

Freedom for Julian Assange depends upon the intervention of the working class

By James Cogan
4 March 2019

I want to add my thanks to all of you who have rallied today, and who are taking part via the Facebook Livestream—which I believe is also going out via Unity4J—and tweeting comments and support.

This demonstration, like the demonstration we held on June 17, 2018, is demanding that the Australian government intervene and exercise the full weight of its diplomatic power and legal discretion to compel the government of Britain to immediately cease arbitrarily detaining WikiLeaks publisher and Australian citizen Julian Assange inside the Ecuadorian embassy in London.

If Julian were not threatened with arrest by British authorities, and the very real danger that British courts would sanction his extradition to the United States to face a show trial on charges of espionage or conspiracy, he could leave the embassy now and return to Australia if he chooses to do so.

Back to his children. Back to his parents. And back to working with his colleagues in carrying out the mission of WikiLeaks—which is to allow whistleblowers to reveal the secrets that those in power seek to conceal.

This rally today, and the support that it has been given in Australia and around the world, has great significance.

It reflects two great inter-connected processes that are going to transform the situation, and which can win the freedom of Julian Assange.

Firstly, it reflects the reality that the working class, after being suppressed for decades, is coming forward in a massive resurgence of the international class struggle.

From the “yellow vest” movement that has shaken the French government to its core, to the eruption of strikes by teachers across the United States, to the rebellion of auto parts workers in Mexico, to the ferment among workers in China, India and Brazil, to name only a few examples, the working class is signalling that it is going to fight for a decent living standard, for democratic rights and for an end to the threat of climate change and world war.

Secondly, the support this rally has won from a truly impressive group of journalists, artists and academics signifies that the best elements in society are once again turning to the working class.

I have had the privilege of speaking with Christine Assange, Julian’s mother, over recent weeks. She cannot be here, but she is here in political solidarity.

Christine wanted me to convey her thanks to you all. To all those who are standing up and fighting for not only the liberty of her son, but for our democratic rights.

In a tweet she sent this morning, Christine Assange notes:

He has not seen sunshine or felt rain for 6 years
His eyesight is fading

His teeth are causing great pain

He is suffering from oedema.

His legs are swelling

His bone density is reducing severely because he had not been in the sunshine for 6 years

That is the torture being inflicted on Julian Assange.

We thank figures like John Pilger, courageous fighter Terry Hicks, singer-songwriter Roger Waters, Professor Stuart Rees, journalists Joe Lauria, Elizabeth Vos and Cathy Vogan of Unity4J, filmmaker Curtis Levy and the many, many others who have given the most active support and endorsement to this rally.

But, as I am sure all those defending Julian will agree, without the intervention of the great strength of the working class, the governments of Australia, Britain and the US will not end his persecution.

They fear WikiLeaks and all independent and critical media, because it provides the working class with the truth that assists in motivating its struggles. That is why there is such a concerted campaign of censorship against independent media, and why Julian has had to endure more than eight years of torment.

Julian is a class war prisoner. His persecution is above all an attack on the working class.

The Trotskyist movement, the WSWs and the SEP, is committed to mobilising the working class in defence of not only Julian, but all democratic rights, as an essential component of the struggle to achieve genuine social equality, to oppose war and to oppose capitalism.

That is how Julian will be freed. That is how censorship will be defeated. That is how the social rights of the working class will be achieved.

At this rally, we reject all the attacks that are used by those who have abandoned the defence of Assange to justify their position.

I am not going to name them. They are not worth mentioning. We know who they are, and they know who they are.

We reject the totally discredited slander levelled against Julian by Swedish prosecutors in 2010 that he was under suspicion of sexual crimes. The allegations were nothing more than an attempt to undermine WikiLeaks and have Julian detained so he could be rendered to the US. Julian did not commit any crime. He was never even charged with a crime.

We reject the absurd claim that by publishing leaks in 2016 that further exposed the right-wing war-mongering character of Democratic Party candidate Hillary Clinton, that WikiLeaks acted on behalf on the Trump campaign or was a conduit for Russian interference.

These are nothing more than threadbare lies. Those who repeat them cannot provide a shred of evidence, except the so-called assessment of the US intelligence agencies responsible for the fabrications about weapons of mass destruction in 2002 and 2003, and numerous other state provocations and conspiracies.

The whole Russia conspiracy has been used to both justify the attack on Assange, wholesale censorship and provocations against Russia that have heightened the danger of a nuclear war. While the Democrats go on about Trump and Russia, they collaborate with him to hand tax cuts to the rich, prepare a regime-change war against Venezuela and persecute immigrants and refugees.

WikiLeaks published the truth. The day will come when Julian is freed, and he will return to this country and be given a hero's welcome. And all those who refused to defend him will be viewed and treated as the pro-imperialist stooges and enemies of democratic rights that they are.

We have no illusions that the Australian government will voluntarily act on Julian's behalf.

Successive Labor and Liberal-National Coalition governments have refused to defend Assange, above all because of the military alliance that the Australian ruling class maintains with US imperialism—an alliance that has seen Australia send troops to neo-colonial wars from Vietnam, to Afghanistan and Iraq, and, since 2010, place itself on the frontline of a growing strategic confrontation with China that threatens to trigger all-out war between nuclear-armed powers.

Testimony was given to the American Congress last week that made clear that the head of the American government, Donald Trump, is nothing more than a criminal and a gangster who belongs in a prison cell.

Trump personifies the criminality of the entire American ruling class.

But that will not cause the Australian establishment to shift its position. As servants of the financial and corporate oligarchy, Labor and the Coalition consider the US-Australia alliance to be more important than the rights, and even the lives, of Australian citizens.

Let us recall that the Australian establishment collaborated with Washington to oust a democratically-elected government in 1975 and an elected prime minister in June 2010, to ensure that American imperialist interests in Australia were protected. We know about the events leading up to the removal of Kevin Rudd in 2010 because of the diplomatic cables published by WikiLeaks.

The only circumstances in which the Australian government will act to free Julian Assange is if the capitalist class in this country is more fearful of a mass movement of the working class, demanding Julian's freedom, than they are of any disruption to their venal relations with the United States.

The contempt of the Australian establishment for the democratic rights of one of its own citizens was spelled out on February 21, by the Coalition government, in the Senate Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Estimates Committee.

A DFAT official made the following admission:

“The Australian government doesn't share the view of that UN committee. We don't believe that Mr Assange is being arbitrarily detained.”

The Australian government thinks it can get away with asserting that Julian Assange is imprisoned in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, deprived of sunlight and medical care, out of a personal choice.

The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, that is

the top legal experts of the UN, disagrees.

It stated, clearly and firmly in the ruling it adopted on December 4, 2015, and which it published on February 6, 2016 and re-issued last December: “The Working Group considered that Mr. Assange has been subjected to different forms of deprivation of liberty.

“The Working Group therefore requested Sweden and the United Kingdom to assess the situation of Mr. Assange to ensure his safety and physical integrity, to facilitate the exercise of his right to freedom of movement in an expedient manner.”

The Australian government dismisses this with contempt. The Australian establishment makes great play of its purported commitment to international law and adherence to democratic rights—but flagrantly ignores an international legal judgement.

The SEP is going to make the persecution of Julian Assange a major issue in the upcoming Australian federal election. Every candidate is going to be compelled to answer whether or not they defend Julian Assange's right to return to his home, with a guarantee of protection from any extradition request by US authorities.

The most important issue, however, is the work we collectively do to bring the working class into this struggle.

On the university campuses, TAFEs and at the high schools, information must be circulated about Julian.

In defiance of the unions, meetings must be organised at workplaces across Australia and around the world, and motions moved demanding the freedom of Assange.

Such motions were moved by teachers at a high school in Melbourne, and by the independent committee representing brutally exploited tea plantation workers in Sri Lanka.

As the Sri Lankan workers concluded: “Freeing Julian Assange is our struggle. We call for it to become the struggle of workers all over the world.”

Their initiative is the model for workers everywhere.

Journalists and media workers have a particular role to play. In Australia, I urge you to throw off the shackles of the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance and raise your voices in defence of a persecuted publisher.

We will be going forward from this rally with tremendous optimism and confidence. Those of us here today represent the beginning of a mass campaign.

We are sending a clear message to Julian Assange today and he will hear it—you are not alone, you have not been abandoned, you have not been forgotten. You will be freed.

To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>