

Julian Assange's freedom depends on the mobilisation of the working class

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WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange spent his 50th birthday on Saturday in the maximum-security Belmarsh Prison, where he has been detained for more than two years. The occasion, and the ongoing incarceration of a journalist in a facility dubbed Britain's Guantanamo Bay, passed with barely a murmur in the corporate press.

Assange's birthday is another marker in the imperialist campaign to destroy him for exposing US-led war crimes, global diplomatic conspiracies and illegal spying operations. His 40th birthday was spent under British house arrest in 2011, his 45th as a political refugee who could not leave Ecuador's London embassy in 2016.

If the US and its allies have their way, Assange will never be a free man. Even though a British district court ruled against his extradition to the US on narrow health grounds in January, there is no timetable for Assange's release from prison in the foreseeable future.

The US is proceeding with an appeal against that verdict. Despite the discrediting of the prosecution case as a frame-up, including last week's admission by a key US witness that he provided fabricated evidence for the indictment against Assange, there is every reason to suspect that such an appeal would be successful. At each point, the British judiciary has thrown aside the rule of law to facilitate Assange's persecution.

The situation underscores the critical importance of an intensified fight for Assange's freedom by all workers, students, young people and defenders of democratic rights.

In this struggle, as in every other, political orientation is decisive. Two diametrically opposed perspectives have emerged in the fight for Assange's freedom.

One, advanced by organisations such as the official Don't Extradite Assange (DEA) group in Britain, involves an endless stream of plaintive appeals to Assange's persecutors to cease their campaign against him, and other lobbying efforts directed to the political establishment.

The other, put forward by the Socialist Equality Parties and the *World Socialist Web Site*, insists that Assange's freedom depends on the mobilisation of the vast social and

political power of the international working class, as part of the fight against imperialist war and the turn by governments to ever more authoritarian forms of rule.

The DEA has collaborated closely with former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn and his allies. When he was at Labour's helm, Corbyn generally refused to mention Assange, let alone fight for his liberty. Having handed the party's leadership to the Blairites, who openly support the persecution of Assange, Corbyn and his colleagues have resumed their occasional posture as defenders of the WikiLeaks founder.

A letter by 24 British parliamentarians last month summed up the character of this latter-day support. It congratulated Joe Biden on his ascension to the US presidency and asked him to "drop this prosecution" as an "act that would be a clarion call for freedom that would echo around the globe." Addressing Biden, the letter stated: "You, like us, must have been disappointed your predecessor launched a prosecution carrying a 175-year sentence against a globally renowned publisher."

A similar appeal was issued last week in a video by the "Bring Assange Home" parliamentary grouping in Australia. Conservative National Party MP Barnaby Joyce was among the most prominent members of the group, but he appears to have quietly moved on since being appointed deputy prime minister of a government that refuses to lift a finger for Assange.

The new de facto figurehead of the group is Peter Khalil, a right-wing Labor Party MP, who was involved in the occupation of Iraq as a "defence analyst," and was exposed in diplomatic cables published by WikiLeaks as a "protected source" of the US embassy, i.e., an American informant. Khalil has suggested, in the politest of terms, that Biden consider dropping the prosecution of Assange, because proceeding with it could undermine the invocation of "human rights" in US-led aggression against China.

With friends such as this, who needs enemies?

By contrast, the sincerity, determination and courage of Assange's family and his WikiLeaks colleagues is beyond

question. But the same basic perspective of appealing to Assange's persecutors was evident in a recently concluded tour of the US by Assange's father and brother, John and Gabriel Shipton.

While making important points about press freedom and Assange's exposure of war crimes, both expressed hope that Biden would see sense and drop the prosecution. The tour featured speaking engagements in cities such as New York, Washington, and Los Angeles, but not a number of industrial centres like Detroit. The Shiptons appeared alongside figures on the periphery of the Democratic Party, but did not meet with auto workers, or other sections of the working class engaged in struggle.

A bankrupt political perspective is never based on the lessons of the past, or an accurate appraisal of the political situation.

The same fawning appeals being addressed to Joe Biden were issued to Trump not so long ago. When Trump was president, the persecution of Assange was presented as a holdover of the Obama administration, and now that Biden is in office, it is referred to as a "Trump-era prosecution." On each occasion that their appeals have been rebuffed, groups such as the DEA simply move on to their next letter-writing campaign, without drawing any balance sheet of their previous efforts.

In reality, the US persecution of Assange is supported by the entire political establishment. Biden, as Obama's vice-president, played a central role in the initiation of this campaign, infamously branding Assange as a "high-tech terrorist." Since becoming president, his administration officials have made plain they have no intention of dropping the case.

The determination of the US ruling elite and its allies to continue their persecution of Assange points to its broader significance. It is an attempt to establish a precedent for state frame-ups and the victimisation of anyone who falls foul of the powers-that-be. This is occurring under conditions of an unprecedented crisis of the global capitalist system, accelerated by the coronavirus pandemic, and a resurgence of the class struggle.

Biden has no intention of advancing "clarion calls for freedom" and democracy as the British parliamentarians suggest. His program is to bomb Iraq and Syria, prepare war against China to ensure American hegemony, force the working class to pay for the trillions handed to Wall Street during the pandemic, and to bolster the police-state apparatus set in place by all of his predecessors over the past 20 years.

A struggle against this offensive, and for the freedom of Assange, must be based on a force more powerful than the US ruling class, its Democratic and Republican parties,

media apparatus, military and intelligence agencies. That force is the American and international working class.

For more than a month, almost 3,000 Volvo trucks workers have been on strike in Virginia after rejecting two concessions contracts pushed by the transnational corporation and the United Auto Workers union. During the pandemic, teachers and health workers have courageously fought against the homicidal, pro-business response of governments to the coronavirus crisis. Throughout the international working class, there is immense political disaffection and opposition to inequality, the assault on jobs, wages and conditions, and never-ending war.

The struggles thus far are a harbinger of even greater ones to come. As in the 20th century, the corollary of capitalism's turn to war and dictatorship is mass revolutionary struggle by the working class.

It is there that Assange's supporters will find a constituency for the defence of democratic rights. It is in the working class that the great democratic traditions of past struggles, including the American Declaration of Independence, celebrated on July 4, live on.

Every effort must be made to apprise the working class of Assange's plight and to mobilise it. This can only take place through a rejection of any perspective of subordinating the struggle to polite appeals and backroom lobbying. The demand must be raised that Biden drop the prosecution; that the UK immediately free Assange, and that the Australian government defend him as a persecuted citizen and publisher. But experience has demonstrated that they will only do this if they are compelled to by a mass movement from below.

Finally, the Assange case raises all the major questions of the present period. The fight for his freedom is a fight against the capitalist state, imperialist war and the domination of society by a corporate oligarchy that resembles the decrepit aristocracies of old. Each facet of Assange's persecution poses the necessity for an alternative, a fight for the revolutionary reorganisation of society, the political power of the working class and genuine democracy. Ultimately, that means a revolutionary struggle for the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of socialism.



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