have declared that Assange is not a “journalist.”

Using weasel words, the Greens now claim to oppose Assange’s extradition to the US, but they are doing nothing to defend him. For years, Greens politicians have remained silent over his plight. In this election, as in every other, they are appealing for closer collaboration with Labor, a pro-imperialist party of the banks.

The rest of the political establishment, from the pseudo-left groups to the right-wing populists, has said virtually nothing about the assault on Assange, signalling their complicit support for his persecution.

The SEP is the only political party fighting to make the defence of Assange a central issue in the election.

Over the past 18 months, the SEP has held a series of rallies and meetings, to build the mass movement required to compel an Australian government to use its diplomatic powers and legal discretion to free Assange. On Saturday, it will hold an election rally in Parramatta to advance this crucial fight, followed by a series of public meetings.

The SEP is the sole party defending Assange and democratic rights, because it fights for the independent interests of the working class and for socialism.

Capitalism is in the midst of its deepest crisis since the 1930s. The ruling elite’s program of war and austerity, and the dominance of society’s resources by a tiny corporate elite, are incompatible with democracy. The only social force that can defend all civil liberties and take society forward is the working class.

While capitalist politicians and the corporate media

stenographers of the intelligence agencies loathe Assange, he is rightly viewed as a hero by millions of workers and young people. They must be mobilised.

This crucial struggle is inextricably tied to the fight for socialism. This is because securing fundamental democratic rights requires nothing less than the revolutionary transformation of society by the working class to meet social needs, not the profit interests of the financial aristocracy.

Democracy must be extended to all aspects of social life by placing the banks and the corporations under public ownership and democratic workers’ control, and by dismantling the military-intelligence apparatus.

This is a global fight requiring the unification of workers around the world. This internationalist and socialist perspective animates the 2019 International Online May Day Rally, organised by the International Committee of the Fourth International and the *World Socialist Web Site*. Register today!

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