Opposing NATO and Trump means fighting to free Julian Assange!

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The Socialist Equality Party calls on all those protesting NATO and the visit to the UK by US President Donald Trump today to make the demand to free Wikileaks founder Julian Assange the spearhead of an international movement against war.

At today's protest, those present will hear speakers from the Stop the War Coalition calling for an anti-war Labour government that ends the "special relationship" with the US that has produced wars all over the world and condemning President Donald Trump for interfering in Britain's general election.

But what do such statements amount to when Assange's brutal incarceration in Belmarsh maximum security prison testifies to the naked criminality of British imperialism?

Assange faces extradition to the US on espionage charges carrying a 175-year sentence. He is desperately ill, having suffered a decade of arbitrary detention. UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Nils Melzer, has warned that the effects of psychological torture, in a conspiracy involving five states—the US, UK, Australia, Sweden and Ecuador, means that he could die in prison. More than 70 medical doctors have issued an open letter to Conservative government Home Secretary Priti Patel and Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott condemning Britain's denial of adequate medical care to Assange and calling for his immediate transfer to a university teaching hospital.

Assange has been targeted above all because he exposed war crimes committed by the US and the UK in Afghanistan and Iraq. But the "collateral murder" video, showing a US helicopter crew mowing down Reuters journalists in Iraq in 2007, is only the most well-known expose by WikiLeaks of imperialist criminality worldwide that has earned Assange the undying hatred of Washington and London.

Only last week, WikiLeaks published an internal email written by a member of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) fact-finding mission to Syria, exposing efforts to suppress and distort evidence to claim that the government of Bashar al-Assad was responsible for the alleged April 7, 2018 gas attack in Douma. The alleged attack was used to justify US, British and French air and missile strikes. The leak showed the report was doctored to conceal evidence refuting official claims of a chemical gas attack.

The aim of Trump and Boris Johnson is to either send Assange to the US, lock him up and throw away the key, or subject him to such psychological and physical cruelty that he dies in prison.

His persecution is a warning to all those who stand against war and colonial-style exploitation of what their own fate might be. It can only be answered by a mass movement ready to defy all such intimidation. Someone celebrated as a hero by hundreds of millions was turned into a pariah by the world's media, major parties—including the Labour Party—and the various pseudo-left groups who refused to challenge the trumped-up sex allegations used to blacken his name. Sweden's nine-year "preliminary investigation" was abandoned last month, for the third and final time, having never led to a single charge being made against Assange—proving once and for all his insistence that the real issue was always the threat of extradition to the US.

No anti-war movement worthy of the name can allow such an obscenity to go unchallenged! Assange must be freed and allowed to return to his family and other loved ones in Australia.

Assange is the most important political prisoner in the world today. His treatment is a warning that imperialist

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war is inevitably accompanied by a frontal assault on democratic rights.

Britain's repressive laws, media and internet censorship, and spying on its citizens, are among the most draconian in the world. Even now Johnson wants to make this election about terror, law and order and "national security", using the terrible events on London Bridge. But the treatment meted out to Assange, the systematic abrogation of his democratic rights, is the highest expression of this turn to authoritarian rule.

The UK government rejected out of hand UN findings that Assange was subjected to arbitrary detention and to psychological torture. He was seized from the Ecuadorian embassy in defiance of international law, imprisoned on a minor bail violation and kept in prison after that draconian sentence ended, without proper medical treatment or the conditions necessary to prepare his defence, based on ludicrous claims that one of the most famous and recognisable individuals in the world is a "flight risk."

The full extent of official criminality has now been exposed by a Spanish investigation into illegal spying on Assange in the Ecuadoran embassy in London by private security form UC Global. *El País* reported that UC Global allegedly passed film footage and sound recordings to the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)—including discussions with his lawyers—meaning that there can be no chance of a fair trial in February and that all proceedings should automatically be quashed.

The most dangerous argument made, even by those expressing sympathy for Assange, is that his supporters should "go easy" over any criticism of the refusal of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and Abbott to demand his release. The last time either spoke in his defence was in April. Both retreated as soon as the Blairites attacked, with Corbyn declaring that Assange's extradition to the US was "a matter for the courts in Britain" and that if Sweden "reinstated" its case against him then he must answer "the accusations made against him."

There has still been no mention of Assange's plight, even after Sweden dropped its investigation. There is nothing in Labour's manifesto, nothing has been said during the entire election campaign and nothing will be said during Trump's visit. In this way Labour plays the key role in isolating Assange and facilitating Trump's vendetta.

Corbyn's defenders also urge silence for fear of politically embarrassing him at a time when he is already under attack, arguing that a Labour government elected on December 12 is Assange's best chance for freedom. This is a political trap. Only a mass movement from below can force the government, Labour or Tory, to pardon Assange and veto his extradition.

The SEP, our sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International and the *World Socialist Web Site* call on workers, young people, intellectuals, artists, medical staff, lawyers and civil rights campaigners to take their place in the global campaign to free Assange.

Assange and heroic whistle-blower Chelsea Manning are prisoners of the class war. The only force capable of defeating the combined efforts of US and British imperialism, their courts, their media, their parties and their intelligence agencies is the international working class, the most powerful social force on the planet.

Only a mass movement of the working class, cutting across all political divisions, can free Assange and take forward the struggle against war and in defence of fundamental democratic rights.

We urge all those who recognise the fundamental issues at stake:

- Hold meetings in workplaces, schools, colleges and universities to build support for Assange's freedom.
- Pass resolutions demanding an immediate end to the US extradition proceedings.
- Organise delegations and make plans to attend the mass protest planned outside Belmarsh for the beginning of court proceedings February 24.

Contact the SEP to join the fight.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

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