

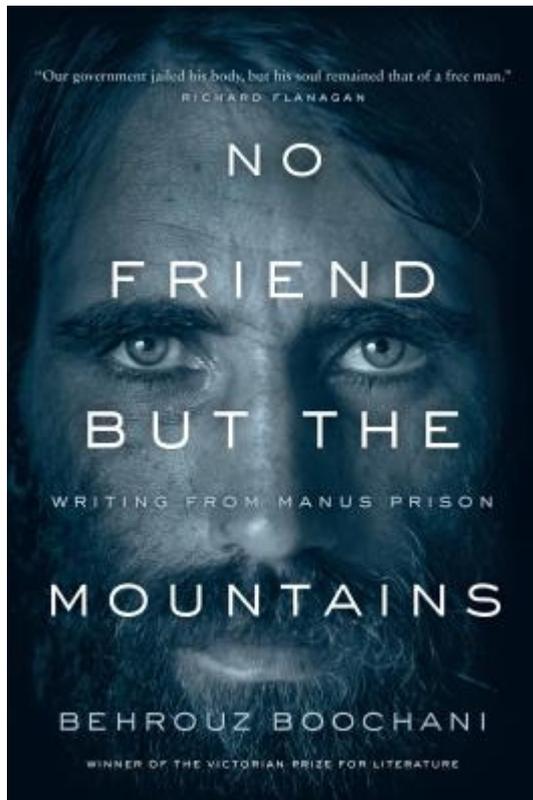
World Press Freedom Day 2019 : Australia's imprisonment of journalist Behrouz Boochani

by Davey Heller, April 8th 2019

World Press Freedom Day on May 3rd is an opportunity to highlight the plight of Australia's most well known targeted journalist Julian Assange but it is also a day to consider the plight of other journalists and whistleblowers in Australia. Classconscious.org intends to publish a series of article on some of these cases in Australia in the lead up to May 3rd.

Behrouz Boochani – Iranian Kurdish journalist and refugee imprisoned by Australia for six years in Papua New Guinea

Behrouz Boochani is an Iranian-Kurdish journalist and refugee who has been imprisoned indefinitely on Manus Island prison by Australian authorities since 2013. Boochani fled Iran where his work as a Kurdish journalist led him to fall foul of the Iranian regime.



He has been held in appalling conditions as part of the punitive “off-shore detention” policy, supported by both major parties in Australia (Labor and Liberal), along with almost 600 other men on Manus. This policy is designed to punish asylum seekers in the camps in an effort to deter other potential asylum seekers from trying to seek asylum in Australia. However the real purpose of this policy is to whip up xenophobia in Australia, not just for electoral gain but ultimately to divide and disorientate the working class. The Australian ruling class was at the forefront of the international moves by the capitalist ruling class to criminalise and demonise asylum seekers for political ends.

Trapped on the island, held in a privately run prison, Behrouz has witnessed violent attacks on inmates from guards and police including the murder of his fellow Iranian friend Reza Berati. He was himself targeted by PNG police and arrested whilst reporting on unrest in the centre in 2017.

Despite suffering the deprivations of incarceration on Manus, Behrouz has courageously continued his brave work as a journalist. He most recently published [No friend but the mountains](#), a memoir he laboriously typed out in Farsi on his mobile phone in short Whats App sections. The book is a first hand account of his journey to seek asylum and his time in the Manus prison. It won the Victorian Premier's Literary Award Victorian Prize for Literature 2019. Boochani is also co-director (with Arash Kamali Sarvestani) of the 2017 feature-length film [Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time](#); in which he filmed life on Manus Island secretly on his mobile phone. He is also collaborator on Nazanin Sahamizadeh's play [Manus](#).

Behrouz Boochani's [Twitter account](#) has been a key ongoing way that the voice of the asylum seekers trapped on Manus and Nauru has been communicated to the world. Behrouz has also been published extensively in major Australian and international newspapers. A recent [documentary](#) on Behrouz was shown on ABC television.

The Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (M.E.A.A.) Campaign for Behrouz Boochani – in stark contrast to silence on Julian Assange.



The MEAA recently launched a [#FreeBehrouz](#) campaign mobilising Australian journalists and writers to sign an open letter demanding the Australian Government bring Behrouz to Australia. Whilst we welcome this campaign, and support for Behrouz more generally, it stands in stark contrast to the silence of the MEAA since 2011 on Julian Assange who is a lifetime member of the union and is also a journalist who has been forced to seek political asylum but is instead detained or imprisoned indefinitely.

That is why [classconscious.org](#) is working with others to promote an [open letter](#) to the MEAA demanding they speak out in defence of Julian Assange.

Several Australian, U.S. and other international journalists, academics, cartoonists and documentary makers have so far signed the letter which will be presented to the MEAA offices in Melbourne on May 3rd, World Press Freedom Day.

The letter is asking that the MEAA make essentially the same demands for Julian that it is making for Behrouz from the Australian Government; that is that both media workers require protection and passage to Australia. Neither man has broken any law and merely seek legal and justified asylum.

The M.E.A.A focus, solidarity and representation for Behrouz starkly highlights their complete silence and passivity on the persecution of Julian in the world's foremost battle for free speech, journalism, whistleblowing and right to know the truth of our capitalist, imperialist masters.

To read more about the events and campaign to defend whistleblowers and journalists visit the [World Press Freedom Day 2019](#) website.