

Emmy Butlin and Maxine Walker of the UK Committee to Defend Julian Assange oppose Facebook censorship of the Socialist Equality Party/IYSSE

By our correspondent
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The WSWS has been sent letters from Emmy Butlin and Maxine Walker, of the Committee to Defend Julian Assange (JADC). The Socialist Equality Party in the UK has collaborated with the JADC in the fight to secure Assange's freedom and welcomes the principled stand of two of its leading members.

Emmy Butlin

I was with alarm that I read in the pages of wsws.org the onslaught of Facebook censorship experienced by SEP members and affiliated Facebook pages internationally. As a WikiLeaks supporter actively campaigning for justice and Freedom for Julian Assange for the last 10 years, I recall he sent a statement to wsws.org in January 2018 in the context of the WSWS webinar in "Organising Resistance to Internet Censorship". [See event here]

It reads: "The Future of humanity is the struggle between humans that control machines and machines that control humans. between the democratisation of communication and the usurpation of communication by artificial intelligence. While the internet has brought about a revolution in people's ability to educate themselves and others, the resulting democratic phenomena has shaken existing establishments to their core. Google, Facebook and their Chinese equivalents, who are socially logistically and financially integrated with existing elites have moved to re-establish discourse control. This is not simply a corrective action. Undetectable mass social influence powered by artificial intelligence is an existential threat to humanity. While still in its infancy the trends are clear

and of geometric nature. The phenomena differs in traditional attempts to shape cultural and political phenomena by operating at scale, speed and increasingly at a subtlety that eclipses human capacities. I commend WSWS for drawing attention to this phenomena."

From that year onwards SEP UK was with myself and others on the ground outside the Ecuadorian Embassy in London standing guard in defence of Julian Assange and your efforts continued through the many articles and through the pages of wsws.org, informing readers about the facts of his case, the establishment war against him, at the time a rare and exceptional voice in the English language publications.

In this our common struggle against censorship, I raised my voice on the 23rd of January this year at Twitter with a message to the many WikiLeaks supporters: "Unacceptable censorship attack by Facebook via purging left-wing pages and individuals, including the Socialist Equality Party an important ally in the struggle to Free Julian #Assange in Britain and Internationally. Read here "

I was not surprised at the solidarity shown by so many WikiLeaks supporters in condemning Facebook's censorious hand. But Facebook capitulated and the pages were restored. This was a taste of the world to come. This dystopian future must be resisted and it will require all our creativity and determination to do so.

Thank you

Emmy Butlin

Committee to Defend Julian Assange (JADC)

Maxine Walker

All socialist and progressive forces should take seriously the many warning shots that have been fired by the Big Tech monopolies in their increasing campaign of on-line censorship. The latest purge shut down Facebook accounts of several Socialist Equality Party sites as well as those of the Socialist Workers Party [UK].

They may have restored these sites claiming they had made a mistake (only the naive will believe this), but their guerrilla tactics will continue and intensify. This is the latest episode in a continuous process that has involved the shutting down of socialist and anti-imperialist sites by Facebook and Twitter, the rigging of Google searches to hide socialist and anti-imperialist sites and the de-monetising of radical sites on YouTube.

Tyrannical regimes throughout history have sought to stop the mouths of dissidents. Monarchs, emperors, religious leaders, bourgeois, and right-wing regimes have used censorship, persecution and murder to silence those whose truths would rouse the masses. Whilst capitalism in the modern age may have adopted abstract principles of free speech these have proved empty in times of crisis or threats from mass discontent. The US Sedition Act of 1918 was aimed at the anti-war and socialist movement and included harsh penalties for those who opposed war, insulted the US government, flag or Constitution. The socialist Eugene Debs was sentenced to 10 years after giving an anti-war speech.

Here in Britain, journalist and publisher Julian Assange remains in isolation in Belmarsh Maximum Security prison for revealing truths about US and British war and economic crimes. He faces a 175-year sentence in the USA should the US appeal against a British Court's refusal to extradite him succeed. Censorship never comes alone. Alongside censorship comes imprisonment, torture and worse.

The acute hardships facing working class people around the world, the revolting disparities in wealth that are displayed, will and are inevitably leading to discontent, struggle and a thirst for knowledge about the causes of the many crises facing humanity. Whilst the ruling classes are rich beyond the dreams of avarice, they are also worried. They have set up a tightly controlled surveillance state, are introducing new

repressive legislation and are in alliance with the Big Tech monopolies and military/intelligence services in order to shape and emphasise false narratives about their "shining" democracy, their wars and the coming austerity.

We are at a critical time. It is vital that progressive voices are not silenced. I would therefore call on all progressives, anti-war activists, socialists and anti-imperialists to unite in the fight against censorship. More than that, to recognize that the Lords of Big Tech in alliance with governments can pull the plug at any time. We need to fight for our right to remain on the Big Tech mass platforms but also prepare for the future. Alternative platforms need to be developed, alternative means of communication studied and tried.

Maxine Walker



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