Free Julian Assange! Defend Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden!

The Socialist Equality Party (Australia)
27 August 2020

The following resolution was unanimously adopted by the Fifth National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) held on August 14–16, 2020. The main Congress resolution *was published on the WSWS yesterday.*

This congress of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) commits to intensifying the fight for the unconditional freedom of WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange. He is a class-war prisoner, who is being persecuted by the major imperialist powers, solely because of his services to the international working class in exposing illegal wars, mass surveillance operations and global diplomatic intrigues. The SEP and the ICFI also salute the courageous stand of whistleblower Chelsea Manning, who, after being imprisoned for 7 years and 217 days, was in 2019 jailed for another 18 months for refusing to give perjured testimony in Grand Jury hearings against Assange.

We defend all journalists and whistleblowers facing persecution for revealing government crimes. This includes Edward Snowden, who exposed massive global spying operations on the world's population by the US National Security Agency in 2013. The ongoing pursuit of Snowden, who was forced to seek asylum in Russia, has exposed the utterly threadbare character of capitalist democracy in the major imperialist centres, as well as the hypocrisy of the US-led claims that regimes in its crosshairs are engaged in "hacking" and "foreign interference."

In March 2018, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Parties around the world, intensified their decade-long struggle in defence of Assange's fundamental democratic rights. This was inseparably connected with the ICFI's fight against internet censorship, which was being conducted by Google, Facebook and other multinational corporations, on behalf of the US government. It took place in response to an escalating assault on Assange himself. The ICFI characterised the defence of Julian Assange as the high point in the fight for democratic rights.

This campaign has been entirely vindicated. Two and a half years since the ICFI made the defence of Assange a central focus of its work, the US-led vendetta against him has dramatically escalated. The WikiLeaks founder was illegally expelled from Ecuador's London embassy, where he resided as a political refugee, recognised by the United Nations (UN), and was brutally arrested by the British police on April 11, 2019. He has since been held at the maximum-security Belmarsh Prison, alongside terrorists and murderers, in conditions of virtual solitary confinement. Assange's health has deteriorated, to the point where close contacts have warned that he may die behind bars, and he has been exposed to the danger of coronavirus infection. At the same time, his access to lawyers and relatives has been severely restricted.

The decision of the US administration of President Donald Trump to charge Assange with 18 offences, including 17 under the American Espionage Act, was a watershed in the global assault on democratic rights. Assange faces criminal prosecution, and life in a US Supermax prison—or worse—for revealing true information, in the public interest, as a journalist and publisher. All of the discredited slanders, relating to concocted Swedish sexual misconduct allegations, and the absurd assertion that Assange has functioned as an agent of the Russian government—whose crimes WikiLeaks has exposed—have been revealed as lies concocted by the intelligence agencies.

As WikiLeaks, the ICFI and the SEPs have warned, the US charges against Assange have opened the

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floodgates for a stepped-up persecution of journalists internationally. Reporters who have fallen foul of the Trump administration have been threatened and assaulted; France has moved to prosecute those journalists who have exposed its imperialist machinations in the Middle East. Likewise, journalists in Australia have been raided for exposing war crimes and plans for expanded mass government surveillance, and threatened with criminal charges.

The SEP in Australia has held several powerful events, including public protests and meetings, demanding that the Australian government fulfill its obligations to Assange, as an Australian citizen and journalist. Leading defenders of civil liberties, including globally acclaimed investigative journalist, John Pilger, have participated in these initiatives.

The SEP has insisted that the Australian government will only take action to secure Assange's liberty—as it is required to do under domestic and international law—if it is compelled to do so by mass pressure from below.

This stance is supported by the record of the past ten years. It was the Greens-backed Labor government of Julia Gillard that began Australia's criminal collaboration in the persecution of Assange, falsely claiming, in 2010, that WikiLeaks had broken Australian laws, and pledging to assist US intelligence agencies in their campaign to destroy the publishing organisation. Every government since, including the current Liberal-National Coalition of Prime Minister Scott Morrison, has ruthlessly dismissed calls to defend Assange, while cultivating ever-closer relations with his chief persecutors.

This complicity extends throughout the entire media and political establishment, encompassing the "liberal media," the Greens, who have done virtually nothing in support of Assange, and the pseudo-left, which abandoned him years ago, as part of the turn by their upper middle-class constituency towards open alignment with imperialist war, along with their support for reactionary identity politics.

The criminal role of the official Australian parties in the Assange case is inseparable from their support for the US-Australia military alliance, and the preparations by American imperialism for new wars, including against nuclear-armed China. This goes hand-in-hand with stepped-up repression within Australia, aimed at suppressing mass opposition to war, social inequality and authoritarianism.

Internationally, claims that a "left-wing" section of the political establishment will act in defence of Assange have been refuted no less decisively. Jeremy Corbyn, who occasionally described himself as a socialist, remained silent on Assange throughout his tenure as leader of the British Labour Party, in line with his continuous capitulations to the rightwing of his own party. Bernie Sanders, who claimed to be waging a "political revolution" within the US Democratic Party, would not even mention Assange's name, and has since endorsed Joe Biden, one of Assange's chief persecutors, as a candidate in the American presidential election.

The SEP insists that the only way to block Assange's extradition to the US and secure his freedom is through the development of a mass international movement, centred in the working class. Millions of workers have entered into explosive struggles over the past years, including in Britain, the US, and, increasingly, in Australia. These will intensify over the coming period. The task of all those fighting for Assange's freedom, including the SEP, is to turn to this movement, and to explain that the fight for the WikiLeaks founder's liberty must be inscribed on the banner of every struggle in defence of democratic rights, for social equality and against war.

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