

“The IYSSE will redouble its efforts to build a mass movement of young people in Assange’s defence”

By Alice Summers
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We are publishing the speech of Alice Summers, a representative of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in the UK, at the May 12 meeting in London in defence of jailed WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange and courageous whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

The arrest and incarceration of Julian Assange is a travesty of justice, an event which will go down in history as one of the first great political crimes of the 21st century.

The images of an ill publisher being forcibly dragged out of the Ecuadorian Embassy by British police as one of them grinned will haunt millions of people across the world for years to come.

The overwhelming majority of workers and youth feel enormous sympathy for Assange, a courageous journalist and publisher persecuted and reviled by the ruling elite for the supposed “crime” of telling the truth.

His inhumane treatment at the hands of the US, UK and Ecuadorian governments, in contravention of international law and United Nations rulings, speaks volumes about the brutal realities of class society, all too familiar to working people on every continent.

The persecution of the WikiLeaks founder is a concentrated expression of the turn towards authoritarianism and the drive to war by the global capitalist class.

My generation came of age to the sound of US and coalition bombs raining down on defenceless civilians. Our formative years were shaped by relentless attacks on living standards, rising economic insecurity, imperialist violence and corruption.

For many, the first political events we would have been conscious of were the criminal imperialist invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. Since then, the “war on terror” has dominated political life in the United States and Europe, claiming millions of innocent lives across the Middle East and central Asia and devastating entire societies. Endless conflict and imperialist destruction have been the constant for all our lives.

Julian Assange is being held because he published leaked information exposing before the world these imperialist atrocities.

He has committed no crime. He is being targeted for revealing details of illegal wars, mass surveillance operations and the daily diplomatic conspiracies of the US and its allies. In doing so, he has performed an invaluable service to working people and youth the world over.

Assange’s record as a journalist is unparalleled. Among WikiLeaks’ most important exposures were the Iraq and Afghan war logs, released in 2010.

The Afghan war logs comprised over 90,000 incident and intelligence reports from the US military, from January 2004 to December 2009. The documents detailed at least 195 civilian deaths at the hands of NATO troops, previously hidden from the public. They exposed the existence of a secret “black unit” within the US military, tasked with illegally assassinating suspected Taliban leaders and opponents of the occupation.

The Iraq war logs documented the deaths of almost 110,000 people, including more than 66,000 acknowledged by the US military as civilians. This included 15,000 civilian deaths known to the US authorities, but publicly suppressed.

The logs detailed brutal US military attacks on unarmed civilians at checkpoints and elsewhere and recorded incidents of torture by US troops, and their Iraqi proxies, and the refusal of military high command to investigate such war crimes.

These exposures left a deep mark on popular consciousness, earning WikiLeaks, and its editor-in-chief, the respect and gratitude of millions across the world. Among workers and young people, Assange was rightfully viewed as a hero.

But for the corporate media, the ruling elite and their pseudo-left hangers-on, Assange is seen as a dangerous and subversive voice that must be silenced.

As bogus allegations were concocted to discredit Assange,

Britain's largest fake 'left' groups, Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party, echoed the propaganda of the liberal media, that Assange must be extradited to Sweden. Not once did they warn that the allegations of sexual assault were part of the efforts of the United States, Britain, Sweden and other governments to silence him and destroy WikiLeaks.

Instead they took full part in repeating the allegations on campuses across the UK by student organisations beholden to identity politics, including the National Union of Students (NUS).

As Assange languished in the Ecuadorian Embassy, in conditions described by the United Nations as "arbitrary detention," a concerted campaign to ban him from speaking at universities across Britain was launched. Its aim was to isolate Assange politically, more surely even than the British judiciary and the police were isolating him physically.

The efforts to silence Assange were part of the "no platform" policy adopted by the NUS, to enforce the dictates of gender and identity politics.

In May 2016, the Student Union at Sheffield University attempted to ban Assange from speaking via a video link at an event sponsored by the Festival of Debate. Trampling on the presumption of innocence, the student executive voted unanimously to deny Assange a platform based on a "zero tolerance" policy toward sexual assault and of providing a "safe space" on campus.

In an indication of the popular support for Assange, this decision was overturned after consultation with students and around 300 people turned out to hear him speak.

The previous year, in November 2015, a similar attempt to block Assange from speaking at the Cambridge Union debating society was overturned. In Sheffield the pseudo-left groups were the campus police. At Cambridge the union's president, Oliver Mosley, had previously worked for the Conservative under-secretary of state for prisons! He called a student referendum to decide whether to ban the WikiLeaks founder—the first in the Union's 200-year history.

The student union women's officer said that the invitation to Assange had "alienated women and minorities."

Students, however, voted overwhelmingly to host Assange with 76.9 percent voting yes.

The result of the NUS no-platform movement is to transform universities into institutions of state-sponsored propaganda and repression.

These reactionary efforts have sown enormous confusion among students—including on Assange.

Against this anti-democratic manoeuvring and slander campaign, the Socialist Equality Party and its youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, have fought to establish the broadest possible

support for Assange among students and young people.

We have opposed the right-wing efforts to dirty Assange's reputation. We have explained the immense political dangers posed by the attempt to criminalise critical journalism.

Now more than ever, with Assange jailed in Belmarsh prison and facing imminent extradition to the United States, the IYSSE will redouble our efforts to build a mass movement of young people and students in Assange's defence.

University students and young workers must turn to the working class, the only social force capable of defending Assange from US extradition and possible charges under the Espionage Act.

Despite the vicious right-wing campaigns against him, Julian Assange and WikiLeaks enjoy growing sympathy from workers and youth across the world. But this sympathy must be turned into active support.

WikiLeaks performed an invaluable service to the international working class in exposing the atrocities of world imperialism. However, it is not enough to expose imperialist crimes. They must be opposed politically.

For that, a mass socialist movement of workers and young people must be built, in opposition to all of the parties of capitalist reaction and to the capitalist system itself, to free Julian Assange, to fight for an end to imperialist war and for genuine democracy.

This is the programme fought for by the IYSSE, the SEP and the International Committee of the Fourth International.

I urge you all to join this fight.

To contact the WSWP and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wswp.org>