

Defend Julian Assange, jailed for exposing the crimes of American and world imperialism

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The following speech was delivered by Tom Scripps, assistant national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in Britain, to the 2021 International May Day Online Rally held by the World Socialist Web Site and the International Committee of the Fourth International on May 1.

Once again, the ICFI is forced to observe at its May Day rally that the heroic journalist Julian Assange is being left to rot in a maximum-security prison in London, and to reiterate our demand for his release.

In the past year, the *World Socialist Web Site* has recorded anniversaries which point to the outstanding character of Assange's journalism and the fundamental political significance of the fight for his freedom.

July 25 marked ten years since the publication of the Afghanistan war logs and October 22 ten years since the Iraq war logs, which together provided an unprecedented account of the brutal imperialist invasion and occupation of these countries, including he covered-up murder of thousands of civilians and use of death squads and torture.

November 27 marked a decade since the release of the US diplomatic cables, revealing imperialist conspiracies and coup plots, corruption, and state surveillance.

This April 24 marked ten years since the publication of the Guantanamo files, documenting the torture of prisoners and detention of innocents, including children, for years without trial.

In the intervening decade, it is not the architects of these crimes who have been put on trial and imprisoned, but Assange for exposing them.

A few weeks ago, we passed the two-year anniversary of his seizure from the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he had claimed political asylum and been kept under effective arbitrary detention by British police for

nearly seven years. He was bundled into a police van, thrown into Belmarsh prison, and subjected to an unbroken chain of abuses of his legal and democratic rights, as the United States sought his extradition for charges totalling 175 years of imprisonment in inhuman conditions.

Two years on, he remains in the hands of his enemies.

A British judge, Vanessa Baraitser, ruled in January that Assange could not be extradited to the United States on mental health grounds, acknowledging that the WikiLeaks founder was at severe risk of suicide.

But this was a politically calculated decision which did not bring Assange so much as a minute of freedom. Except on the point of his health, Baraitser accepted every antidemocratic element of the American government's case, leaving the door wide open for an appeal of her ruling by the prosecution.

Among the first acts of the Biden administration when it came into office was to make clear that the United States would pursue an appeal and continue to seek Assange's extradition, proving that there is not a shred of difference between the Republicans and the Democrats when it comes to their hostility to democratic rights. The same is true of all bourgeois parties, their media echo chambers and their pseudo-left adjuncts the world over.

Assange's extradition hearing in London's Old Bailey last September was a watershed in the collapse of democracy and the descent of world imperialism into abject criminality. While the crimes exposed by WikiLeaks were recounted by witness after witness—"collateral murder", "extraordinary rendition", "enhanced interrogation", "wars of aggression"—Assange sat in the dock charged with "espionage", framed as an irresponsible hacker.

This grotesque spectacle was met with barely a

murmur in the nominally liberal media who had belatedly registered for-the-record opposition to Assange's extradition to cover for their wholehearted participation in a filthy conspiracy of slander against him over an entire decade.

If there is one positive to the recent cynical uproar over the treatment of the right-wing imperialist stooge Alexei Navalny in Russia, it is that it proves the fraudulent character of these organisations' stated support for Assange. One can hardly read an issue of the UK's *Guardian* or America's *New York Times* without coming across a defence of the politically rotten Navalny. And one can hardly remember their last word uttered on Assange.

The pseudo-left, who led the lying and utterly discredited campaign to brand Assange a sexual predator, can even now barely bring themselves to mention his name.

With their near silence on Assange, these forces are providing a vital service to world imperialism in its drive to war and dictatorship. The pandemic has dramatically intensified class and geopolitical tensions. To advance their predatory interests, and in an attempt to deflect growing social unrest outwards, the United States and its allies are carrying out a campaign of escalating aggression against Russia and China.

The ruling class knows that this agenda, which threatens the world with the catastrophe of war between nuclear-armed powers, cannot proceed without an evisceration of democratic rights. Biden, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson and their fellow gangsters intend to destroy Assange as a cruel example and authoritarian precedent for those who expose and oppose imperialist crimes.

Assange's ongoing persecution has widened the chasm which separates two opposed perspectives in the fight for his freedom.

The official campaign, represented by the Don't Extradite Assange organisation, has directed its efforts towards recruiting left-talking political charlatans and issuing appeals to the capitalist state and its representatives—beginning with a championing of the spineless former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, who in turn placed his hopes in Johnson's right-wing government, and culminating in utterly bankrupt appeals to Presidents Trump and Biden for a pardon.

This is the politics of passivity and defeat, which

seeks to substitute political and celebrity endorsements for a struggle to rally the only force which can secure Assange's freedom and safety—the international working class. The fruit of their labours is a ragtag band of minor parliamentarians and political commentators of the sort who speak loudly only when they are sure they will not be heard. They are not a shortcut to the masses, but a block on their mobilisation.

The ICFI rejects these soporific appeals. We turn directly to the working class and seek to organise workers in an international campaign of class struggle in Assange's defence. On the day the ICFI launches a global initiative for the formation of rank-and-file committees to fight the immense class battles that lie ahead, we are more confident than ever that this perspective will see Assange freed.



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