

An Open Letter to fellow Educators: Take a stand with Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning

James McDonald
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In the interests of journalistic freedom, truth and the rule of law, it is imperative that teachers in the US and internationally take a principled stance in defense of Julian Assange.

Assange, the investigative journalist and founder of Wikileaks, is being held in Britain's maximum-security Belmarsh prison in virtual solitary confinement. His health has deteriorated drastically since his imprisonment in May. In November, 60 doctors signed an open letter warning that he could die in prison. He is scheduled to appear in court in February for a hearing to determine whether the United Kingdom will extradite him to the United States where the government has prepared to charge him under the Espionage Act.

Assange is guilty of nothing more than exposing to the world the US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the infamous Democratic National Committee (DNC) emails of 2016 that revealed the DNC acted illegally to thwart the candidacy of Senator Bernie Sanders for president. This political vendetta against a journalist, in opposition to international law, is being spearheaded by the US government, military and intelligence agencies.

The government's own documents brought to light by Wikileaks have demonstrated that all of the imperialist wars in the Middle East were based on lies. Only last week, Wikileaks released documents revealing serious objections from within the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to the watchdog group's public report of 2019 that blamed Syria's Assad government for an alleged chlorine gas attack on the Syrian city of Douma in April 2018. The files released by Wikileaks not only suggest that evidence of a chemical attack was planted, but that photos of alleged victims, showing people foaming at the mouth, indicate these people exhibited signs of exposure to sarin

gas, not chlorine. The Trump administration used the doctored OPCW report, released well after the fact, to justify the launching of a direct assault on Syria, where Russian forces were stationed in defense of the Assad regime. The attack could have triggered World War III.

Exposures like this demonstrate just why the US ruling elite are so desperate to destroy Assange and whistleblowers like Chelsea Manning. It was Manning, then an Army private, who leaked over 750,000 classified and unclassified documents to Wikileaks implicating US forces in war crimes in Iraq, including the infamous "Collateral Murder" video. For her principled act, Manning was incarcerated and tortured in US military prisons. Although released in 2017, Manning is back in prison for refusing to testify against Assange.

All defenders of democratic principles and rights should be concerned with the fates of Assange and Manning. A journalist and a whistleblower, they are being persecuted for revealing to the world the ugly truth about imperialist power.

But why should teachers in particular come to their defense?

As teachers know well, public education is under attack, in the US and internationally. This attack is not simply a matter of governmental cost cutting or the privatization of education through for-profit charter schools. The attack on education is an attack on the working class and especially the youth. A government that serves the interests of a wealthy elite fears nothing so much as truth, and the prospect of a truly educated population, capable of dismantling lies and discerning truth, is anathema to such a government. The persecution of Assange and Manning is part of this attack on truth and the working class.

From overcrowded classrooms to outdated textbooks,

from inadequate pay and benefits to dumbed-down curricula, teachers see firsthand the means by which the ruling elite carry out their war on public education. They have also seen how this war has been prosecuted by Democrats and Republicans alike, by Barack Obama and Arne Duncan as surely as by Donald Trump and Betsy DeVos.

Teachers have fought back valiantly in defense of education, not only in their everyday work in the classroom but over the past two years in the form of city-wide and even statewide strikes. These strikes have put demands for quality of education on a par with demands for better pay and benefits, and for this reason have seen overwhelming support from students and parents. But they have not been supported by the politically bankrupt teachers' unions, which are part of the apparatus of the elite and whose chief purpose is to provide an ever-cheaper work force and to prevent strikes. Predictably, the unions have failed to issue any support to Assange and Manning, but instead are lining up behind various pro-war Democratic candidates for president.

It is up to teachers to continue the struggle for education and truth, and this means a struggle independent of the traitorous unions. Teachers must form their own rank-and-file committees and join ranks with a whole new generation of students looking for a path of struggle against war and censorship.

The defense of the courageous Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning is a responsibility of the working class. His persecution is our persecution, his struggle for truth is our struggle for truth. Teachers should take their place in this fight to defend the democratic rights of the whole working class and a future for the next generation.

Fraternally,
James McDonald



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