

Strong response to SEP online meeting on the fight to free Julian Assange

Our reporter
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) held a well-attended online public meeting on Sunday, “Oppose British extradition order: Fight to free Julian Assange!” More than 200 people tuned in from across Australia, as well as Canada, France, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States. The meeting is available to view in full below.

The meeting was called in response to British Home Secretary Priti Patel’s announcement that her government had approved the extradition of Assange to the United States, where he faces 175 years imprisonment for exposing US-led war crimes. With almost all legal avenues in the British courts exhausted, the announcement underscores that the fight to free the WikiLeaks founder is increasingly urgent.

The following resolution was passed without opposition at the meeting:

“This meeting condemns the persecution of Julian Assange by the American, British, Australian and Swedish governments for exposing the war crimes of the US and its allies. We demand that the Australian government end its collaboration with the legal travesty to railroad Assange into the US courts and instead use all its diplomatic and other powers to secure his immediate and unconditional release.”

SEP National Secretary Cheryl Crisp chaired the meeting, with reports delivered by *World Socialist Web Site* writers Eric London and Oscar Grenfell. Following the speakers, the meeting featured a lively discussion as the panel responded to questions and comments from the diverse and highly engaged audience.

Crisp emphasised that what must be fought for, as the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and SEP have done from the outset, is “the mobilisation of the working class to come to the defence of this courageous journalist.”

Crisp and the other speakers explained that this is the opposite of the bankrupt perspective of making plaintive appeals to official politicians, including the newly elected

Labor government in Australia, former UK Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn or Democrat Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

These layers are all in agreement over the need to silence figures like Assange in order to suppress opposition to the war agenda, under conditions where the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine is rapidly advancing towards a global conflagration.

Crisp drew the critical parallel between Assange and Dr. David Berger, an Australian general practitioner whose medical registration is under threat due to his criticism of the homicidal “let it rip” COVID-19 policies embraced by all Australian governments.

London, a national committee member of the SEP in the United States and a writer for the WSWs, declared: “The institution that is primarily responsible for everything that has happened to Assange is the government of the United States and its two component parts, the Democratic and Republican parties.”

The population, London explained, cannot be “allowed to come within a ten-foot pole of the truth,” under conditions where the US “fight for democracy” means “bringing the world to the brink of nuclear catastrophe with Russia, starving billions of people and triggering mass hunger in the midst of the world’s worst pandemic in centuries.”

The assault on democratic rights by the US ruling elite is no less acute in the domestic arena. Eighteen months on from Trump and the Republicans’ January 6, 2021 attempt to establish a fascistic presidential dictatorship by force, London noted, “all the main conspirators are free and plotting a second attempt for the next elections in 2024.”

The Democrats, London said, “insist on saving the Republican Party” and promoting illusions of “national unity,” which are completely shattered by the reality of life in the US: “Daily mass shootings, police killings and reactionary decisions from the courts.”

For these reasons, London explained, “such a political establishment cannot tolerate freedom for the likes of Julian Assange.”

London stressed the need for the fight for Assange’s

freedom to be based on a fight to mobilise the international working class, in which there is an “unprecedented upsurge” in response to rapid increases in the cost of living and widespread shortages of food and other essentials. This was sharply expressed in developments over the weekend in Sri Lanka, where masses of protesters occupied the presidential palace, forcing the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapakse and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe.

Oscar Grenfell, a member of the SEP (Australia) national committee and a writer for the WSWS, warned that any illusions that the newly elected federal government of Anthony Albanese will do anything to aid Assange are a complete dead end.

“Labor’s position on Assange is very clear,” Grenfell said. “It’s identical to that of the former Liberal government.”

Foreign Minister Penny Wong, Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus and Defence Minister Richard Marles have all refused to employ the diplomatic powers they have to free Assange, although such powers have been used in the past to aid Australian citizens being persecuted abroad.

Grenfell explained that Labor’s refusal to defend Assange was based on its “full support for American imperialism’s plans to dominate the world through conflict with Russia and China.”

Grenfell noted that “Labor and Coalition governments could not have thrown Assange to the wolves as they did, without political assistance.” This came from the Greens and the pseudo-left, who promoted the frame-up of Assange through the Swedish sexual misconduct investigation, which was “always a sham.”

“The critical issue for defenders of Assange,” Grenfell concluded, is to turn to the emerging movement of the global working class, “and to explain the connection between Assange’s plight and the social and democratic rights of the working class.”

In response to questions and comments from attendees, the panelists reiterated the necessity to understand the persecution of Assange in its political and historical context.

Grenfell said: “We’ve never viewed the Assange case as a single issue, separate from what’s taking place more broadly.”

None of the increasing attacks on the working class, including war, the pandemic or the persecution of Assange, could be understood as “the product of individual proclivities or moral failings,” he continued.

“The most basic social and democratic rights of working people are incompatible with a society dominated by the banks, big business and a vast military intelligence apparatus.” This, Grenfell explained, meant the only solution was a struggle against the capitalist system itself.

In response to a question about the silence of the unions on

the persecution of Assange, Crisp noted the refusal of the unions to raise the protection and defence of their own members from COVID-19, just as they have they no concern for the health and wellbeing of Assange.

Crisp explained: “These are not organisations that defend the interests of the working class, so they do not defend the interests of Julian Assange, who speaks the truth and speaks to inform broad sections of people about what goes on behind closed doors, what goes on that the media refuses to report.”

In response to questions over whether the fight to free Assange could be taken forward through appeals to “left” figures such as Jeremy Corbyn, London noted, “Corbyn was leader of the Labour Party from 2015 to 2020, a period during which Julian Assange was in London, in the embassy. ... We have to be ruthless in exposing all of those who had any opportunity and refused, as Corbyn did, to lift a finger to help Julian Assange.”

Rather than appeals to such figures, London stressed, what is required is “a powerful united movement of the working class that aims to defend democratic rights and the likes of Julian Assange by attacking the source, capitalism. That requires socialist revolution. That’s the only way that Assange can be protected, that’s the only way that world war can be prevented and that’s what the perspective of the Socialist Equality Party is aimed at achieving.”

The SEP urges all defenders of democratic rights and opponents of imperialist war to get involved and join the fight to free Julian Assange. Contact the SEP today and sign up for the Free Assange Newsletter below.



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wsws.org/contact