

San Francisco Labor Council passes motion in defence of Julian Assange

by Davey Heller, February 26th 2019

On February 11th, in an important development in building the campaign to Free Julian Assange in the international working class, the San Francisco Labor Council passed a “Resolution in Support of the Defense of Whistleblower & Journalist Julian Assange”. The San Francisco Labor Council is affiliated with the AFL-CIO and represents over one hundred thousand workers in over 150 Unions.

The motion, which can be read in full below, stated that “Julian Assange has helped expose the role of the US and other governments of war crimes and violations of international law” and “shown the collusion between government officials, politicians and corrupt billionaires and corporate owners”.

It highlighted that the “U.S. government along with the UK government are seeking to push Julian Assange out of the London Ecuadorian consulate and for his arrest by the May UK government and his deportation to the United States for criminal prosecution”.

The motion placed this persecution in the context of broader efforts by the U.S. government to target and harass Whistleblowers and journalists. It contrasted the “US politicians who have called for the murder and torture of

Julian Assange to silence him” with the support he has received from figures such as Oliver Stone and Daniel Ellsberg and the Pacifica Radio Network.

Classconscious.org unequivocally welcomes the support given to Julian Assange by the delegates of the SLFC who moved and supported this motion. Mobilising workers and trade unionists is an important element in building this campaign.

It is also important to acknowledge the challenges and political obstacles that stand in the way of such a mobilisation. These are pointed to by a number of facts surrounding this motion. Firstly, the motion refers to the support given to Julian Assange by the Media Arts and Entertainment Alliance (MEAA: which represents journalists industrially in Australia), in 2010 when they made him a life member. The fact is that the MEAA has not made a public statement in support of Julian since 2011. This is indicative of the near silence from the trade unions and their political masters in the Australian Labor Party over the last nine years. This represents the way the Labor Party, like the Liberal Party has failed to stand up for Julian Assange in deference to ongoing unanimous support in the Australian ruling class for the U.S. Alliance. Defending Assange means cutting across the interests of this alliance.

The AFL-CIO, like it's offshoot, the ACTU in Australia – is politically subordinate to the ruling class and particular the Democrat Party, which shares a bipartisan hatred of Assange with the Republicans. This was evident in both the resistance to the motion from sections of the unions present and the fact that as yet no mention of the motion has been posted on the SFLC Facebook page and the only mention on the SFLC website is in its resolution section.

None of this however, undermines the importance of the motion passed in San Francisco on February 11th. In some degrees it only serves to magnify the motion's importance as it shows that the support for Julian Assange within the working class can, and must find expression within the union movement as the working class of every country is forced to raise political demands to defend, and advance their living standards against a global onslaught against wages and working conditions.

This episode should be a clarion call for workers around the world to raise the plight of Julian Assange in their workplaces and union meetings and have similar motions passed.



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Resolution in Support of the Defense of Whistleblower & Journalist Julian Assange

Whereas, Julian Assange has helped expose the role of the US and other governments of war crimes and violations of international law; and

Whereas, Assange and WikiLeaks have helped expose the Panama papers and the Podesta emails which have shown the collusion between government officials, politicians and corrupt billionaires and corporate owners; and

Whereas, the US government along with the UK government are seeking to push Julian Assange out of the London Ecuadoran consulate and for his arrest by the May UK government and his deportation in the United States for criminal prosecution; and

Whereas, there is a systemic effort by the US government to harass, repress and jail reporters and whistleblowers who exposed corruption and criminal activities by government officials; and

Whereas, US politicians have called for the murder and torture of Julian Assange to silence him; and

Whereas, the Australian Media, Arts and Entertainment Alliance (MEAA) union made Julian Assange an honorary member for life, waived his fees and called for the defense of his rights, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2010-12-23/journalists-union-shows-support-for-assange/2383428>; and

Whereas, the Pacifica Radio Network, Daniel Ellsberg, Oliver Stone and others have called for his defense and freedom,

Therefore be it Resolved the San Francisco Labor Council defends the rights of journalists and whistleblowers and opposes prosecution which could affect all whistleblowers in the US; and

Be it Finally Resolved the San Francisco Labor Council urges our representatives to oppose the criminal prosecution of Julian Assange for whistleblowing activities and will forward this for concurrence by affiliated bodies.

Submitted by Richard Stone, APWU, and adopted by the Executive Committee of the San Francisco Labor Council as amended on February 4, 2019 and accepted by the Delegate Body on February 11, 2019.

Respectfully,

Rudy Gonzalez
Executive Director

OPEIU 29 AFL-CIO 11



Full report on debate by Steve Zeltzer

reproduced from KPFA WorkWeekRadio

By Steve Zelzter Member CWA PMWG

After a contentious debate, the San Francisco Labor Council voted to support journalist and whistleblower Julian Assange on February 11, 2019. Assange is being held a virtual prisoner at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London and the US government wants to arrest him if he is forced out of the embassy.

In 2010, the Australian unions stood in defense of Assange against the campaign by the US and other governments to threaten his arrest and prosecution. These governments have been embarrassed and exposed by WikiLeaks and have been seeking to arrest him and remove him and Wikileaks from continuing their work.

Richard Stone, a delegate for the American Postal Workers in San Francisco introduced the resolution to support Assange at the December 2018 meeting of the Labor Council which represents over 100,000 workers in San Francisco. The resolution condemned the attacks on Julian Assange and threats to murder him. It supported Assange and WikiLeaks for helping to expose the Panama papers and the Podesta emails which the resolution said "have shown the collusion between government officials, politicians and corrupt billionaires and corporate owners"

It also challenged the "systemic effort by the US government to harass, repress and jail reporters and whistleblowers who exposed corruption and criminal activities by government

officials”.

It ran into immediate opposition from some delegates. Alisa Messer, who is the former president of AFT 2121 and the political director of the SF Labor Council charged in the discussion that Assange had been investigated and charged with rape and this was a reason to amend the resolution.

This was challenged on the floor by SEIU 1021 delegate Alyssa James-Garner who reported that there had been an investigation but never any such charges. This was also supported by IATSE Local 16 delegate Michael Madden who said that there were no charges against Assange.

CWA Pacific Media Workers Guild delegate and VP of the Local Gloria LaRiva also supported the resolution to defend Julian Assange and pointed out that the attack on him was not isolated but that many journalists have been targeted for repression and murder.

San Francisco Labor Council Olga Miranda who is Secretary Treasurer and president of SEIU Local 87 argued that the issue needed more information and made a motion to table the resolution until February for more education. This passed and delegates from the Social And Economic Justice sub-committee had an educational meeting on the issue.

On Monday February 4, 2019 there was another discussion in the Executive Committee to amend the resolution to only defend Assange against any criminal charges for “whistleblowing” and not all criminal charges. The sealed secret indictment against Julian Assange if filed would have likely led to a to criminal

charges of releasing secret government information under the Espionage Act.

One of the issues delegates pointed out who supported Julian Assange is that many other journalists have been prosecuted and the prosecution of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange could lead to criminal charges against the Washington Post, New York Times and other publications that reported on the emails and other materials released by Wikileaks.

During the debate on the resolution at the February meeting, delegates spoke in favor of defending him and tied it to the secret role of the US government in Chile, Venezuela and many other countries to intervene to overthrow governments which the US government disagreed with. Delegates from SEIU 1021 including Martha Hawthorne said WikiLeaks played an important role in providing important information and she said she considered Assange a hero and was worried about his health.

Delegates prior to passing the resolution had also passed a resolution opposing the illegal US military and CIA plans to invade Venezuela and supported protests against these actions.

Despite the fact that there had been no charges of rape against Assange, some delegates continued to argue that this was not the case. AFT 2121 president Jenny Worley also had argued that there were criminal charges against him.

SFLC Secretary Treasurer Miranda also lambasted the delegates for wasting time on such issues and argued that they should be spending time talking about contracts and their local union issues. She also said that delegates from some unions were not

attending meetings because of such issues being brought up in the council.

The members voted to support the amendment of the resolution by the SFLC and it becomes the first labor resolution in the United States supporting the freedom of Julian Assange and defending his rights as a journalist to get WikiLeaks information to people in the United States and around the world. US journalists are also being physically threatened by Trump who has called them scum and at a rally held on the same night that the resolution came up at the council, BBC cameraman Ron Skeans was violently pushed and shoved by a supporter of Trump after Trump pointed to the journalists and incited the frenzied crowd to attack them.

US politicians have also supported the murder of Assange as a way to silence him and other journalists who expose the activities of the US government and both Democrats and Republicans have supported the criminal prosecution of him.

Journalists and other trade unionists have joined two rallies in San Francisco at the British consulate to demand his freedom and the action by the San Francisco Labor Council is a step forward in taking the defense campaign to other unions and working people in the United States.

Steve Zeltzer

KFPA WorkWeek Radio

workweek@kpfa.org

WW 2-11-19 SFLC, Labor And Julian Assange: Trade Unionists
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<https://soundcloud.com/workweek-radio/my-movieww-2-11-19-sflc-labor-and-julian-assange-trade-unionists-speak-ou>