

Speech by Niles Niemuth to London meeting

“What is it that Manning and Assange are being persecuted for? Revealing the truth”

18 May 2019

We are publishing the speech of Niles Niemuth, a leading member of the Socialist Equality Party (US), at the May 12 public meeting in London in defence of jailed WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange and courageous whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

Niemuth spoke via internet connection from Detroit.

I welcome the opportunity to speak at this important meeting in London organized by the Socialist Equality Party to demand freedom for Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning. These two courageous individuals have the support of workers all over the world, which must be organized and developed. They are the targets of an international conspiracy by the ruling elites, and the fight to defend them must be based on an international movement of the working class.

Julian Assange is being cruelly held in the notorious Belmarsh prison, where he is being held for 50 weeks as he faces an illegal and undemocratic extradition process to the United States, Manning is being subjected to a Kafkaesque legal travesty for refusing to give testimony before a grand jury tasked with drawing up charges against Assange.

Manning was released from jail on Thursday after being held for 62 days in contempt of court. She faces the prospect of being returned this week as she was served with a new subpoena for a new grand jury as the term of the last grand jury expired. She has stated that she expects to be returned to jail this coming Thursday when she is scheduled to appear in court once again. She has not been charged or convicted of any crime.

During the first month of her incarceration, Manning was placed in solitary confinement, subjecting her to psychological trauma, and she was denied access to adequate medical attention.

She has taken a courageous and politically principled stand in refusing to answer any questions by the

prosecutors who seek to bring further criminal charges against the WikiLeaks founder. She already served seven years in a military prison, including a year in solitary confinement, for leaking evidence of American war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“The idea I hold the keys to my own cell is an absurd one, as I face the prospect of suffering either way due to this unnecessary and punitive subpoena: I can either go to jail or betray my principles,” Manning explained in an eight-page letter submitted to the court last week appealing for release. “The latter exists as a much worse prison than the government can construct.”

The unyielding pursuit of Manning and Assange has been a bipartisan effort which began under the Obama administration and continues under Trump, who tweeted in 2017 that Manning is an “ungrateful TRAITOR” who should not have been released from prison.

As the preparations of the Trump administration for new wars all around the world have intensified, from Venezuela and Iran to China and Russia, so too has the effort to silence all of those who have exposed past war crimes. On Thursday, a former National Security Agency intelligence analyst, Daniel Hale, 31, was arrested on allegations that he leaked secret information about Washington’s illegal drone assassination program to the press.

While Trump is preparing for war abroad, carrying out fascist attacks on immigrants at home and promoting the growth of authoritarianism, the Democratic Party has continued to move to the right, lining up behind Trump’s assault on immigrants and trade war against China. The Democratic leadership has repeatedly ruled out impeaching the president because they fear that a protracted impeachment process might be an opening for the popular opposition to Trump to take an independent form and move in an openly anti-capitalist direction.

The courage displayed by Assange and Manning stands in stark contrast to all those spineless cowards and swindlers in and around the Democratic Party who have supported the persecution of Assange and abandoned Manning to the clutches of the Trump administration.

The attitude of political organizations and tendencies to the persecution of Manning and Assange defines their character. Those who have actively or tacitly supported this pseudo-legal abomination have upon them a black mark that can never be washed clean.

The Democrats have campaigned against Assange as part of their anti-Russia campaign and have been almost entirely silent on the incarceration of Manning. The concocted narrative of Russian hacking of the US elections has also been used to justify censoring the internet and pressuring the Trump administration from the right to take a much more hostile position toward Moscow.

Obama, who cynically utilized the commutation of Manning's sentence, without a full presidential pardon clearing her criminal record, to burnish his own legacy, has said not a word about her persecution.

Democratic presidential candidate Senator Bernie Sanders, who tweeted on World Press Freedom Day that "There can be no free society without a free media," has refused to answer any questions about Assange or Manning. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), likewise has kept her mouth shut after a single tweet more than month ago calling for Manning to be released on bail.

These forces all line up against Assange and Manning because they support American imperialism. However, they do not speak for the working class, the majority of the American population.

There is broad support for Manning and Assange in the working class. Which is shown in one poll after another and we have seen in our own interventions, protests and meetings in the US and internationally. As she has noted, Manning received thousands of letters of support while in jail from educators, factory workers, store clerks, gardeners, chefs, and airplane pilots among others.

The SEP and International Youth and Students for Social Equality have been campaigning among the working class and young people to bring awareness to the situation facing Manning and Assange. Angela, an auto worker from Kokomo, Indiana, recently told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "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. ... We have to unite around Assange, Chelsea Manning, Snowden and all those telling the truth."

The defence of Manning and Assange must be embedded in the working class. Across the US the significant increase in strike activity we saw last year has continued this year—from teachers, to Uber and Lyft drivers, and nurses. There is a growing determination among auto workers for a serious fight as their contracts come up this summer. Workers' struggles are increasingly developing independently and in opposition to the trade unions.

The ruling class is terrified. Terrified of the truth. Terrified of the class struggle. Terrified of opposition in the working class to war. And terrified above all of socialism, which Trump will make a major element in his 2020 re-election campaign. What is it that Manning and Assange are being persecuted for? Revealing the truth. The truth about American imperialism, the crimes that it has committed around the world.

They are to be made an example of in order to establish the principle that those who speak the truth will suffer the cruellest fate at the hands of the state. The anti-Russia campaign spearheaded by the Democrats is driven in large part by the desire to create a framework for criminalizing opposition, tarred with claim that it is the result of the Russians "sowing divisions." Efforts to censor the internet are intended to reinforce the control of the corrupt and bought corporate media, the embedded media, what [renowned journalist] John Pilger has called "Vichy journalism."

The truth is stronger than government propaganda. The working class is stronger than the capitalist ruling elite. There is a powerful force that can, must and will come to the defence of Assange and Manning, the international working class. The fight to end the persecution of these courageous individuals, and all those who have exposed government crimes, must be connected to the fight against war, against inequality, and against capitalism.



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