

# SEP US presidential candidate Joseph Kishore: “Free Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning!”

By Joseph Kishore - Socialist Equality Party US presidential candidate  
26 February 2020

As the Socialist Equality Party’s candidate for US president, I condemn the torture and persecution of WikiLeaks publisher and journalist Julian Assange.

The SEP opposes Assange’s extradition to the United States. We demand immediate freedom for Assange and for whistleblower Chelsea Manning, who remains in jail for refusing to testify before a grand jury convened to file additional charges against Assange.

The extradition hearings that begin formally on Monday are a legal travesty. Throughout his incarceration in the UK’s Belmarsh prison, Assange has been denied the most basic requirements for his legal case.

The United Nation’s Nils Melzer has said that the conditions in which he has been held amount to torture. This by itself nullifies any legal proceedings and requires his immediate freedom.

Assange is a political prisoner. He has been targeted because he has exposed the truth. He exposed the crimes of American imperialism and the ruling class. He did what journalists should do, inform the population about what is really going on.

For this he has been hounded by Swedish prosecutors, forced to seek refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, spied on by American intelligence agencies, dragged from his only place of security by British police, imprisoned in a maximum security prison, and targeted for rendition to the United States, where he would face life in prison or worse.

Those responsible for the international witch-hunt against Assange include the governments of the United States, Britain, Sweden, and Australia. They include the media, which has shamelessly and relentlessly slandered Assange. They also include the pseudo-left organizations that have spread lies to justify his persecution.

All those who have actively or tacitly supported this

pseudo-legal abomination have upon them a black mark that can never be washed clean.

Here in the United States, the entire political establishment has participated in the persecution of Assange. The Trump administration is continuing the vendetta against him initiated by the Obama administration, as part of its wholesale assault on democratic rights.

Trump leads a government of the far-right, with distinctly authoritarian characteristics. He is sending Swat teams into cities throughout the country to terrorize immigrant communities and carry out mass round-ups. He has threatened to unleash the military against countries throughout the world. He displays complete contempt for basic democratic rights.

However, it is the Democratic Party that has played the leading role in targeting WikiLeaks.

From the beginning of the Trump administration, there were mass protests against his fascist policies. The Democrats worked to smother these protests and channel them behind their own reactionary, pro-war agenda.

What is the central issue upon which the Democrats have waged their supposed opposition to Trump? That he is an agent of Vladimir Putin, that he has failed to pursue an aggressive enough policy against Russia.

A central aim of the anti-Russia campaign, which has assumed levels that can only be compared to the McCarthyite witch-hunts of the 1950s, has been to fight out foreign policy differences within the ruling class.

An additional motivation, by no means secondary, has been to criminalize domestic opposition. The targeting of WikiLeaks and Julian Assange is part of an effort to tar all opposition to the American imperialism and the policies of the ruling class as the operations of a foreign power.

This is now being revived in the 2020 elections, in the form of unsubstantiated claims, originating from US intelligence agencies, that Putin is intervening in order to bolster the campaign of Bernie Sanders.

To further this reactionary narrative, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and other corporate outlets relentlessly smeared Assange as a “Russian agent” and depicted him as the linchpin of a conspiracy hatched in Moscow to deprive Democratic Party candidate Hillary Clinton of the presidency in the 2016 US elections.

This is and has always been a lie. It is a lie used to justify the torture of Assange. It is a lie used as a pretext for internet censorship. It is a lie used to suppress free speech and a free press.

In the 2020 elections, the extradition of Assange is not a subject for discussion or debate. None of the major Democratic Party candidates have even spoken about the extradition hearings, let alone opposed them. They support what is being done to Assange because they support American imperialism.

This includes the supposed “socialist” Bernie Sanders. Sanders has won widespread support in the Democratic Party primaries from workers and young people because of his calls for a “political revolution” against the “billionaire class” and his appeal to anti-war sentiment.

However, Sanders’ main role has been to try to keep mass social opposition within the framework of the right-wing Democratic Party, to promote the fiction that anything can be done through this instrument of the military-intelligence agencies and Wall Street.

In a recent interview given to the *New York Times*, Sanders declared that he would “consider military force to preempt an Iranian or North Korean nuclear or missile test.” He also declared that the United States should consider Russia an “adversary or even an enemy.”

The Democrats and Sanders are also silent on the continued incarceration of Chelsea Manning, who has stood as a model of courage in her refusal to testify before the grand jury against Assange. For this, she has been imprisoned for nearly a year for “contempt of court.”

Just this past week, Manning filed another motion for her release. “I have been separated from my loved ones, deprived of sunlight, and could not even attend my mother’s funeral,” she wrote. “It is easier to endure these hardships now than to cooperate to win back some comfort, and live the rest of my life knowing that I acted out of self-interest and not principle.”

Manning has been fined nearly half a million dollars, and she could face hundreds of thousands more in fines

and another seven months in jail if her appeal for release is not granted.

The fight to free Assange and Manning, and to defend democratic rights, must be connected to the fight against imperialist war and the capitalist system.

Their persecution takes place under conditions of growing class conflict and social unrest throughout the world. The capitalist oligarchs and war criminals are well aware that their policies are encountering mass resistance.

By making an example of Assange, they are seeking to silence all opposition. If Assange is extradited to the US, the same can be done to any journalist, publisher or activist who falls foul of the American government.

The greatest mistake would be to harbor illusions that Assange will be freed through the actions of any faction of the state. Fruitless appeals directed toward Sanders in the US or Corbyn in the UK are worse than useless. They can only serve to strengthen the political institutions and parties responsible for Assange’s persecution.

The working class must fight to free Assange and Manning and to defend democratic rights through its independent organization.

The past year has seen the eruption of major demonstrations and strikes throughout the world. In the United States, strike action is at its highest levels in three decades. There is growing support for socialism and opposition to capitalism among workers and youth.

In these elections, the Socialist Equality Party pledges to connect the fight to free Assange and Manning with the independent political mobilization of the working class against war, fascism, authoritarianism, inequality and the capitalist system.

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