

Julian Assange's life is in danger!

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In an interview with the *World Socialist Web Site* last week, John Shipton, the father of WikiLeaks' founder Julian Assange, spoke of his fear that his son "may die" as a result of the conditions under which he is being imprisoned in Belmarsh Prison in London.

Shipton's statement is not an exaggeration. Serious concerns about Assange's physical and mental health have been raised by others who have been able to visit him since he was sent to Belmarsh, including his brother Gabriel Shipton, journalist and filmmaker John Pilger, fashion designer Vivienne Westwood, actress Pamela Anderson and United Nations' Special Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer.

The conclusion that must be drawn is that Julian Assange—an Australian citizen, journalist and publisher responsible for bringing into the light of day US war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq, the diplomatic intrigues and corruption of governments around the world and the scale of CIA spying and black operations—is the victim of a slow-motion attempted murder by the combined forces of the American, British and Australian state apparatuses.

There are ample grounds to accuse Washington, London and Canberra of calculating that Assange's death is preferable to the years-long and politically fraught process of extraditing him from the United Kingdom to the US for a show trial on charges of espionage.

Assange is being kept in solitary confinement for up to 21 to 23 hours per day. He has next to no access to outside information or telephone calls, a library and, above all, human interaction apart from with guards. When he does leave his cell, he is prevented from speaking with inmates and minimal time outside is spent alone. He is allowed only two one-hour personal visits per month, and even those have been subjected to provocative interference by the prison authorities. He has suffered significant weight loss and, according to those closest to him, some signs of mental disorientation, despite his determination to stand by his principles and his actions.

This treatment is being inflicted on a man who is being persecuted for the "crime" of telling the truth. He defied

the oppressive power of the US state and its allies and has therefore been subjected to a relentless campaign of personal slander and state persecution.

His abuse in Belmarsh is in stark contrast to that of convicted English fascist Tommy Robinson, who has publicly thanked the prison's governor for the extent of the liberties, visits and personal attention he was provided while he served barely 10 weeks of a 19-week custodial sentence.

Assange was hauled to the maximum-security prison on April 11, after the Ecuadorian government reneged on the political asylum it had granted him inside its embassy in London. He sought sanctuary in the small building on June 17, 2012 only after, in a procession of judicial travesties, British courts repeatedly upheld a warrant for his extradition to Sweden to answer questions—not even charges—over fabricated allegations of sexual assault.

The sole motive behind the Swedish pursuit of Assange was to extradite him on to the US. It is well-known that a secret grand jury empanelled in Virginia by the Obama administration in late 2010 indicted Assange for WikiLeaks' publication of US military and diplomatic secrets leaked by whistle-blower Chelsea Manning.

For close to seven years, Assange endured what the United Nations formally assessed as "arbitrary detention" and "torture" at the hands of the United Kingdom. British authorities rejected requests that he be permitted to leave the small embassy for sunlight or to receive medical treatment without facing immediate arrest. The protests of the UN were dismissed.

Even after the fraudulent investigation against Assange was finally abandoned by Sweden in 2017, the British government did not relent. Instead, it collaborated as Washington pressured Ecuador to cut off all Assange's communications and, ultimately, to renege on its provision of asylum. Throughout this entire time, successive Australian governments, as part of their sordid strategic alliance with the US, fully supported the flagrant violations of its own citizens' rights and liberty and refused to raise a word in his defence.

The custodial period of the vindictive and rare 50-week sentence imposed on Assange for violating his bail terms ended on September 22. Under normal circumstances on a minor bail-related matter, a person would have been released. But in the case of Julian Assange, nothing has proceeded in a “normal” fashion. Fundamental, and in some cases centuries-old democratic and legal rights and precedents have been cast aside.

The latest example, of too many to list in one article, was on September 13. British judge Vanessa Baraitser pre-empted even an application for Assange’s release and ordered that he remain incarcerated on the pretext he would “abscond again” from the extradition trial that is set to begin on February 25, 2020.

The ruling effectively condemned Assange to Belmarsh for years. His legal team would be expected to appeal all the way to the highest court to prevent his rendition to the US, where he faces a life sentence of 175 years on 17 charges of espionage and one of conspiracy.

In an act of sheer brutality, Chelsea Manning has been re-imprisoned by American courts for refusing to testify to the grand jury impanelled by the Trump administration that indicted Assange. She could be detained until late 2020 if the grand jury serves out its entire 18-month term. In addition, she is being vindictively fined \$1,000 per day, threatening her with nearly \$450,000 in fines and financial bankruptcy. The American state is attempting to force her to retract her repeated evidence that Assange played no part in obtaining the leaked information.

The international working class is the only social force that can compel the American, British and Australian governments to end their collective persecution of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning. A movement must be forged around the world that is orientated to the independent mobilisation of workers and young people in political protest, strikes and other industrial action that demand governments act to release them.

Appeals to the moral conscience of the US, UK or Australian governments are worse than useless. They uphold the class interests of the imperialist ruling elite and they are determined to destroy all independent media that expose the lies that support their wars, intrigues and other crimes. WikiLeaks, Assange and Manning are being persecuted to intimidate and silence all would-be whistleblowers, principled journalists and advocates for political and social change.

The Democratic Party in the US, with the complicity of Bernie Sanders and so-called “left” Democrats, has been at the forefront of seeking Assange’s extradition.

In Britain, absolutely no confidence can be extended to the Labour Party or its leader Jeremy Corbyn, who, by his silence, is fully supporting the judicial charade underway to justify Assange’s illegal rendition to the US.

In Australia, no parliamentary party is demanding that the government cease collaborating with the persecution of one of its citizens by the United Kingdom and the United States. In the case of the Australian Greens, it is so determined to avoid any criticism by the official political and media establishment that it is defying the sentiment of its own grass-roots membership.

The thoroughly pro-big business and corrupted trade union bureaucracies have rejected every appeal made to them to oppose the flagrant attack on democratic rights taking place.

Even more glaring is the silence of the pseudo-left organisations internationally. A range of such formations, from the Democratic Socialists of America, to the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party in the UK, to Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative in Australia, boycott every action taken in defence of Assange in order not to disrupt their subservient relations with the establishment parties and the trade unions.

The campaign to free Assange and Manning is inseparable from the fight for a rebellion against the political and trade union apparatuses, who seek to keep the working class tied to capitalism. The campaign for their defence must be taken into the workplaces, to the universities and to the schools, and into the working-class suburbs.

This is the orientation of the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Parties. We appeal for the closest collaboration with all those who are prepared to fight the bureaucratic stranglehold of despised pro-imperialist organisations over the working class, so the full weight of its strength can be unleashed to prevent the state persecution and threatened murder of Julian Assange.



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