

Montreal SEP Canada meeting demands freedom for Assange and Manning

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) of Canada held a public meeting in Montreal last Sunday as part of the global campaign mounted by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International to demand the release of WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange and whistleblower Chelsea Manning. They are being persecuted by the ruling class for exposing war crimes committed by the US and its allies, including Canada, in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Assange is threatened with extradition to the US to face a show trial and up to 175 years in prison. He is currently being held in a high-security prison in London, where several doctors have warned that he is subject to psychological torture and “dying slowly.” As for Manning, she is imprisoned in Virginia for refusing to testify against Assange.

The main address at the Montreal meeting was given by SEP National Secretary Keith Jones. He began by establishing the purpose of the meeting. “A key first step in this campaign is to break through the wall of silence the Canadian political establishment and media have erected around the persecution of Julian Assange, the founder and publisher of Wikileaks, and Chelsea Manning.”

Jones returned to this theme later, noting that the entire political establishment is ready to see Assange subjected to exemplary punishment for exposing imperialist crimes. “This is true not only of the Liberals, Conservatives and Parti Quebecois, but also of the ostensibly progressive parties, the NDP, the Greens, and Quebec Solidaire.”

Jones explained why the Canadian ruling elite and its media are hostile to Assange and Manning. “Because Canadian imperialism is Washington’s closest ally and even more fundamentally because the Canadian

bourgeoisie has no solution to the growing crisis of world capitalism other than aggression abroad and class war at home, the Canadian establishment supports the persecution of Assange and Manning and is moving to assert control over the internet.”

Jones went on to say: “Assange and Manning are not just the victims of a vindictive legal vendetta mounted by some of the world’s most powerful governments—a vendetta meant to intimidate and silence all those who would seek to expose the crimes of US imperialism and its allies. In their persecution of Assange, the US and British governments are attacking and seeking to eviscerate core democratic rights, including the rights of free speech, to political asylum, and to due process.”

Jones called on those present at the meeting to fight to mobilize the Canadian and international working class in defence of Assange and Manning. After decades of being stifled by trade unions and social democratic parties like the NDP, the working class, he explained, is re-emerging on Canada and around the world as a powerful social force.

The Montreal meeting heard a contribution by Oscar Grenfell in the form of an audio message. Grenfell is an Australian reporter for the *World Socialist Web Site* who is playing a leading role in the struggle to free Assange. He said: “It is no exaggeration to state that outside of our international party, there is no other political tendency in the world leading a struggle in defence of Assange, who, it could be argued, is the world’s foremost political prisoner.

“The question may be raised,” continued Grenfell, “why is it that we have placed such stress on the need to block Assange’s extradition, and emphasised the importance of this struggle for the working class as a whole?

“Firstly, our defence of Assange is part of our

struggle against imperialism and the threat of world war. The ruling elites are seeking to silence him and WikiLeaks to prevent exposures of the new wars they are preparing, including against Iran, North Korea, Russia and China. As in the world wars of last century, military conflict, opposed by the vast mass of the population, means repression.

“Secondly, our fight for Assange’s freedom is a key component of the campaign we are waging against internet censorship. Since 2017, Google, Facebook and other internet conglomerates have enacted measures to artificially limit the audience of progressive, socialist and anti-war websites, including WikiLeaks and the WSWS. This is part of the turn by capitalist governments all over the world to authoritarianism, in response to an upsurge of the working class, and the first stages of workers organising independently of the corporatised trade unions.

“Thirdly, our defence of Assange arises from our fight for all of the social and democratic rights of the working class and for socialism. Trotsky and other leading Marxists emphasised the centrality of the struggle for democratic rights to the fight for socialism. In a period of capitalist breakdown, when the ruling elites hurtle towards dictatorship and social inequality becomes incompatible with the old democratic trappings, it falls to the working class and its leadership to defend all remaining civil liberties.”

The reports were followed by a lively period of discussion. A question was asked about the SEP’s call to turn to the international working class to secure the release of Assange and Manning. “But why hasn’t the working class intervened yet?”, asked a member of the audience.

The speakers explained that workers were motivated by a strong anti-war sentiment and a rejection of growing social inequality, but that their opposition has been suppressed by the pro-capitalist unions and social-democratic politicians, and their pseudo-left backers. The massive 2012 Quebec student strike was a case in point. Just as workers began to pour into the streets to defend the students against state repression, opening the possibility of a broad counteroffensive against the entire austerity program of the capitalist elite, the unions intervened to shut the strike down and channel the anger against the Charest Liberal government behind the pro-austerity Parti Québécois. “One has to

identify the different political tendencies at work in a movement,” Jones explained.

Other questions focused on the significance of the “Yellow Vests” movement in France, and the view that one must oppose the entire capitalist system to fight war and social inequality. The speakers emphasized the objective source of the re-emergence of mass working class struggles—the advanced crisis of the capitalist system—and the need to arm these struggles with a socialist internationalist political perspective based on the lessons of history.



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