

An appeal to young people

Defend the right to tell the truth! Defend Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning!

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality
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Today, thousands of young people will demand that governments “tell the truth” about the scale and dangers of climate change. While this takes place, two champions of press freedom, of the right to tell the truth, are imprisoned, their lives in danger.

Julian Assange is locked-up in Belmarsh maximum security prison in London, facing US extradition proceedings on 17 charges under the Espionage Act that carry 175 years in prison. He has been charged for publishing true information about US government war crimes.

The founder of the groundbreaking investigative news outlet, WikiLeaks, Assange is the recipient of Amnesty International’s UK Media Award, the Reader’s Choice Award for Time Person of the Year, the Voltaire Award for Free Speech and a Gold Medalist of the Sydney Peace Foundation. He has also repeatedly been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

WikiLeaks’ major exposures include:

- The “Collateral Murder” video showing the brutal killing of unarmed Iraqi civilians by the US military.
- The Afghan war logs revealing the killing of 195 civilians, suppressed by the US and its allies, and the creation of a “black unit” assassination squad.
- The Iraq war logs revealing 15,000 civilian deaths known to the US military and suppressed, the cultivation of sectarian death squads and the use of torture.
- The Guantánamo Files documenting the illegal imprisonment of at least 150 Afghan and Pakistani civilians, who the US authorities knew had no connection to terrorism.

Chelsea Manning, a former US soldier and whistleblower, leaked material to WikiLeaks that

played a vital role in the exposure of war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Both she and Assange have suffered appallingly as a result.

Manning spent seven years in prison, one of those in solitary confinement, before being released, but crucially not pardoned, by President Barack Obama in 2017. She is now back in prison for refusing on principle to testify to a secret grand jury convened to bring trumped up criminal charges against Assange and WikiLeaks.

Assange was confined for nearly seven years in prison-like conditions in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, where he was granted political asylum against US extradition threats for espionage. He could not leave as UK police were stationed 24/7 outside, ready to seize him for a minor breach of bail before passing him on to the American government. In 2016, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention ruled that he was being “arbitrarily detained” and that he should be released and compensated.

Last month, a visibly ill Assange was dragged out of the Ecuadorian Embassy by a squad of British police after the Ecuadorian government illegally removed his political asylum. The UN Special Rapporteur on torture warned that this decision exposed him “to a real risk of serious violations of his human rights, including his freedom of expression, his right to a fair trial and the prohibition of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”

Assange is now serving a maximum sentence of nearly a year for a bail violation in Belmarsh—normally used to house those convicted of major crimes such as murder and terrorism offences. He is kept to his cell 23

hours a day and has had contact with his lawyers impeded.

A series of hearings is underway to secure his extradition to the US, where he faces decades of imprisonment if not the death penalty. This past Monday, his personal effects, including his correspondence with his legal team, were handed over by the Ecuadorian Embassy to the United States.

Assange and Manning's democratic rights have been torn to shreds. This has only been made possible by the disgusting campaign of lies and slander waged against Assange in the mainstream press. A manufactured case of sexual assault in Sweden, already closed twice due to lack of evidence, is being used to blacken his name and provide a pretext for imprisoning him until the real case can be brought in America. At the same time, every political organization—including Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party, the Greens and Scottish National Party—has either maintained a shameful silence on Assange's persecution or is actively supporting it.

These forces have sought to isolate WikiLeaks from the immense popular support that exists for the work of Assange and his dedicated staff. To the extent that young people protesting today are unaware of what has been described above, the forces of reaction have been successful. With the fate of Assange and Manning reaching a crossroads, however, an international movement is now building in their defence.

Neither is a prisoner by any legal right. They are prisoners of class war, being made an example of by the ruling elite whose crimes they exposed. The final responsibility for their release therefore does not lie with the courts or capitalist politicians, but with the working class and youth who owe them a great debt.

Assange and Manning's most important contribution to the world has been their exposure of imperialist intrigues and militarism. In Assange's own words, WikiLeaks acts as an "intelligence agency of the people"—against their governments. A damage assessment authored by the US Department of Defense after the WikiLeaks releases on Iraq and Afghanistan admitted the main threat posed by WikiLeaks was that it "could be used by the press or our adversaries to negatively impact support for current operations in the [Middle East]."

Today's protest is focused on the imminent catastrophe—in the next few decades—facing humanity if

climate change is not averted and repaired. Yet such is the ferocity of the ruling elites' war plans today that a more imminent danger is posed by the threat of major wars, including a third world war fought with nuclear weapons which promises catastrophe for humanity.

Tensions between the US and Iran, China, Russia and even Europe are at an unprecedented level. The Trump administration is engaged in an immense trade war with Beijing and is seeking to cripple Chinese technology company, Huawei. Washington is throttling the Venezuelan and Iranian economies with crippling sanctions to force regime change and has threatened military action if these plans fail. There are 12,000 NATO troops, along with tanks, aircraft and artillery, stationed on Russia's Western border.

Meanwhile, UK Foreign secretary Jeremy Hunt has said that the UK must double its military budget in a decade. Overall global military spending in 2019 topped \$1.8 trillion dollars, the highest on record.

The Middle East, the South China Sea, Venezuela, the India-Pakistan border, the Russian border—any of these flashpoints could be the spark to a global conflagration.

Defending Assange and Manning is the first critical step in building a powerful anti-war movement to prevent such a catastrophe. The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) calls on all young people concerned about the fate of the planet to join the campaign for their freedom.



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