

Julian Assange calls for workers to organise in his defence

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In a letter to a supporter in France, imprisoned WikiLeaks' publisher Julian Assange urged workers to take action in their workplaces to fight for his freedom, including through the establishment of "blocs" in their trade unions.

The appeal is a significant political statement. It follows previous letters in which he has stressed the need for public protests and campaigns that mobilise the opposition that exists in the working class to the attempt to extradite him from Britain to the US, where he faces life imprisonment for publishing leaks that exposed American war crimes and anti-democratic diplomatic conspiracies.

Assange's letter, sent in reply to a supporter in France, was published by the Unity4JFrançais Twitter account when it was received on November 3. It is among the first publicly-released letters from Assange since British authorities at the maximum-security Belmarsh Prison imposed an illegal blockade on his correspondence some months ago.

The full text of the appeal reads: "Dear Anne-Marie—you ask what you can do to fight for my freedom? Use your strategic skills, friends, resources and associations. If you are a nurse, gather nurses, form a bloc in the nurses union, etc! JPA [Julian Paul Assange]."

Assange's use of the term "bloc" is striking. Historically, it has been used to describe an organised fraction that fights within a union to change its official policy, above all by campaigning among rank-and-file workers. This includes the passage of motions and demands for political and industrial action and other initiatives that mobilise the strength of the working class. If the union apparatus does not respond, "blocs" seek their removal and replacement, or establish new, independent organisations.

Assange's appeal comes amid the refusal of the trade unions to take any action in his defence.

This includes the unions in Britain, where he is being held as a political prisoner by the Conservative government; their counterparts in the United States, where the Trump administration and the Democratic Party are seeking to imprison him for life or worse for publishing the truth; and those in Australia, the country that owes Assange legal protection as a result of his citizenship.

In Britain, the unions have not organised a single action to oppose Assange's imprisonment or to demand that the government block his extradition.

Their attitude was summed up at a meeting of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) in May. While posturing as defenders of press freedom, the union officials were openly hostile to a delegation of Assange supporters. NUJ General Secretary Michelle Stanistreet obscenely declared: "To focus on Assange would be offensive to the memory of those who have been killed all over the world."

The unions are campaigning in the current general election for Labour, whose leader Jeremy Corbyn has maintained a complicit silence on Assange's persecution. Corbyn has acceded to a purge demanded by the right wing of his own party against the few prominent members who have spoken out against imperialist war and in defence of the WikiLeaks founder.

In the US, the unions are campaigning for the Democrats, whose leading figures have spearheaded the unprecedented pursuit of Assange.

For its part, the Australian Council of Trade Unions, which claims to represent millions of workers, has not seen fit to issue a single statement in defence of Assange since his arrest on April 11. The Media,

Entertainment and Arts Alliance, which covers journalists, has broken a years-long silence on Assange's plight with a handful of tokenistic statements and events, while refusing to call any action in his defence.

The Australian unions are completely integrated with the Labor Party, which in 2010 initiated the collaboration of successive governments with the US-led vendetta against Assange and is an unalloyed supporter of the US-Australia military alliance.

The perfidious role of the trade unions internationally in regard to Assange and the fight to defend freedom of speech is not an aberration. It flows from their function as a political and industrial police force for big business and governments, against the workers they falsely claim to represent.

In response to the globalisation of production, the unions have taken their nationalist and pro-capitalist program to its logical conclusion. They have dispensed with reformist policies and emerged as the most ruthless advocates of ensuring the "international competitiveness" of their "own" corporations. For the past four decades, the unions around the world have collaborated in the imposition of a relentless assault on workers' jobs, wages and conditions, and the suppression of fundamental democratic rights.

This pro-business agenda is now encountering mass opposition.

Assange's appeal to rank-and-file workers comes amid a resurgence of the international working class. Explosive strikes and political demonstrations—organised outside of, and in opposition to the old labour and union organisations—have erupted around the world. In the US and Britain, strikes are breaking out at a level unseen for decades.

The eruption of class struggle is being impelled by immense hostility to unprecedented social inequality, and the use of authoritarian methods by governments around the world to enforce an agenda of austerity and imperialist war.

There is a deep-going relationship between Assange's persecution and the attempts by governments to repress the emerging global movement of the working class. The US-led pursuit of Assange has always been aimed at intimidating anyone who exposes government and corporate criminality and establishing a precedent for the ruthless suppression of

independent media that reports the truth.

For this reason, the fight for Assange's freedom is inextricably tied to the struggle for all of the social and democratic rights of the working class and against the intensifying drive to war.

The WSWs urges workers to act on Assange's appeal. At factories and workplaces, "blocs," or independent rank-and-file committees, should be established that move resolutions and coordinate actions demanding the immediate and unconditional release of Assange, Chelsea Manning and all other falsely imprisoned journalists and whistleblowers. In the US, Britain and Australia, strikes and political demonstrations are required to compel the governments of those countries to end their flagrant vendetta against Assange and drop all charges against him.

The WSWs and Socialist Equality Parties will take Assange's message to workplaces internationally. We encourage all other defenders of Assange and democratic rights to do the same.



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