“The Socialist Equality Party views the defence of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning as the spearhead of an emerging global struggle against imperialism.”

Chris Marsden
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Below is the speech delivered by Socialist Equality Party (UK) National Secretary Chris Marsden to the May 12 *meeting in London in defence of jailed WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange and courageous whistleblower Chelsea Manning.*

Sometimes the most difficult thing is to understand the times you are living through. It is always easier for historians, because they have the benefit of hindsight. But we are living through a sea change in world politics.

Events spanning only the last few days, underscore why Julian Assange is locked up in Belmarsh prison facing extradition to the United States.

Not the self-serving lies of the Trump administration and the May government, or the fake news spewed out by the British and American media.

The real reason.

Last weekend, the Israeli government was raining down bombs on Gaza and carrying out “targeted assassinations.” Sixteen Palestinians were killed including a pregnant mother and her 14-month-old baby.

On Sunday evening, US National Security Adviser John Bolton announced that the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln and nuclear-capable B52 bombers were being deployed to threaten Iran.

He warned that “any attack on United States interests or those of our allies will be met with unrelenting force.”

That same evening, President Trump re-tweeted a post by evangelist Jerry Falwell Jr. calling for him to extend his term from four years to six—a de facto threat to cancel the 2020 elections.

Throughout the rest of the week, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was lashing out in every direction—threatening enemies and allies alike.

“We will hold the Iranians accountable for attacks on American interests,” he declared Monday, at a conference of countries with territory in the Arctic.

While there, Pompeo also denounced China for pursuing “national security aims,” Russia for “a pattern of aggressive behaviour” and declared Canada’s claim on the Northwest Passage to be “illegitimate.”

He then pointedly cancelled a meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, flying instead to Iraq to underscore the US threat to plunge the Middle East into war.

The full gravity of these events was highlighted by Saturday’s announcement that the US was also sending a Patriot missile-defence system to the Middle East.

The threat of war has never been more real nor more imminent.

I ask you all: How similar does this sound to the run-up to the Iraq War in 2003, with talk of weapons of mass destruction and of an unspecified threat to US forces?

The US is, of course, the real aggressor in the Middle East.

Even ABC News was obliged to note that the US Navy’s 5th Fleet is based in Bahrain, that Saudi Arabia is home to over 7,000 American troops, Qatar 10,000, Kuwait 13,000 and the UAE 5,000. Dubai is also the largest port of call for the US Navy outside of America.

And the war danger is not confined to the Middle East. A May 5 *Foreign Policy* article is entitled, “How to win America’s next war.”

It cites the statement by then-Defense Secretary James Mattis in 2018 that great power competition—not terrorism—was now the Pentagon’s priority and called for this perspective to be “fleshed out.”

Russia, and especially China, are the primary targets cited for military aggression, but the article speaks of the US having “an enduring interest in open access to the world’s key regions—primarily Asia and Europe—to ensure their latent power is not turned against it.”

The article continues:

“For a generation, the Pentagon operated on what might be called the Desert Storm model, under which the United States exploited the enormous technical advantages it had developed, starting in the 1970s, to build a military capable of dominating any opponent in the 1990s and 2000s, a time when it lacked a peer competitor…

“The problem today, however, is the approach that worked so well against these so-called rogue state adversaries will fail against China or Russia… To make this strategy work will require a force posture that is much more lethal, agile, and ready.”

This new and more aggressive turn to war is why the US wants Julian Assange in its clutches.

While in the UK, Pompeo warned the May government to back off from plans to involve China’s Huawei in its 5G network, explaining:

“The US has an obligation to ensure the places where we operate, places where US information is, places where we have national security risks, that they operate within trusted networks and that is what we will do.”

There you have it.

First the US threatens to respond to national security threats anywhere in the world.

Second, Pompeo stresses that in order to pursue its global interests unchecked, the US needs and demands “trusted networks.”

The main threat to US imperialism’s predatory ambitions, and those of its junior partner Britain, is nether Beijing, nor Moscow, but an informed and politically mobilised working class.

That is why Julian Assange and WikiLeaks must be silenced. That is why a terrible example must be made of whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

What does WikiLeaks represent?

To answer that question, I want to quote Assange’s acceptance speech

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of the Sydney Peace Foundation Gold Medal at the Frontline Club in London in 2011.

This was made at a time when no one would have dared to question whether Assange deserved a major prize for journalism, let alone declare that he was not a journalist at all!

This is what Assange said:

"I always keep in mind something that was said by the great poet and novelist May Sarton: you have to think like a hero in order to act like a merely decent human being…

"We are objective, but we are not neutral. We are on the side of justice. Objectivity is not the same as neutrality. We are objective about the facts when it comes to reporting and not distorting facts. But we are not neutral about what kind of world we would like to see. We want to see a more just world.

"For my staff and me, WikiLeaks will always strive to be an intelligence agency of the people. And we will always — as long as whistle-blowers are willing to act as heroes — act like merely decent human beings."

These are more than fine words. They are a mission statement.

WikiLeaks has indeed acted as an "intelligence agency of the people" and at great personal cost to Assange. It is why he is so hated by the world's rulers.

Two articles published immediately after Assange was seized by British police confirm this fact. They show what has led to the US vendetta. And it is not the baseless lie that Assange and Chelsea Manning imperilled US troops in Afghanistan and Iraq.

On April 11, *Buzzfeed* ran an exclusive on never-before seen Department of Defense damage assessment reports, made after WikiLeaks released Manning's cache of classified documents.

One report on leaked documents on Afghanistan specifically states that they would not result in a "significant impact" to US military operations.

Another states "with high confidence that disclosure of the Iraq data set will have no direct personal impact on current and former US leadership in Iraq."

The real problem they identified was that leaking details of tens of thousands of previously concealed civilian casualties in Afghanistan and Iraq "could be used by the press or our adversaries to negatively impact support for current operations in the region."

That is, WikiLeaks might politically galvanise anti-war sentiment all over the world.

The next day, April 12, US National Public Radio issued its list of how WikiLeaks threatened national security. It noted, as one major example, the disclosure that the CIA could use state-of-the art television as a listening device even when it was turned off.

It cited a former top intelligence operative complaining that this "creates situations where the US intelligence community is going to have to expend resources and going to have to spend both dollars and people to develop new methods."

Now that is a crime that must be punished—to cost the secret state so much money!

The paid flunkeys of the ruling class in parliament and the media of course know all of this and choose to conceal it.

Those journalists who rail against Assange and portray him in the vilest terms imaginable, the likes of the *Guardian's* Suzanne Moore and Hadley Freeman, are themselves vile.

They are part of the official media lie machine, unabashed purveyors of fake news. They would happily sell their souls to the highest bidder if such a bargain could be struck. And the price would be cheap.

And when political leaders who claim to be opposed to Assange's extradition to the US, like Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, then do nothing, they too are guilty.

The same holds true for those who adopt a pose of impartiality on Sweden's threat to renew demands for Assange to be extradited—and who pretend to believe that the spurious allegations against him are credible and have nothing to do with the US efforts to silence him.

Anyone who is not an active partisan in the struggle to secure freedom for Assange and Manning is not only betraying fundamental democratic principles; they are complicit in the ongoing offensive of the imperialist powers against the workers and oppressed peoples of the world.

Make no mistake, the price for such a betrayal will be coined in blood.

The Socialist Equality Party views the defence of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning as the spearhead of an emerging global struggle against imperialism.

We have all lived through truly dark times—decades of uninterrupted wars, not only in Afghanistan and Iraq, but the Balkans, Rwanda, Libya, Syria, Yemen—the list goes on.

Accompanying this explosion of colonial-style war has been the assault on democratic freedoms carried out in the name of the "war on terror," including the mass surveillance exposed by that other heroic whistleblower, Edward Snowden.

This eruption of imperialist militarism and break with democratic forms of rule, together with the cultivation of far-right forces, is too fundamental a shift to be explained away as the actions of criminal political elements in the ruling elite, such as Trump.

They are the malignant symptoms of a global capitalist system that is in terminal crisis.

The conflict between rival powers for control of markets and resources has become so acute in the increasingly globalised world that the regulatory political and economic mechanisms set up in the aftermath of World War II have broken down. As a result, the world in which we live once again resembles that viewed by the generation of the 1930s—one beset by trade war, rearmament, colonial wars and fascist reaction.

But this crisis is also unleashing a powerful counterforce upon which an entirely different world can be built.

The ruling class has spent decades systematically hiking up the brutal exploitation of the working class, slashing wages and destroying essential services—not only to more effectively compete for global economic dominance, but to funnel more and more of society's wealth into the coffers of a super-rich oligarchy.

Because of the collapse of the Soviet Union and all the old workers parties and trade unions, and the political confusion this generated, the ruling classes thought they could do this forever.

They were wrong.

The Socialist Equality Party, the International Committee of the Fourth International and the *World Socialist Web Site* base our struggle to free Assange and Manning on the international working class.

Standing in the tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, we understand that the fight to defend these heroic figures is the spearhead of the struggle against imperialism and for socialism. This perspective now emerges as the only way forward for humanity.

For the past two years, we have seen an extraordinary growth in the class struggle in country after country.

Workers suffering unbearable hardship for decades are coming to the bitter conclusion that they must take the fight to those who have ruined their lives and who deny a future to the younger generation—whatever the cost to themselves. And to such people, those coming into struggle against the existing social order, Assange and Manning's heroic stand on principles is an inspiration.

To make this clear, these are some of the comments the WSWS has received on Assange:

From the UK:

• "Assange is in the forefront of the fight for freedom of speech against corrupt governments, especially by revealing US state security secrets."

• "Assange is guilty of being a hero, guilty of telling the truth, guilty of exposing US war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq."

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From Australia:

• “It’s a great shame that Assange is labelled a criminal when he’s highlighting the true criminals in our society… He is the voice of the voiceless at the moment and we should all be fighting for what he’s fighting for.”

• “If you can convince workers to band together, people will listen. When someone stands up, it gathers momentum. Workers here should support Assange, because we need more of him in the world.”

From the US

• “The jailing of Assange is an attack on the entire working class… The capitalists and the powers-that-be are desperate. They don’t want workers to know the truth. They recognize that the working class is more powerful than we recognize ourselves, and they are afraid of us.”

This is the voice of the future speaking and we must give it political expression and leadership.

There has been a lot of discussion about history today. That is in the nature of our meetings. We are a historically based party. But I want to make this very clear. Everybody in this room is making history. They are on the right side of history because they are involved in the fightback against imperialism. And to conduct that struggle means the defence of Chelsea Manning, it means the defence of Julian Assange, and it means building a new revolutionary leadership in the working class.

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