

Response to James Cogan's defence of #Unity4J on Facebook

By Davey Heller , 26 February 2019

On September 22nd 2018, James Cogan, Secretary of the Socialist Equality Party of Australia, responded in a Facebook post to my article published on classconscious.org: "[The I.C.F.I must expose the petit-bourgeois and far-right forces who have co-opted the campaign for Julian Assange: An appeal to ICFI members and supporters](#)". James' response has been widely distributed on [Twitter](#) and has been cited by both supporters of the #Unity4J and the SEP as the 'final word' on the debate over the 'no politics' perspective and inclusion of the far-right on the #Unity4J vigils. In light of the persistent references to this post, I feel it is necessary to formally respond and take the opportunity to give James a further opportunity to clarify the SEP's position on a number of important political questions which he has so far failed to address.

I feel that this response ignores or omits answers to some important political questions raised in the articles I have published on this matter on classconscious.org

i) What does the SEP think of the 'no politics' perspective of #Unity4J as expressed on their [about](#) page that states "we must bring together ALL public figures who support Julian and WikiLeaks, regardless of their political views or party

affiliation.”?

ii) How does the SEP reconcile its uncritical support, appearance on and endorsement of #Unity4j in light of the [critique made by Mike Head](#) of the perspective of #Unity4J at the ‘Politics in the Pub’ event in Sydney on August 2018?

iii) Why will the SEP not address by name the far -right journalists who have repeatedly appeared on #Unity4J online vigils? This includes:

Lee Stranahan, the ex- senior investigative reporter for Breitbart. This individual is closely connected to Stephen Bannon and is therefore at the heart of the rise of the fascist threat in the U.S. He is a conscious fascist.

Cassandra Fairbanks has appeared repeatedly on #Unity4J and is similarly well connected to the alt-right movement in the U.S. and therefore the Trump White House.

Ross Cameron (before his recent public disgrace) from the far-right Murdoch stable also made several appearances on #Unity4J.

iv) Does the SEP agree or disagree with my statement?:

“It is extremely disorientating that figures such as Lee Stranahan are platformed and given equal respect as the likes of Chris Hedges and Daniel Ellsberg within #Unity4J. The working-class cannot effectively fight fascists if these

wolves are allowed to dress up in the sheep's clothing of defending Assange and 'fighting the establishment' – hiding amongst real progressive voices."

Surely, it is disingenuous to suggest that if a figure like Lee Stranahan does not use his allotted time on #Unity4J to explicitly state their "support for the Trump administration" – than his appearance becomes unproblematic in light of the fact their entire political and media career is dedicated to advancing the fascist agenda of Trump's Republicans?

Surely, James, you are uncomfortable on some level as a representative of the ICFI being given equal treatment and respect to the likes of political trash like Breitbart, The Gateway Pundit and Sky News journalists?

v) Why have the wsws.org and yourself have still given no explanation for the ongoing censoring of the comments sections from the 12th July 2018 wsws.org article on #Unity4J where we first raised our concerns about the ICFI's uncritical attitude to #Unity4J

[Why was the comment section on the WSWs #Unity4J article removed?](#)

Would you not agree that debate is the key way the Marxist movement clarifies important political questions and in contrast – censoring of such debate echoes the unhealthiest bureaucratic tendencies in a Marxist party?

vi) Why does your reply ignore classconscious.org's repeated, non-sectarian attempts to mobilise the international working class in defence of Julian Assange?

Your reply made no reference in your dismissal of classconscious.org and myself as "demoralised middle class" elements, to the fact – that at the time of your statement we had already helped organise two global international days of actions for Assange and put out a standing call for Emergency Action outside U.S. Embassies worldwide. This oversight is hard to understand given that these protests were extensively promoted and linked to on the wsws.org itself.

You are also well aware that these call outs were made explicitly as part of a call to mobilise the international youth and working class in defence of Assange. I completely refute your characterisation of myself as demoralised. I am sustained by my revolutionary confidence that the international working class is the only social force that can and must intervene to not only defend Julian Assange but be organised with a socialist perspective to fight against capitalism and fascism.

I also totally refute that in the current climate where the threat of the far-right to the working class is as acute on an international scale or greater than it was during the 1930's – that to express concerns on such matters denotes "demoralisation". As a Marxist, it is obviously a balancing act to correctly assess the threat of fascism correctly without overstating it but conversely not understating its threat and consequently chloroforming the working class to an existential threat.

To conclude, classconscious.org has never demanded or condemned the ICFI for covering or even participating in

#Unity4J. Obviously, as Marxists it is neither advisable or possible to avoid working with non-Marxist forces to defend the rights of the working class and to defend Julian Assange. However we do condemn the uncritical endorsement of a politically, heterogeneous platform like #Unity4J, organised on a 'no politics', 'Unite with the Right' perspective, with no attempt to define the class forces involved for the working class.

Even the participation of far-right forces does not mean that it is impermissible for Marxists to participate in #Unity4J but these forces must be clearly identified and their true agendas exposed. In contrast, however, the ICFI has refused to name let alone criticise these forces or the petty bourgeois elements such as Kim Dotcom's New Zealand Internet Party and a number of individuals that the SEP has previously labelled pseudo-left (or worse) such as George Galloway and Slavok Zizek. As you said James, it is inevitable such forces are attracted to a broad movement – but as Marxists we must never cease to work to expose or at least label them where necessary. In an age of 'non-political' political movements such as the Yellow Vests, this will be an increasingly important task of Marxists – to not allow the far-right, in particular, to pollute such movements and instead orientate these movements with a clear Marxist orientation.

Lenin wrote in *"Left Wing' Communism : An Infantile Disorder:*

that there is an:

absolute necessity, for the Communist Party, the vanguard of the proletariat, its class-conscious section, to resort to changes of tack, to conciliation and compromises with the various groups of proletarians, with the various parties of the workers and small masters. It is entirely a matter of knowing how to apply these tactics in order to raise—not

lower—the general level of proletarian class-consciousness, revolutionary spirit, and ability to fight and win.”

It brings me no joy to say – that I sincerely believe the ICFI will one day deeply regret its public and uncritical embrace of #Unity4J and the manner in which this has served to lower – not raise – the general level of proletarian class-consciousness.



James Cogan

22 September 2018 · 🌐

Davey Heller, who publishes the website classconscious.org, has spent the past week or more circulating a document on Facebook and via email that criticises the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) for its "silence" on the Unity4J online vigils that have been held to promote support for WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange. He asserts that the vigils have provided a means for the "far-right" to "take-over" the "campaign" to defend Assange and WikiLeaks and seek to channel it behind "fascistic, US President Donald Trump and the Republican Party."

Heller's assertions are based on a misrepresentation of the political character of the international campaign to defend Julian Assange and secure his freedom. The organisations and individuals at the forefront of the defence of WikiLeaks and Assange are overwhelmingly left-wing and progressive, uphold democratic rights, and oppose nationalism and racism. The political identity of the pro-Assange movement finds expression not only in the participation of the ICFI, but also in the involvement of such outspoken opponents of imperialism as the journalists John Pilger and Chris Hedges.

Assange's legal team, publicly represented by figures such as Jennifer Robinson, has consistently advanced the most strident condemnation of the Trump administration for continuing the persecution of WikiLeaks that was begun under the presidency of Barack Obama.

It is false to claim that the Unity4J online vigils have been a vehicle for far-right demagoguery, let alone support for the Trump administration. People need only listen to what has been said during the vigils to confirm the falsity of Heller's allegations. Many people, of differing political persuasions, have used the events to oppose any prosecution of Assange by the US government and to call for an end to his de-facto imprisonment and denial of communication in the Ecuadorian embassy in London.

Of course, as in any large public movement, it is not possible to stop all the various right-wing elements that seek to posture as defenders of democratic rights. They try to take advantage of the fact that Assange has been abandoned by ex-liberal and pseudo-left organisations and individuals. But their right-wing demagoguery has little, if any impact, and has certainly not politically defined the vigils. In any event, the most effective means of ensuring the isolation and expulsion of the right-wing elements is through the systematic fight to mobilise the working class, on the basis of a clear socialist, anti-imperialist and democratic program, in support of Assange.

Heller, exhibiting the pessimism and demoralisation characteristic of middle-class protesters, vastly exaggerates the strength of the reactionary elements, and wants to divert the struggle in defence of WikiLeaks among workers and youth into a politically confused campaign against a mythical right-wing takeover of the campaign. In the process, whatever his intentions, Heller is legitimising the efforts of ex-liberals and the pseudo-left to portray Assange himself as a tool of right-wing pro-Trump and pro-Putin forces.

  Gloria Torres, Tristan Sykes and 64 others

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Related classconscious.org articles

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[“Call things by their right names”: The “hired, fascist demagogues” who have no place in a campaign to defend Julian Assange.](#)

[The I.C.F.I must expose the petit-bourgeois and far-right forces who have co-opted the campaign for Julian Assange: An appeal to ICFI members and supporters](#)

[Why was the comment section on the WSWS #Unity4J article removed?](#)

[Mike Head of the ICFI critiques the 'No Politics' of #Unity4J](#)

[The Dead End Of 'Uniting' With Fascists To Defend Julian Assange.](#)