

Speech by Ulrich Rippert to London meeting

“Defending Julian Assange requires the mobilisation of the working class in a struggle against capitalism”

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We are publishing the speech of Ulrich Rippert, chairman of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP, Socialist Equality Party) in Germany, at the May 12 public meeting in London in defence of jailed WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange and courageous whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

Comrades and friends,

I am very happy to be able to participate in this meeting of the Socialist Equality Party to defend Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning. It is clearly an international meeting.

We are an international party. Under conditions where in every country nationalist tendencies and nationalist movements are getting stronger, the international collaboration of our movement and its fight to unite the working class are vital.

The defence of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning has to be understood in a political context. All the great questions of the current political situation are concentrated in the legal attack, witch-hunt and terror inflicted on Assange and Manning.

What is the crime they have carried out? They have explained to the people of the world the war crimes of American and European imperialism. Millions of people were shocked when they saw the videos and read the documents.

Now they are trying to organize a show trial to intimidate everybody and make them shut up!

Anyone who dares to do the same as Assange and Manning, whether by organizing opposition against the systematic preparation for war or a movement against unemployment and poverty, must be suppressed. That is the message.

In every country, the ruling class is responding to the growing movement from below by preparing police states and dictatorship. That's the only way they can push through their policy of war and their attacks against the population.

While there is massive support for Julian Assange among young people and in the working class, all the governments and all the political parties are united in support of the American and the British government witch-hunt.

When I arrived at the airport this morning and took a taxi, the driver asked me, “Are you here for a vacation?”

I said, “No, I am here for a meeting to defend Julian Assange.” He said, “Yes, Julian. I was at the Ecuadorian embassy when he was at the window and spoke to us. I am a supporter of the defence committee.” All the way here we had a very intensive political discussion. He said many of his colleagues are following this situation and are quite nervous and agitated by what is building up.

The defence of Julian Assange can only be carried out through the

international mobilisation of the working class on the basis of a socialist programme. There is no constituency in the ruling elite or in the political system for defending him—it must be done by the working class.

In Germany this is very clear. The so-called Left Party supports a government that is doing nothing to organize a resistance campaign against this attack.

Allow me to give you a short report about the European election campaign we are carrying out. We organized meetings last week in Munich and in Leipzig, and earlier in many other cities. We've had very intense discussions with workers and young people on why it requires a revolutionary socialist program to fight to defend Assange and Manning and why it is necessary to mobilise the working class and build an international revolutionary party.

We are organizing next Saturday a public rally in front of the British Embassy in Berlin. We will not only accuse the British government for what it has done [to Assange] and also the American government which is behind it, but we will also attack the German government which is fully informed and directly integrated into this conspiracy!

Especially in Germany, these questions have a very long history. It was exactly 80 years ago, in March 1929, that one of the most well-known anti-war journalists was arrested—Carl von Ossietzky. He was a very courageous journalist in the same way that Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning are.

He wrote an article in the weekly magazine *Die Weltbühne* [The World Stage] which revealed secret information about the military build-up of the German Army. This was illegal, in contravention of the Versailles Treaty, and Ossietzky made this public. At that time, you still had the Weimar republic, and it was quite clear that the information he published was correct—as was the information given by Assange and Manning.

But it was secret. He was arrested and then in 1931 got one and a half years in jail for betraying secrets. Shortly after, the Nazis came to power and put him in a concentration camp where he was tortured and died in 1938.

Die Weltbühne, which Ossietzky worked for, was a leading international anti-war magazine and it even published some of the articles by Leon Trotsky, against the rise of fascism in Germany.

Today, as in the '30s, the attack on democratic rights is connected with the build-up of right-wing fascist movements. In Germany this is very pronounced.

This is the first time since the Nazis that you again have a right-wing party in the German parliament, with an openly fascist wing. And that party, which in the last elections got only 12 percent of the vote, dominates German government policy, dominates the policies of the Grand Coalition of the conservative [Christian Democratic Union, CDU]

and social democratic parties [Social Democratic Party, SDP].

The Alternative für Deutschland [AfD] party—some call it Alternative for Democracy—has organized a witch-hunt against foreigners. Camps with barbed wire and powers to patrol refugees and asylum seekers have been established just like under the Nazis. These later became the extermination camps.

But there are also differences from the 1920s and the '30s. Today, these fascist movements do not yet have a mass influence. These are movements which are systematically built up by the ruling elite, by the state, by the political system, the political parties, the secret services, the military, and not least, the media. They support them.

Among the population these fascists are hated. In Germany, the anti-Nazi demonstrations are always bigger than the Nazi demonstrations. Some are 10 times bigger! But the police and the Special Forces protect the Nazi demonstrations and arrest the anti-fascists, claiming they are violating the right of the Nazis to demonstrate.

The reasons why these forces are built up is to try to push against the growing opposition to war and the way that trade war is used to prepare for military war. Not since the end of the Second World War have we been so close to a Third World War. And the ruling class knows that this war policy can only be pushed through with fascist dictatorial measures and terror. In Germany, they are now discussing nuclear weapons! Can you imagine what that means, after all that happened in Germany?

They discuss openly how they are preparing for an aircraft carrier, which is one of the most expensive and powerful military systems. The only one the German bourgeoisie previously had was under the Nazis in 1938. It was an instrument for the direct preparation of the beginning of the Second World War and the attack against Poland.

However, this military build-up meets growing opposition from below. There is quite visibly a return of the class struggle. For decades now, they have tried to suppress the class struggle. The trade unions and all the political parties have worked to systematically push the working class back.

But now you have growing opposition movements. You have seen the Yellow Vest movement in Paris—and although this movement might be in many aspects of its political orientation very confused—it is driven by the most profound social questions: social inequality and cheap labour. And although the French government is moving with all its power against it, they are not able to get them off the streets.

In Poland, there have been mass strikes by 300,000 teachers in recent months. And when the right-wing PiS [Law and Justice] government demanded that the teachers go back to work, 40,000 social workers decided to go on strike. In that situation, the union intervened with all its power to suppress the teachers' strike.

More and more, we are seeing that this movement from below has two decisive aspects.

First, it is international. Second, it develops as a rebellion against the trade unions and the political parties that have suppressed it for so many years.

It's not only the teachers. In eastern Europe you have a growing movement against labour conditions and low wages. You have strikes in the car industry and other sectors in Romania, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Serbia and Kosovo, and the mass demonstrations against the so-called slave law in Hungary of the Orban government.

In Germany, you have a growing strike movement among teachers and social workers. A few weeks ago in Berlin, around 40,000 workers and young people demonstrated against rising rents they are unable to pay and demanded the expropriation of the hedge funds and the speculators.

This movement needs a socialist political leadership and needs a socialist political programme.

That is why our election campaign is so important. Nobody should misunderstand why we have candidates in this campaign. It does not mean

that we accept the European parliament, the EU [European Union] or its institutions. No, we don't. We are determined opponents and political enemies of the EU.

But our opposition against the EU is not a nationalist one. We are not for a return to the nation-state. We want to unite the working class on an international socialist programme.

We explain in one meeting after another that the split in Europe is not between the people who support the EU and the people who reject the EU, but between the mass of the population of Europe and a small upper class which has unequalled wealth. This conflict between the rich and the poor is the main question and is the driving force of the state build-up. It is the ruling elite in Europe that is the driving force for the return to war, the building of a police state and a return to Fortress Europe, which has seen 30,000 people already killed in the Mediterranean.

Our answer to the EU is the United Socialist States of Europe. We fight for workers' governments, to expropriate the big banks and the big companies and organize society on a socialist basis under workers control. We do not base ourselves on parliamentary maneuvers, or appeals to the ruling elite, or on begging for concessions. We base ourselves on the strength of the working class, the young people and the students and we mobilize the working class based on an international socialist program.

What are the strengths of our international party? Well, let's ask the question, how do you measure the strength of a party?

Yes, you need influence, political influence, you need parliamentarians, and you need members, that is all true. But it is not the decisive answer.

The real strength of a party is the historical tradition that it follows. Is this party able to answer and understand the profound changes in the political situation? Is it able to give a progressive answer to the profound problems that capitalist society brings forward?

Thirty years ago, we—the British section and the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International—held our first joint European election campaign. In preparation for today's meeting, I looked at our programme from that time. The headline of the election manifesto of the Fourth International for the 1989 European elections declared:

For the international unity of the working class!

For the United Socialist States of Europe!

For a socialist program to abolish the profit system!

In one section from it—the conditions that confronted workers in the European Common Market—we said the single market was an instrument of capitalist monopolies. Here is one paragraph that I would like to read out. Remember it was written 30 years ago, in 1989. Some of the older people here may remember that it was a year of change because suddenly there was a mass movement developing in the Eastern European countries when the Soviet Union still existed.

We said the following:

The policies of the Stalinist bureaucracy have led the Eastern European countries, including the Soviet Union, into a devastating economic crisis.

At the roots of this crisis lies the isolation of the Soviet economy from world economy.

There are only two possibilities for overcoming this isolation:

1. The unification of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union with Western Europe, within the framework of a Socialist United States of Europe, as a first step towards a socialist World Republic. This requires the overthrowing of capitalism in Western Europe through a socialist revolution and the overthrow of the Stalinist bureaucracy in Eastern Europe through a political revolution. This is the road advanced by the Fourth International.

The task of a socialist revolution is to overthrow the capitalist property relations and the political regime. Whilst the political

revolution [against Stalinism] defends the existing, nationalized property relations, but overthrows the bureaucratic regime, replacing it with real workers democracy.

2. The reintroduction of capitalist relations and the exploitation of the Soviet and Eastern European working class on a capitalist basis. This is the road taken by [Soviet Stalinist leader Mikhail] Gorbachev, [Polish Stalinist leader Wojciech] Jaruzelski and the other present leaders of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

In following this road, they shamelessly collaborate with the most reactionary imperialist forces and stab every revolutionary movement of the international working class and of oppressed peoples in the back.

Everyone that reads or hears this text can see that the reason for this crisis was the globalization of production. Under conditions where not only was the market global, but production was as well, no country could exist apart from the international market and labour relations. That's why there were only two ways to integrate the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe into the international system of production and trade—world revolution or capitalist restoration.

In that document we asked what would capitalist restoration do and what would be the consequences? All the other political parties and governments and the high-paid think tanks of the bourgeoisie declared that socialism was finished, capitalism had triumphed. They said, it's the beginning of democracy and freedom and the beginning of well-being and prosperity for everybody! The end of all wars.

The author Francis Fukuyama wrote about "the end of history," claiming mankind had reached all its goals! Every party supported this line. Not only in Germany, not only in Europe, but all over the world. We were the only movement opposing this, we stood against it. We said the opposite.

Now today, if you draw a balance sheet, what became of their democracy and freedom? We have police states, the preparation of dictatorships. We have the harassment of anti-war journalist Julian Assange, who confronts enormous dangers.

What happened to "prosperity for everybody"? The social situation is on the verge of an explosion.

As for the end of all wars—it was the beginning of new wars! NATO and its supporters have been involved in 25 years of wars in the Middle East, in Latin America, in one country after another.

Our analysis was correct. That is the strength of our movement. That is the party that we built.

We are the party that opposed the biggest lie of the 20th century—that socialism failed and that Stalinism was socialism. We are the Trotskyists, who fought against Stalinism from the very beginning and gave their lives in that struggle. Therefore, our movement proved that socialism was not finished, that Trotskyism was the only force to wage a struggle against Stalinism.

Today that perspective is of enormous objective political importance. Our fight for the United Socialist States of Europe is now of enormous importance. The return of the class struggle changes the whole political situation.

Yes, the ruling class responds to the first stage with the building of a police state, attacks on democratic rights, dictatorship and preparation for war. But if any of you think that they are able to turn the wheel of history back, without any problems—that they can go back to fascism in Germany—you are making a big mistake.

We demand, "Never again fascism, never again war!"

This perspective is burned into the consciousness of millions of workers and youth and not only in Germany. In Berlin you cannot walk 100 metres without seeing a monument dealing with the enormous crimes that were

carried out by the Nazis. All that is very fresh and alive.

Everything depends now on the growing movement against fascism, war and dictatorship being based on an international socialist programme and the international leadership of the working class.

At the centre of our campaign we have the building of our sections in all European countries.

I will close with this argument. The future is not decided in Westminster, the future is not decided in Berlin, it is not decided in Brussels in the headquarters of the EU. It's definitely not decided in the European parliament. It is decided by the people who are sitting in this room.

Thirty years ago, we said, "German reunification and the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the re-introduction of capitalist exploitation means mass unemployment, poverty, war." And we were right. Back then we explained that they couldn't carry out these attacks without resistance in the working class and that the class struggle would come back.

It is back. We were right.

Today we make another prediction. We say the return of the class struggle will revive the socialist tradition in the working class. Germany is not only the country of the Nazis. Germany is the country of the socialist movement, the country of Karl Marx, where the socialist movement had the biggest and deepest roots and the return of that movement will take the form of the building of our party.

When we say we defend Julian Assange, we say that can only be done through the mobilisation of the working class in a struggle against capitalism, because the driving force to suppress and attack Assange is the capitalist system, the capitalist governments and the preparations of war.

You cannot stop war without the mobilisation of the working class. Therefore comrades, to support Julian Assange and to understand the urgency of the present situation, this is not something you can do passively. You have to become active. You have to become a fighter to build a revolutionary socialist movement.

Study the history of our party, the International Committee of the Fourth International, and join the struggle to build a party of revolutionary leadership.



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