

# Free Julian Assange! The political issues confronting educators in the fight for freedom of information

By the Committee for Public Education (Australia)  
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*The Committee for Public Education (CFPE) is an organisation of rank-and-file teachers, initiated by the Socialist Equality Party, to wage an independent struggle against government-union attacks on jobs, wages and conditions, and a broader onslaught on public education.*

The Committee for Public Education (Australia) condemns the politically motivated show trial of WikiLeaks journalist and publisher Julian Assange now underway in London, which aims to dragoon him into an American high security prison for the rest of his life. We call on all educators and school staff in Australia and internationally to mobilise in his defence and move resolutions demanding his freedom in primary, secondary, and tertiary education institutions.

The resumed extradition proceedings that began on September 7, have provided a concentrated demonstration of the blatant illegality and vengeful recklessness that has characterised the US-led vendetta against Assange over the past decade.

The hearings have made clear that the extradition attempt that aims at paving the way for prosecution in the US under the Espionage Act has nothing whatsoever to do with “hacking,” protecting lives, or any of the other spurious rationales issued by the American government. Assange’s real crime, in the eyes of US imperialism, is having exposed its illegal operations around the world.

WikiLeaks’ “Collateral Murder” video of US soldiers shooting a group of civilians and two journalists in Baghdad, from an Apache attack helicopter, will forever remain one of the enduring moments of the illegal occupation of Iraq. Assange also helped bring to light the Iraq and Afghanistan War Logs, detailing key aspects of both wars kept secret by US authorities, including more precise casualty numbers. WikiLeaks’ “cablegate” release of tens of thousands of US diplomatic cables detailed the mafia-like operations of State Department officials around the world, such as stealing hair and tissue samples from UN delegates as part of DNA

profiling operations. Assange also made public in the “Vault 7” release that the Central Intelligence Agency engaged in mass electronic surveillance of ordinary people’s computers and mobile phones.

For these and other exposures, the WikiLeaks’ founder became a hero in the eyes of the world’s population but a dangerous enemy for the American government.

In 2012 Assange was given political asylum by the Ecuadorian government but was forced to take refuge in that country’s British embassy after being encircled by British police seeking his arrest on false and manipulated sexual misconduct allegations from Sweden. In 2019, after a protracted US government pressure campaign against Ecuador and after an illegal surveillance operation inside the embassy, Assange was dragged out by British police and interned in London’s Belmarsh high-security prison, known as “Britain’s Guantanamo.” He has spent the last two years in mostly solitary confinement, in gravely poor health and this year at high risk of catching the potentially fatal coronavirus.

The international fight to put a stop to the unprecedented US-led vendetta and to secure the freedom of Julian Assange is not only a matter of the personal rights of the WikiLeaks founder—as important as these are. It is also a matter of protecting the democratic rights of ordinary people around the world. This includes the right to publish, distribute, and discuss politically important information, regardless of its classification status within the American intelligence apparatus.

The Assange trial is creating a precedent that, if allowed to stand, will quickly see other opponents of war and oppression subjected to the US’s globally extended extra-territorial espionage laws. Former CIA chief Leon Panetta this month acknowledged the thinking within Washington ruling circles when he declared his hope that imprisoning Assange would “send a message to others not to do the same thing.”

The international working class needs to mobilise in defence of Assange. Within the development of this movement, the CFPE encourages education workers to step forward.

Just as the assault on democratic rights is global, so too is the international onslaught on public education. At every level, education is being privatised and carved up by business interests, while public schools and universities are being cut to the bone. Curricula are being dulled and narrowed to meet the demands of finance capital for a readily exploitable workforce, while the conditions of teachers in public schools are being made untenable.

Teachers and educators are among those owing a debt to Assange and to the whistleblowers who courageously decided to leak classified information in the public interest. Many of the highest ideals of a democratic public education system relate to the people's right to meaningfully participate in political and cultural life, to be able to access accurate and relevant information, and to distinguish true from false statements by independently referencing this information. Teachers will be unable to develop children's and young people's ability to do all these things if the US government and its intelligence agencies are able to determine what information may be known and discussed and what issues are forbidden.

The right to information and the right to an accessible and uncensored internet acquires an additional urgency amid the coronavirus pandemic. Teachers and educators are among many sections of the working class that are now being forced by governments back into their workplaces, despite the dangers of the COVID-19 contagion.

Around the world, the premature lifting of lockdown and other restrictions imposed during the "first wave" of infections saw large numbers of schools and universities immediately affected by COVID19 clusters, endangering both school staff and students. In Australia, officials, the media, and the teacher unions worked together to downplay the danger and suppress awareness of how many schools were affected. Aside from those following the analysis of the CFPE and *World Socialist Web Site*, the only teachers who would have known the extent of school shutdowns in Victoria and New South Wales were the most determined pursuers of this information on unpublicised and difficult to find health department web pages.

The teacher unions have worked to undermine the health and safety of educators and school workers throughout the pandemic, functioning as the active collaborators of state and federal governments and their education department bureaucracies. Only initiatives taken independently of the unions have resulted in the mobilisation of teachers in defence of their and their students' safety.

The fight to defend Julian Assange among teachers and educators has likewise proceeded outside of and in opposition to the teacher unions. Not a single official in any state has said a single word about the trial. Members of the CFPE, on the other hand, have repeatedly spoken at public demonstrations organised by the Socialist Equality Party and other meetings.

Teachers at Footscray City College have twice adopted resolutions demanding that the Australian government act on its obligations and intervene to halt the attempted extradition to the US of Assange, allowing the journalist to return to his home country if he wishes to do so. Similar resolutions moved by CFPE members have been passed at regional meetings of teachers in Sydney and Melbourne. As a result of the actions of the CFPE, a group called "Teachers for Assange" has been formed, to take the fight for Assange's freedom into the schools and broadly into the working class, organising street campaigns, distributing leaflets from the *World Socialist Web Site* and participating in demonstrations.

Such measures must be taken up more widely and with greater urgency than ever. While the entire political and trade union establishment in Australia and internationally is happy to sit back and await Assange's destruction, workers need to unify the struggle for his freedom—organising meetings, both online and in person depending on coronavirus restrictions, adopting and circulating resolutions, and coordinating other actions on an international scale. Following the resolutions from teachers of the CFPE, the recent move by London bus drivers to defend Assange through their rank and file committee marked an important step forward that needs to be amplified by all workers who defend democratic rights and oppose war and militarism.

We encourage all educators and school staff in Australia and internationally to contact the CFPE and *World Socialist Web Site* and discuss the next steps.

To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>