WORKERS MUST FIGHT TO FREE JULIAN ASSANGE!



BY WILL LEHMAN
Mack Trucks worker and rank-and-file candidate for UAW president

Dear brothers and sisters,

In less than one week, you will begin receiving ballots in the mail for the UAW elections. I have included information on how to vote and how to obtain a ballot if you don't get one on my website. I urge all of you to vote, and to vote for me, Will Lehman, for UAW president. I am campaigning to build rank-and-file power on the shop floor in opposition to the entire UAW apparatus.

I am writing to you today, however, on another matter that is critical to the interests of all workers, in the US and throughout the world. That is the case of Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks. Assange is currently imprisoned in the United Kingdom and faces extradition to the US, where he would be prosecuted under the Espionage Act. He could receive a 175-year sentence or even be executed.

Julian Assange (Photo by David G. Silvers, Cancillería del Ecuador / CC BY-SA 2.0)

Assange is being persecuted for one reason and one reason alone: He revealed the truth about the actions of the American government abroad, the same government that represents the corporations that exploit us here in the United States.

One of the most significant initial exposures by WikiLeaks was a video, released in 2010, depicting the US Army killing unarmed civilians and journalists in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad. The footage was filmed three years earlier, in 2007, in the early years of the US occupation of Iraq. I urge all of you to watch this video, which is titled "Collateral Murder."

The video was followed by the release of the Iraq and Afghan war logs in 2010 and the Guantanamo files in 2011. These documents, which were made available to the public thanks to the heroic actions of whistleblower Chelsea Manning, exposed a lie that is central to the propaganda of the US government, Democrat and Republican alike: that the wars abroad are about defending democracy.

For this reason, Assange has been subjected to more than a decade of vicious and uninterrupted persecution. He is currently in London's Belmarsh maximum-security prison, where he recently contracted COVID-19. The UK High Court ruled late last year that he could be extradited to the US, even though the trial itself revealed that the CIA had plotted to kidnap and murder him.

Beyond his personal fate, there are two critical issues for workers in the defense of Assange.

First, the persecution of Assange is an attack on basic democratic rights, including the First Amendment right to free speech and a free press. Assange is guilty of telling us the truth, of exposing lies that the government does not want exposed.

The corporations and the wealthy in this country depend on a bought-and-paid-for media, which parrots whatever the government tells them. We experience this every day, when workers are denounced in the media for our efforts to secure a decent wage and a future for ourselves and our families. If an individual can be jailed and prosecuted for revealing true information, it sets a dangerous precedent that will be used against any worker who speaks out and opposes the demands of the corporations, aided and abetted by the union apparatus.

Second, Assange has helped to expose the reality of American militarism. How much money has been spent and how many lives lost, including of US soldiers, to wage endless war abroad? And for what? They throw around words like "democracy" and "freedom" to convince workers that these wars are worth the cost, but the reality is that they are about securing the domination of American corporations over the entire globe. More than 1 million Iraqis and Afghans have died to achieve this end.

The consequences of these wars are felt by all of us. More than $1 trillion is expended on the US military every year, while they claim that no money is available to provide decent living conditions for workers. One veteran kills him

or herself every 80 minutes in the US, the consequence of post-traumatic stress disorder from what they saw and experienced at war. As soon as their bodies are no longer useful to the ruling class, veterans are essentially discarded by the government.

Now, the Biden administration is escalating a conflict with Russia that Biden himself said last week could lead to "Armageddon"—that is, the annihilation of the entire planet in nuclear war. And what is this all about? The government of Vladimir Putin represents the oligarchs in Russia, and the invasion of Ukraine must be opposed by all workers. However, this invasion was a response to the expansion of the US-led NATO military alliance up to Russia's borders and the massive armament of Ukraine by the US.

Everything that the media tells us about this war is a lie. It is not a war about "democracy." Ukraine's government is comprised of neo-Nazis who praise people who helped carry out the Holocaust during World War Two. The oligarchs who run Ukraine recently passed a labor law eliminating the right of millions of workers to collectively bargain. You won't hear that on the nightly news.

The same military-industrial complex that provoked the war in Iraq is escalating war against Russia today, but on an even larger and more dangerous scale. The US banks and corporations are fighting to control Eastern Europe at the expense of their Russian rivals. The US ruling elite is prepared to make the working class suffer greatly, and even sacrifice millions of lives, to expand the domination of American corporations.

Workers in the US and throughout the world have no interest in the war. We have the same interests as workers in Russia, Ukraine and in every country. We are exploited by the same corporations. We confront the same problems. We will suffer the same consequences if the catastrophe of nuclear war is not prevented.

Workers should know that the labor movement has a long and proud tradition of defending democratic rights, as these rights are critical for all workers. It should also be recalled that the UAW withdrew from the AFL-CIO in 1968 in opposition to the Vietnam War. The fact that the trade unions no longer even raise these critical issues is part of the same process that has led to their domination by a privileged apparatus that serves the interests of the companies.

For these reasons, it is critical that all workers take a stand in defense of Julian Assange. It will not be through appeals to the ruling elite and their politicians that his freedom will be secured, but only through our intervention. We must connect the fight to defend our interests with the defense of Assange, the defense of democratic rights, and opposition to war.

Sincerely,

Will Lehman

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

Get involved with the rank-and-file campaign in the UAW elections.

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved