

The persecution of Assange and Manning is an attack on the working class

Oscar Grenfell
7 May 2019

On Saturday, May 4, the International Committee of the Fourth International held the 2019 International Online May Day Rally, the sixth annual online May Day Rally held by the ICFI, the world Trotskyist movement. The rally heard speeches on different aspects of the world crisis of capitalism and the struggles of the international working class from 12 leading members of the world party and its sections and sympathizing organizations around the world.

On successive days, the World Socialist Web Site is publishing the texts of the speeches delivered at the rally. Below is the speech delivered by Oscar Grenfell, a member of the National Committee of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia). On Monday, the WSWS published the opening report to the rally, given by David North, the chairman of the international editorial board of the WSWS and national chairman of the Socialist Equality Party (US).

One of the great traditions of the international socialist workers movement on May Day is to extend our solidarity and support to all class war prisoners, and to pledge to redouble our efforts to secure their freedom.

Today, the most prominent class war prisoners in the world are WikiLeaks founder and publisher Julian Assange and the courageous whistleblower Chelsea Manning. They are being ruthlessly persecuted by the most powerful governments in the world for their services to the international working class.

Assange and Manning have committed no crime. They are being targeted for exposing the illegal wars, mass surveillance operations and daily diplomatic conspiracies of the US and all of its allies.

At this celebration of international May Day, the *World Socialist Web Site*, the International Committee of the Fourth International and all its sections commit to deepening our protracted campaign against the attempts to extradite Assange to the US and to win his freedom. We also pledge to expand our struggle for the immediate release of Chelsea Manning. This is a decisive political fight for the working class and for all defenders of democratic rights.

We have gathered just over three weeks since Assange was dragged from Ecuador's London embassy and arrested by the British police. Footage of a very ill, world-renowned journalist being manhandled by six British cops and wincing at his first exposure to sunlight in seven years will live in history as a milestone in the decay of bourgeois democracy and the turn to authoritarianism by governments around the world.

Assange's arrest was illegal. His status as a political refugee, upheld by the United Nations, was trampled upon and annulled by a corrupt Ecuadorian regime seeking to curry favour with the Wall Street banks and intelligence agencies.

As soon as Assange was detained, it was revealed that the Trump administration had issued a request for his extradition to face charges in the US. This was a vindication of the warnings made by WikiLeaks, the *World Socialist Web Site* and Assange himself that he required political asylum to avoid US prosecution for WikiLeaks' lawful publishing activities.

Assange's arrest has set in motion a judicial travesty, which can be described only as a pseudo-legal fig leaf for an extraordinary rendition operation. Within hours of his expulsion from the Ecuadorian embassy, he was convicted of trumped-up bail charges, denounced as a "narcissist" by the presiding judge, and provocatively told that he could submit to US extradition so as to "get on with his life."

Since then, Assange has been held in conditions of isolation in Belmarsh Prison, dubbed the UK's Guantanamo Bay after the US military jail notorious for torture and other violations of human rights.

Last Wednesday, Assange was sentenced to 50 weeks in prison on the bail charges. This was despite the fact that he had already spent years in effective arbitrary detention, that he had forfeited the bail money and that the reason for his turn to the Ecuadorian embassy—that he faced a politically motivated US prosecution—had been confirmed.

With all of the malice and vindictiveness of the British ruling class, the judge summarily rejected the arguments of

Assange's lawyers and made no attempt to conceal her disdain for him.

Her ruling demonstrates that preventing Assange's extradition to the US will require nothing less than an all-out mobilization of the only social force that can mount a successful defence of democratic rights—the working class.

The two publicly unveiled US charges against Assange are a farce. They center on claims that an unverified chat log revealed that Assange and Manning had attempted to crack a US military computer password. In fact, there is no evidence that the password was ever accessed. And even if it were, all Assange has been accused of is attempting to help Manning protect her identity—a common practice for journalists working with sources.

But as legal experts have warned, the computer hacking charges are merely aimed at facilitating Assange's extradition by bypassing a ban on UK prisoners being sent to the US on political offences. If the war criminals in Washington get their hands on the WikiLeaks founder, he will almost certainly be charged with espionage, a capital offence.

A prosecution of Assange along these lines would be nothing less than an attempt to abolish the rights to freedom of the press and free speech, enshrined in the US Constitution. The goal would be to intimidate mass opposition within the working class to war, inequality and authoritarianism.

The significance of such a charge is demonstrated by the history of the Espionage Act. It was used to imprison US socialist leader Eugene Debs for his opposition to World War I. In the 1970s, the Nixon administration unsuccessfully sought to use its provisions to block further publication of the Pentagon Papers, which exposed the scale of US criminality in the Vietnam War.

The dangers confronting Assange are demonstrated by the plight of Chelsea Manning. She has been detained by the Trump administration for over eight weeks, at times in solitary confinement, for refusing to give perjured testimony against the WikiLeaks founder. If Assange is handed over to the US, there is every possibility that he will end up in Guantanamo Bay or a dark site jail operated by the CIA's torturers.

All of the official institutions of capitalist society are implicated in the persecution of Assange. The corporate press has responded to his arrest with unconcealed glee.

Corporate reporters, who function as stenographers for governments and the intelligence agencies, have proclaimed that Assange is "not a journalist." They are the modern-day equivalents of the pharaoh's scribes, or those German reporters who functioned as propagandists for the Nazi regime. Let it not be forgotten that such "journalists" were

prosecuted at the Nuremberg Trials for their role in facilitating war crimes and unprecedented attacks on democratic rights.

All of the establishment parties in Britain, the US and Australia have participated in the attacks on Assange.

The Democrats have spearheaded the bogus claims that Assange is a Russian agent because WikiLeaks published true and newsworthy information exposing the fact that the Democratic National Committee rigged the party's 2016 primaries in favour of Hillary Clinton. Her secret Wall Street speeches, also published by WikiLeaks, exposed Clinton as a bought-and-paid-for servant of the banks.

In Britain, Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party have done nothing to defend Assange. Successive Australian governments, Labor and Liberal-National alike, have joined the campaign against him, refusing to carry out their clear obligation to defend a persecuted Australian citizen and journalist.

A host of organizations, from the pseudo-left to the trade unions, have abandoned Assange. Over the past eight years, after initially posturing as defenders of Assange, they have lined up behind every lie and slander against the courageous journalist, including the bogus Swedish allegations that he committed sexual misconduct. They ignore the fact that Assange has never been charged with a crime in that country and that the investigation was ended in 2017. Such organizations have already made their peace with imperialist war and repression.

There is another force, however, that can and must be mobilized to defend Assange: the international working class. Millions of workers and young people rightly view him as a hero for exposing the US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, Washington's global meddling operations, and mass CIA spying, to name only some of WikiLeaks' most prominent revelations.

The working class is entering into mass social and political battles all over the world. The fight to free Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning must be inscribed on the banner of all of these struggles.

Authorised by James Cogan for the Socialist Equality Party, Suite 906, 185 Elizabeth Street, Sydney, NSW, 2000.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)