

As British show-trial resumes: The working class must defend Julian Assange!

Oscar Grenfell
7 September 2020

The latest stage in the decade-long persecution of Julian Assange begins today, with the final three weeks of British court hearings for the extradition of the WikiLeaks publisher to the US, where he faces 175 years in prison for exposing American war crimes, human rights violations, coups and meddling operations around the world.

Whatever the court decides will likely be subject to years of legal appeal, but the scenario that Assange has warned of for the past ten years—that he risks being hauled before a secret US court, prosecuted for lawful publishing activities and thrown into a hellhole run by his CIA persecutors—is all too real.

The innumerable pundits and media commentators who derided these warnings as a conspiracy theory and promoted the slanders used to undermine public support for Assange have fallen silent. The legal travesty underway in the land of the Magna Carta either goes unmentioned in the official press, or is discreetly buried in brief columns halfway through the papers.

The hearings are only proceeding because the attempt of the British state to kill Assange by exposing him to the danger of coronavirus infection has so far failed.

Throughout the pandemic, Assange has been held in the maximum-security Belmarsh Prison, where he has been denied a mask or any other protection, even as dozens of inmates and staff have contracted COVID-19. A bail application has been contemptuously dismissed, despite the fact that Assange has been convicted of no crime, as have warnings that his health continues to deteriorate.

Assange, facing the most consequential legal proceedings of his life, has been unable to meet with his lawyers for the past six months. Weeks before the resumption of the trial, US prosecutors filed a superseding indictment, based on the lies and slanders of FBI informants, over a year after they were required to submit their final charge sheet. The transparent purpose was to

inundate Assange's legal team with tens of thousands of documents, after they had finished preparing their case, to prevent even the possibility of a defence.

As a matter of law, the US extradition request should have been thrown out as soon as it was submitted.

It violates innumerable treaties, laws and international conventions, including a ban on extraditions from Britain to the US for political offenses, prohibitions on the refoulement of those who have secured asylum to their persecutors and an absolute proscription on subjecting anyone to the likelihood of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, which Assange would unquestionably face in the US.

The WikiLeaks founder's defence is expected to submit detailed evidence establishing that the CIA illegally surveilled Assange when he was a political refugee in Ecuador's London embassy. His legal meetings were intercepted, in a flagrant breach of attorney-client privilege, and his infant child was spied upon, in a violation of fundamental human rights.

Despite the lawlessness, the hearings proceed, with the backing of the entire British political, media and legal establishment. The case is overseen by a judge whose husband has the closest ties to the intelligence agencies and the military. The Conservative government and the Labour opposition explicitly support the show-trial. The unions and the pseudo-left are opposed to any defence of Assange.

The line-up is proof that the only viable political strategy to fight for Assange's freedom is one based upon the independent mobilisation of the working class against all of the official parties and the profit system that they defend.

Assange's dire plight cannot be understood in isolation. It is one of the sharpest expressions of a turn to authoritarianism and censorship by governments around the world, amid a breakdown of capitalism, an escalation

of imperialist militarism and the emergence of major class struggles.

The very governments persecuting Assange are at war with the population. In Britain, the US and Australia they have pursued a homicidal response to the pandemic, based on exposing millions of workers to a deadly virus so that capitalist production and corporate profits can continue.

Ordinary people are being made to pay for the economic crisis accelerated by the pandemic. Mass unemployment, the gutting of welfare and jobless payments and a stepped-up assault on wages and conditions goes hand in hand with government handouts of trillions of dollars to the banks, financial speculators and oligarchs.

The class war at home is accompanied by escalating war abroad, exemplified by continuous US provocations and threats against China and Russia, which risk a global nuclear conflagration.

None of this is compatible with democratic norms. Well aware that their criminal policies are inflaming mass social and political opposition from below, the ruling elites are responding with the blunt instruments of repression.

The US authorities, who want to destroy Assange, have, for the past three months, overseen state violence against mass protests in opposition to police killings. The turn to dictatorial methods is epitomised by Trump's threats to illegally deploy the military against domestic opposition and his attempts to cultivate a fascist movement.

His nominal opponent, Democratic Party presidential candidate Joe Biden, is rallying support from war criminals and the intelligence agencies. Biden's program is internet censorship, military confrontation with Russia and China and trillions more for Wall Street.

The unanimity of the ruling elite in the assault on democratic rights is summed-up by the fact that the two official candidates in November's US presidential election, Biden and Trump, both support the prosecution of Assange, which is a frontal assault on the press freedom enshrined in the US Constitution by the American Revolution. A similar bipartisanship is evident in every other country.

Desperate illusions that a section of the political establishment would come to Assange's aid now take on the character of hopeless delusions.

Former British Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, who occasionally claimed to be a socialist, refused to defend Assange and has handed over control of the party to the Blairites. Bernie Sanders, who said that he was waging a "political revolution" through the big business

Democratic Party, but would not even mention Assange's name, is Biden's most enthusiastic supporter.

The promotion of such bankrupt figures, including by organisations like the official Don't Extradite Assange campaign group, has only served to demobilise and disorient the latent mass support for the WikiLeaks founder, and direct it behind the very forces responsible for Assange's persecution.

Experience has shown that the social force that can and must take forward the fight for his freedom is the international working class. All over the world, teachers, auto workers, medical staff and many others are entering into struggle against the governments and corporate elites that have imperilled their lives during the pandemic, and attacked their social and democratic rights.

The persecution of Assange is not only aimed at silencing forever a courageous journalist and publisher who has exposed historic war crimes. It is an attempt to intimidate this emerging movement and establish a precedent for far broader victimisations and frame-ups.

But just as the working class will not accept the turn towards dictatorship, so it must defend Assange.

The *World Socialist Web Site* appeals to workers, students and young people to become active in the fight to block Assange's extradition and secure his unconditional release. The fight for his freedom is your fight! It is inseparable from your struggles against inequality, the corporate onslaught on social conditions and the capitalist system that is responsible for the global crisis.

We encourage the broadest meetings and discussions in neighbourhoods, schools, universities and workplaces, along with public protests and rallies, where it is safe for them to be held. Resolutions should be adopted at workplaces, demanding an end to the persecution of Assange and calling on other sections of the working class to join this struggle.

Sign up to the WSWWS Assange newsletter. Become active in the fight for press freedom, democratic rights, an end to imperialist war, and for socialism.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)