

Twitter removes account of Assange defence organisation

Mike Head
13 July 2019

Last Thursday, without notice or explanation, Twitter arbitrarily suspended the account of @Unity4J, a platform dedicated to circulating information and advocacy for WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. As of this writing, the account has been gone for two days.

The operators of the account reported that they were given no reason for its removal by Twitter staff, and received no response to their appeals for reinstatement. As this occurred, Assange, a journalist and publisher, remained incarcerated in London's notorious Belmarsh Prison. He is facing extradition to the US, where he could be jailed for life, or executed, on unprecedented US Espionage Act charges.

"About 8:45am CST on Thursday July 11, one of our Unity4J Twitter team members went to retweet on the account and noticed that the account was no longer accessible," reported Christy Dopf, one of the operators of the account. "When each of us also attempted to access the account we all received the same message 'Account Suspended'.

"Twitter did not send us a reason or violation for the suspension. So an appeal was submitted. We did receive correspondence that Twitter got our request and the case is currently open. Unfortunately we do not have a timeline on how long this could take."

Unity4J has been prominent in campaigning against Assange's persecution, arrest and extradition. Its online vigils have featured well-known Assange defenders, including Socialist Equality Party (SEP) representatives who have spoken about the SEPs' global campaign to free Assange and whistleblower Chelsea Manning, currently imprisoned in a US jail for refusing to testify against Assange.

Unity4J co-founder Elizabeth Vos tweeted: "I have no doubt that @Unity4J's twitter account was suspended because it was a hub of useful information on solidarity

events and actions in support of Assange, WikiLeaks, Chelsea Manning and more. Horrendous censorship to suspend the account, @TwitterSupport."

Twitter's move is part of a wider pattern. Vos told independent journalist Caitlin Johnstone: "It seems that Assange supporters have been targeted for suspension over the last few days and weeks, including the suspension of individuals (Yon Solitary, Monique Jolie) as well as accounts like Unity4J. All of these suspensions are unacceptable, but I find the Unity4J suspension especially egregious because it was an amplifier of events across the board, not only actions run by Unity4J. It never broke the Twitter rules and it was an activist account supporting a journalist who's been silenced or 'disappeared,' so this suspension is an extension of that suppression."

Many Assange supporters have protested to the Twitter Support account and Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey, objecting to the silencing of a legitimate activist account, to no avail thus far.

Christine Assange, the journalist's mother, tweeted: "HELP!! Twitter suspended @Unity4J The global #FreeAssange supporters account. Its a central point for updates, interviews and actions re my son politically persecuted journalist JULIAN ASSANGE! Please demand @TwitterSupport and @Jack re-instate it. Many thanks #Unity4J."

Musician Roger Waters, co-founder of famous rock band Pink Floyd, broadcast a video denouncing the suspension. He accused Twitter of seeking to silence supporters of Assange, whom he described as a "great hero of freedom of the press and freedom of any kind." Waters said Unity4J was a cogent, intelligent and powerful voice of opposition to the persecution of Assange. "Twitter, you are Big Brother!" he said. "You are an arm of the thought police."

Twitter has acted as a corporate judge, jury and executioner, providing no explanation, let alone justification. Even if the account is eventually restored, the removal serves to undercut the international struggle underway to defend Assange and Manning.

On June 20, the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Parties affiliated with the International Committee of the Fourth International called for a global campaign to stop Assange's extradition to the United States, and to secure both his and Manning's freedom.

This Sunday, at 2 p.m., Australian Eastern Time, the SEP in Australia will conduct a live-streamed rally in Melbourne, following rallies in Sydney and Brisbane, to take forward this campaign. Readers can watch the rally on Facebook at SEP Australia.

Twitter has joined Facebook and Google in what has become mounting censorship directed against progressive and left-wing political speech on online media platforms. Last year, the WSWS urged the formation of an international coalition to fight the censorship of socialist, anti-war, left-wing and progressive websites, organisations and activists. Google's manipulation of search results, beginning in April 2017, limited traffic to left-wing sites, particularly the WSWS, which reported a nearly 70 percent decline in readers resulting from Google searches.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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