

The defence of Assange and Manning is the spearhead of the struggle against imperialism

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On Saturday, May 4, the International Committee of the Fourth International held the 2019 International May Day Online 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 Chris Marsden, national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (Britain). 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).

The fate of Julian Assange, as far as the world's ruling elites are concerned, is presently being decided in Britain.

The full might of the UK's state apparatus is deployed against the WikiLeaks founder to ensure that he is extradited to the United States and silenced forever.

The police snatch squad, which illegally seized him from the Ecuadorian Embassy, delivered him to a judiciary so determined to impose class justice that it is discrediting the entire legal system before the eyes of millions.

On the very afternoon of his arrest, Assange was found guilty of violating the terms of his bail by District Judge Michael Snow in less than 40 minutes.

He was then sent to Belmarsh maximum security prison, known as Britain's Guantanamo, and kept in

conditions of near total isolation.

His appearance for sentencing at Southwark Crown Court took place on May Day—underscoring his status as a class war prisoner.

On that occasion, it took Judge Deborah Taylor less than two minutes to dismiss Assange's central defence—that he took refuge in the Embassy in order to avoid “kidnap and torture” in the US—as “unrealistic.”

She then accused him of “exploiting your privileged position” and costing “£16 million of taxpayers' money,” before vindictively sentencing him to 50 weeks in prison.

The very next day, proceedings were opened on extradition to the US, where, whatever denials are made, Assange faces charges under the Espionage Act that carry the death penalty.

What has this got to do with justice? Nothing.

“Give me the man and I will find the crime,” declared Stalin's state prosecutor, Vyshinsky.

“Sentence first, verdict afterwards!” said the Red Queen.

Assange also faces a Conservative government that could not be more open regarding its determination to deliver him to the US. Britain's Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, is denounced in today's *World Socialist Web Site* perspective for his statement, made on the day of Assange's arrest, that he was “no hero.” The arrest, Hunt boasted, was proof that the rule of law operating in the UK was for everyone.

Yet this same man declared Thursday that the British press had a “right” to report leaks from the UK's National Security Council because, “That is what happens in a free press... By helping truth to prevail, a free media ultimately helps us all to flourish.”

Hunt was speaking while in Ethiopia, marking World Press Freedom Day. Almost at the same time, Assange

was telling Westminster Magistrates Court, “I do not wish to surrender myself for extradition for doing journalism which has won many, many awards and protected many, many people.”

For Hunt, revealing the sordid infighting within the Conservative Party is legitimate, even helpful for his career. Exposing war crimes is not.

More important for Britain’s ruling class than even the exercise of state power is the collusion of the media, of the Labour Party, the trade unions and the pseudo-left groups in what is the first great political crime of the 21st century.

It is not necessary to remind anyone listening tonight of the venal role played by the media, liberal newspapers like the *Guardian*, above all, who have spent years denigrating Assange.

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has done nothing, other than issuing a 21-word tweet opposing Assange’s extradition to the US on the day of his arrest. Within 48 hours, he had joined his party’s right-wing in declaring support for Assange being sent to Sweden.

This is despite no charges having ever been brought in Sweden and with no extradition warrant existing. The Labourites hope is that this will change, so they can assume the role of Pontius Pilate and claim to have washed their hands of Assange’s fate.

For the record, it took the Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers Party even less time than Corbyn to fall into line behind this demand!

I want to speak briefly on one incident that illustrates how these forces facilitate the state persecution of Julian Assange.

On Friday night, the National Union of Journalists held its own event to mark World Press Freedom Day in London. No one on the panel so much as mentioned Julian Assange, locked in a cell just an hour’s distance away.

Corbyn sent a filmed message in which he praised “journalists prepared to go more than an extra mile to find out the truth so the rest of us might know,” but also maintained silence on Assange.

When challenged by angry members of the audience, NUJ General Secretary Michelle Stanistreet replied that to focus on Assange would be “offensive to the memory” of the journalists who have been killed all over the world.

She should explain to us, all of us, how it is offensive

to anyone’s memory to demand action to prevent Assange himself possibly being executed!

For his part, former NUJ president Tim Dawson offered the caveat that “there are journalists who have some issues with Julian Assange...”

Indeed, there are many such despicable journalists!

These are the forces marshalled against Assange and the heroic whistle-blower Chelsea Manning. But a far more powerful social force is being mobilised in defence of Assange—and in ever greater numbers—that will really decide his fate.

For millions of workers in Britain and internationally, the hostility of the official parties and the media to Assange is proof of the significance of his exposure of imperialist war crimes and conspiracies.

Thursday’s court protest in the UK was joined by some who had travelled from countries all over the world. They included around 80 Yellow Vests from France, who came by coach after attending May Day demonstrations in Paris that were brutally attacked by riot police under instructions from Macron, the “president of the rich.”

One told our reporters, “For us, he is the first Yellow Vest. A person that was willing to fight against the government for peace and freedom...”

“Today’s protest is a symbol of the fight for freedom. We are talking about human rights. We are talking about justice. We are talking about how we can live in a better society. Assange has brought to light information that can stop wars.”

This expresses a fundamental truth.

Internationally, the most conscious representatives of the working class, struggling to survive and opposed to the existing social order, are with Assange.

It is the task of the International Committee, one that we are determined to carry out, to mobilise this immense social force. We will provide workers and young people with a socialist perspective on which to secure freedom for Assange and Manning, as the spearhead of the fight against war, state repression and the malignant growth of social inequality.



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