

SEP holds emergency online meeting to demand immediate freedom for Julian Assange

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) held a politically strong and highly-engaged online public meeting Wednesday to discuss how to take forward the fight to free WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

More than 250 people participated in the meeting from at least 26 countries, ranging from Brazil to multiple European and South Asian states, reflecting the global support for Assange and the struggle to free him.

A feature of the more than two-hour meeting was the constant stream of more than 650 comments and questions posted by participants, and the appreciative responses to the answers and clarifications provided by the speakers.

The full video of the meeting can be viewed below, or by clicking [here](#).

The SEP called the emergency meeting in response to the December 10 ruling by the UK High Court ordering Assange's extradition to the United States. If transported to the US he will be tried on espionage charges and potentially face a life sentence or the death penalty for publishing documents exposing the war crimes, mass surveillance and diplomatic intrigues of the US and its allies.

The meeting heard reports from two prominent *World Socialist Web Site* writers on the persecution of Assange: Thomas Scripps, assistant national secretary of the SEP (UK) and Oscar Grenfell, SEP (Australia) national committee member and national convenor of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality. SEP (Australia) National Secretary Cheryl Crisp chaired the meeting.

Opening the meeting, Crisp explained the critical connection between the defence of Assange and the decision of the WSWS to launch a Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 pandemic.

For almost two years, capitalist governments around the world, with the support of the trade unions and the corporate media, have conducted a campaign of lies and misinformation to justify their murderous profit-driven

pandemic policies. The millions of entirely preventable infections and deaths from COVID-19 serve a stark reminder that, as Crisp said, "the truth is a life and death question."

"Without the truth," Crisp continued, "ordinary people, the working class, the mass of the world's population are completely disarmed, but that is what has happened in the course of the past two years." She said the workers' inquest would expose and answer the falsifications and coverups, just as the WSWS would continue to do on the frame-ups and character assassination of Assange.

Speaking first, Scripps characterised the legal proceedings against Assange as a "travesty of justice." He explained: "The judiciary has consistently taken the desired outcomes of British and US imperialism and worked backwards to fashion rulings and judgments to suit those ends."

Scripps described the "disdain for the law" exhibited by the British courts and prison system. "Throughout his time in Belmarsh, Assange had access to his lawyers interrupted and was denied the time or material necessary to prepare his case—against all rights of due process," he said.

"Absurdly," in Assange's October hearing, the judge accepted the prosecution's argument that "his case had nothing to do with the war crimes, wars of aggression and collateral murder; extraordinary rendition and torture exposed by WikiLeaks."

The judges had accepted phony "assurances" that Assange would be well treated in US prisons, offered by the same government and agencies that had plotted to assassinate Assange.

Scripps made the critical point that "Assange's salvation has never been the British judiciary. His freedom and defence have always depended on a mass movement of the international working class."

Scripps continued: "The real damage to the fight for Assange's freedom has therefore been done by those who have opposed this orientation and directed the campaign not

to the working class but to the courts, right-wing governments, liberal NGOs and media organisations and tame and toothless so-called lefts.”

By way of example, Scripps described the promotion of former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn as a champion of Assange’s cause by the Don’t Extradite Assange campaign. He noted: “Corbyn has the dishonour of being the man in a position to do the most for Assange’s cause who in reality did the least.”

Speaking next, Grenfell explained that the Swedish investigation into Assange was “a complete frame-up,” which “provided the ideological cement for an unholy alliance of the US intelligence agencies, the so-called liberal press, upper-middle-class feminists and the pseudo-left.”

Grenfell detailed the role of the Greens-backed Gillard Labor government, which “tried to illegally tear up his passport and pledged to help the US intelligence agencies campaign to destroy WikiLeaks.”

In recent weeks, Grenfell reported, various Australian government figures have “bemoaned Assange’s plight, feigned sympathy for his medical issues and declared that the saga has ‘gone on too long.’”

None has taken any action. Typical was Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce, who declared: “I have no power in Britain or US over these matters. I have no standing in the British courts.”

Grenfell said conclusions must be drawn from these experiences. “The first and perhaps most crucial step is to dispense with futile illusions that are a dead-end at best and a cover for the very forces responsible for Assange’s plight at worst. Assange’s freedom is not going to be secured by writing friendly letters to your local MP, or by imploring [Australian Labor Party leader] Albanese to grow a spine.”

Instead, Grenfell urged defenders of Assange to turn to the international working class, and bring the fight for his defence to the global resurgence of the class struggle that is already underway.

Grenfell explained: “The persecution of Assange is, at the most fundamental level, aimed at intimidating the opposition in the working class and creating a precedent for its suppression.”

These reports generated lively discussion in the chat field, as well as a question-and-answer session. A central theme of the questions was “what can we do?” And could Assange be defended through appeals to politicians or other establishment figures?

The panelists, along with SEP members and supporters who contributed in the chat, explained that the fight for Assange’s freedom depends fundamentally on the development of consciousness and understanding in the working class.

Scripps said: “A resolution passed in a workplace, or in a neighbourhood, is worth infinitely more than a dozen editorials in the *Guardian*, or a dozen motions put in parliament.”

Grenfell said: “Action needs to be taken, but the crucial question is, ‘what is the political perspective that action is based on?’... There’s been no shortage of appeals to bourgeois politicians and capitalist governments to intervene in Assange’s defence.

“We don’t disagree with placing demands on governments, but what we’ve always explained is that they’ll only take this step, which would come up against the US alliance and against their own attack on democratic rights domestically, if they’re forced to do so by mass pressure from below. That means mobilising a social force.”

Attendees expressed their warm appreciation of the meeting and the answers to the questions.

Iwan wrote: “Many, many thanks to the speakers and organizers for this important meeting and the tireless efforts of the SEP to free Julian Assange!”

Ingrid said: “Misinformation is everywhere, not only mainstream but alternative platforms. WSWS is the only place that makes sense in very dark times.”

Pietro wrote: “Julian’s freedom is a revolutionary question. Julian represents anti-war sentiment. That is why his freedom is synonymous with the overthrow of the warmongering capitalist system.”

Mitchell, an IT worker from Queensland, said: “The events of the last few years show that it’s up to people power to do the work. All change will come from the bottom up, not the top down. I don’t trust the press anymore. I’ve read the *World Socialist Web Site* for 5-6 years; I’m an avid reader of it.”

He continued: “Barnaby Joyce? I don’t trust him. Those politicians aren’t going to help, they dictate over us. The working class needs to assert its independence to carry this struggle forward.”



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