

American educators demand freedom for Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning

The WSWS Teacher Newsletter
1 June 2019

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, ill from years of confinement in London's Ecuadorian Embassy, is receiving increasing support from workers, students and intellectuals worldwide. Assange, currently being detained in Britain's Belmarsh prison over a bogus bail jumping conviction, faces 175 years in prison if he is extradited to the United States to face the government's charges under the 1917 Espionage Act.

In the first publicly-released statement since his imprisonment in Belmarsh prison, Assange wrote to British journalist Gordon Dimmack, "I am defenceless and am counting on you and others of good character to save my life." He added, "Truth ultimately is all we have."

The journalist's appeal for support is being taken up by ever wider layers of the working class, as millions oppose the Trump administration's frontal assault on press freedom and the First Amendment of the US Constitution.

Among educators in the United States, the attack on democratic rights strikes a particularly sensitive nerve, as thousands of teachers, who continue their strikes for better pay, smaller class sizes and funding for public education, face possible arrest, fines and dismissal for "illegal" strikes and use of sick days to exercise their right to protest. In Kentucky, state Education Commissioner Wayne Lewis recently demanded the names of all teachers from Jefferson County Public Schools district who called in sick on the days of mass rallies which took place at the state Capitol beginning February 28.

"The Assange case is an attack on First Amendment rights and freedom of the press, and will have a chilling effect on any criticism of empire," Gavin, a Detroit teacher told the WSWS *Teacher Newsletter*. He added, "Using the Espionage Act, specifically going after a non-US national is a dangerous precedent and a warning shot across the world that no citizen of the world can use the press to criticize US crimes.

"They [the US government] have to stop Assange and Manning with these insane 170 year charges because they have exposed a little bit of what is a wealth of

information—that the United States is the greatest perpetrator of human rights abuses in the world."

Condemning the role of the mainstream media in the persecution of Assange and Manning, Joanne wrote in to the *Teacher Newsletter* to say, "Julian IS A JOURNALIST. The reason people in power want to harm him and Chelsea is because the reports exposed their corruption. The reports exposed troops killing innocent people. Now you make up more lies to prosecute him. No harm came to troops, only embarrassment to the administration and exposure of some sick killers. The American people NEED WHISTLE BLOWERS in order to stop corruption, but it appears even whistle blowers don't slow down the corruption. The ones who should be prosecuted are the mainstream media who use their position to lie to the American people in order to keep their high salaries. Those who should be prosecuted are the oligarchs who command the mainstream media to lie and do their bidding or be fired."

The Steering Committee of the Coalition of Rank-and-File Committees issued a statement on April 18 explaining why workers should support Assange and Manning. The statement said in part, "Assange is not a criminal, but a hero. He has been hunted down and persecuted for exposing war crimes, including the slaughter of innocent civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan by US military forces. The real criminals are those who launched these wars, including George W. Bush, Dick Cheney and leading political figures in both the Democratic and Republican parties."

In response to the April 18 statement, a librarian wrote eloquently to the *Teacher Newsletter*:

"I am writing to express my full support of the Statement issued by the Steering Committee of the Coalition of Rank-and-File Committees in defense of Julian Assange.

"As the director of a public library, I cannot overstate the need for a free press and the absolute right of working class readers to know the truth. The persecution of Assange, as well as the reimprisonment of Chelsea Manning for refusing to give information against him, are intended to send a chilling message to others who might report the truth—in

doing so, you will face imprisonment, torture, and possibly death.

“Much has been made in the media about the threat of ‘fake’ news, with both conservatives and liberals claiming the news reported by the ‘other side’ is biased at the very least, and completely false at the worst. However, what most working class people know is that the news coming out of every major media outlet cannot be trusted. Facts are left unreported, major events and issues of critical importance to the lives and well-being of the working class are suppressed or only given minimal and biased coverage; examples from recent years include the bogus coverage of the Egyptian Revolution in 2011, the lack of reporting on the disastrous circumstances facing workers in Greece, strike waves across China, and the catastrophic implications of global warming for life on Earth.

“Public libraries across the United States are being asked to offer classes on how to detect ‘fake’ news, so that readers can better detect bias, lack of authority, and how to fact-check articles and reports, especially in an online environment. Yet the recommendations we are given by those touting the battle against fake news is to direct people to such news outlets as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and other thoroughly discredited media conglomerates.

“These supposedly objective news outlets are nothing more than mouthpieces for the ruling elite. They are responsible for false reporting and, later, burying any retractions deep inside the paper where people are unlikely to notice them—an example being the role of the *New York Times* in spreading the lie about Weapons of Mass Destruction in the lead-up to the war against Iraq. The ruling class is in dire fear of people learning the truth, faced with an online environment where members of the working class can share the real truth in words and pictures; thus their attempt to enlist public libraries to spread the lie that the major media outlets can be trusted.

“I remember as a child in the early 1970s, seeing news stories on television that horrified me. Little Vietnamese children running naked, in terror down a dirt road, being chased by US helicopters. I recall the fury of my parents and older siblings watching these atrocities, calling for an end to the war. I also remember watching protesters walking the streets in Buffalo, where I grew up, during that same period demanding the US get out of Southeast Asia, and that those in power who were responsible for these crimes be punished. That was the final gasp of the media playing its true role as the ‘Fourth Estate’ in our democracy.

“Edmund Burke, the 18th century Anglo-Irish Statesman and political theorist, stated ‘there were Three Estates in Parliament; but, in the Reporters’ Gallery yonder, there sat a Fourth Estate more important far than they all.’ Today those

in power decry the Press as an enemy of the State and move to crush it, using courageous reporters and whistleblowers like Assange, Manning, and Edward Snowden as examples of what will happen to anyone who dares reveal the truth. While democracy requires a free and open press, tyranny cannot withstand it.

“I join the call to release Julian Assange, that all charges against him be dropped, and that he be given full freedom to continue reporting the truth. He, along with Manning and Snowden, are heroes who deserve our full support and protection.”

Following the announcement that the Trump administration had charged Assange with 17 counts under the Espionage Act, the WSWS received many more statements of support from workers.

Joanne, a secondary government teacher in Melbourne Australia, said, “I stand with Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning in their fight against the suppression of truth. I will be standing with them on June 12th, during my lunchtime, even if it is just me. My school is very conservative and would not approve of my stand, but I ‘must resist, I can resist’.”

Reiterating the widely-held sentiment that the war criminals should be jailed and the whistle-blowers freed, adjunct professor Rebecca said, “Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning are being targeted because the corrupt bourgeois government of the United States seeks to continue committing and covering up war crimes and human rights abuses abroad in service to maintaining its position as the global center of power.

“In the face of its weakened global economic position and mounting worldwide social opposition to capitalism, the government of the United States will work to replace its lost economic might with the use of military force in order to maintain favorable social and geopolitical relations. The kind of radical journalism Assange and Manning practiced is vital now if we are to have a chance at stopping this.

“The charges against Assange and Manning should be dropped and they should be freed. Their heroism and courage should be celebrated, and their journalism should be upheld as a model, not a crime.”



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