

Assange extradition decision due January 4: Mobilise the working class to secure his freedom!

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The UK courts will decide on Monday January 4 whether WikiLeaks founder and journalist Julian Assange should be extradited to the United States. He faces a life sentence on charges under the Espionage Act for exposing war crimes and coup plots, torture and other human rights abuses, state corruption and spying.

A decision to extradite is all but assured. The hearing was a pseudo-legal travesty which saw Assange's basic democratic rights trampled. Presiding district judge Vanessa Baraitser has treated Assange with undisguised hostility throughout the proceedings. Her supervisor, Lady Emma Arbuthnot, is married to a government figure named personally in the WikiLeaks exposures.

A decision either way will be met with an appeal, leading to months or even years more legal battles. All the while, Assange will be kept imprisoned in Belmarsh maximum security prison in London, at grave risk to his life.

Monday's hearing nevertheless marks an important new stage in the decade-long persecution of the most significant journalist of the twenty-first century.

Assange's legal team have torn to shreds the frame-up mounted against him by the US government. They have demonstrated that US prosecutors have fundamentally misrepresented the facts of the case, that the US Justice Department has not proceeded in good faith, and that they are seeking extradition for a political offence—barred under the Anglo-US Extradition Treaty.

They have shown how the request breaks statutory bars against extraditing anyone at risk of being punished “on account of his... political opinions” or discriminated against during legal proceedings because of those opinions, or anyone whose extradition would be “unjust and oppressive” on medical grounds. The extradition request threatens to violate Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, the right to freedom of expression; Article 7, the right against retroactive criminalisation; Article 6, the right to a fair trial; and Article 3, the right against inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

This demolition of the prosecution's arguments has stripped

bare the social interests behind Assange's vindictive treatment. He is being made an example of by the US and allied states to terrorise opposition to war and dictatorship, on behalf of their predatory ruling classes. His extradition hearing is a show trial organised to deliver a predetermined decision on a class war prisoner.

These social forces will not relent until they are made to, out of fear of a global mass movement for the WikiLeaks' founder's freedom.

There is a wellspring of popular support for Assange. WikiLeaks is celebrated by millions for having struck a blow against the brutal activities of American imperialism and its allies, including the UK. Assange's case is also understood as setting a precedent for a further assault on journalism and democratic rights.

Over 1,600 journalists in 99 countries have signed their names to an open letter demanding Assange's freedom. The letter's publication in December 2019 followed the establishment of the Doctors for Assange group one month earlier, bringing together medical professionals outraged at Assange's mistreatment. A Lawyers for Assange and an Artists for Assange group were founded earlier this year.

However, the social force capable of securing Assange's freedom and defending democratic rights, the international working class, has yet to be organised in his support.

Building the necessary campaign in the working class requires a political reckoning with the forces that have worked to isolate Assange. These include the media and civil rights organisations of the petty-bourgeois “liberal” fraternity, the pseudo-left and the trade union and Labour bureaucracy.

In its earlier years, WikiLeaks worked with newspapers and magazines like the *Guardian*, the *New York Times*, *Le Monde*, *Der Spiegel* and *El Pais* to publish its releases. From the beginning, these organisations sought to control the political fallout from the unprecedented exposures—profiting from the scoop along the way.

When Assange refused to retreat from the public's right to know and threatened to upset their cosy relationships with their respective ruling classes, they stabbed him in the back.

WikiLeaks' former "media partners" launched a systematic campaign to demonise Assange, promoting a manufactured Swedish sexual assault investigation and fabricated stories of collusion with the Russian state.

Pseudo-left organisations like the Socialist Workers Party in the UK and the International Socialist Organisation in the US, whose support for imperialist interventions under the fraudulent banner of "human rights" was threatened by the WikiLeaks revelations, joined the crusade. Their affluent middle-class constituency, steeped in identity politics, was only too happy to support Sweden's trumped-up insinuations of sexual assault.

The Labour Party "left" and trade union bureaucracy maintained a complicit silence throughout. Only in April 2019 did then Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn publicly oppose Assange's extradition to the US, before stating less than 48 hours later that his fate was "a matter for the courts." Corbyn kept silent on Assange's case throughout the December 2019 general election. Since being replaced as leader of the Labour Party, he has intermittently called on the British judiciary and Prime Minister Boris Johnson to block Assange's extradition.

In waging its campaign for Assange's freedom, the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* identified these developments as part of the lurch to the right in bourgeois politics—including its pseudo-left adjuncts—and proof of the fact that there was no constituency for democratic rights in any section of the ruling class. We insisted that the fight to defend Assange depended on a political struggle to alert workers and young people internationally to the issues involved in his persecution and organise them in opposition to the global turn to dictatorship and war.

The official Don't Extradite Assange (DEA) campaign group, formed at the end of 2019, has intervened to prevent these conclusions from being drawn and enforce a bankrupt orientation to the capitalist state. This has centred on its call that "left" and "right" must unite to secure Assange's freedom.

This initially took the form of promoting the pro-forma protests of a few Labour "lefts" and the belated cynical apologies of the *Guardian*—which is now so exposed over this issue that it published an editorial recently opposing Assange's extradition and urging, "Previous cases relating to Mr Assange should not be used to confuse the issue[!]. Sweden has dropped the investigation into an accusation of rape, which he denied." The *Guardian* places its confidence in President-elect Joe Biden, who infamously labelled Assange a "high-tech terrorist."

In recent weeks, the reactionary logic of the DEA's politics has reached its obscene conclusion—issuing friendly appeals to US President Donald Trump to grant Assange freedom. The president has issued a slew of pardons in recent weeks, prompting the DEA to promote the petition, "President Trump: Pardon Assange!" The DEA's Twitter feed has featured the neo-fascist Cassandra Fairbanks, Christian fundamentalist and former vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin, QAnon-

promoting Republican congresswoman-elect Marjorie Taylor Greene and far-right provocateur and Breitbart contributor James O'Keefe, among other similarly repulsive figures.

It is legitimate to seek a presidential pardon—Assange is owed that and more. But an address to Trump which seeks to advance the cause of democratic rights can only take the form of a demand on behalf of an opposed mass movement of the working class—one aimed squarely against Trump, the Republicans and Democrats.

The call being pushed by the DEA is instead an appeal to the non-existent democratic sensibilities of the fascistic gangster in the White House and his entourage. The petition is headed by an image of Trump with a speech bubble which reads, "[T]he First Amendment is vital to our country. We need a free press and a free exchange of ideas. We need citizens and the media to be free to criticize."

This comes in the same month as Trump pardoned members of the Blackwater mercenary group responsible for the Nisour Square massacre of 14 Iraqi citizens in 2007—one of the most egregious crimes in the savage war that Assange and WikiLeaks did so much to expose. Those appealing to the president likewise ignore his ongoing plans for a coup, including concerns that he might declare martial law under the pretext of launching a catastrophic military confrontation with Iran.

The orientation to Trump is the clearest possible proof that any perspective for the defence of Assange and democratic rights which bases itself on the capitalist state and its representatives is bankrupt. Since WikiLeaks published the Iraq and Afghan War Logs, the Guantanamo files and the US diplomatic cables, Assange's fate has been bound up with the struggle against imperialism and its political representatives. That struggle demands the construction of a mass socialist, anti-imperialist movement of the international working class. We call on all those who agree with this perspective to contact us today.



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