

6 November 2020

Dear General Secretary

I am writing to share with you my deep concerns about the plight of Julian Assange and the grave risk that his potential prosecution poses for free expression and democracy.

The real issue in this case is the charges for which Mr Assange has been indicted. Most concern alleged violations of the Espionage Act. This is a repressive statute that has in the past been used to jail trades union activists and working-class leaders. More particularly, the charges themselves seek to criminalise activity that for many NUJ members is their daily work – cultivating sources who are willing to share sensitive information that reveals incompetence, corruption, and illegality. Indeed, few are the effective trades unionists who don't recognise the usefulness of well-timed leak.

As you will probably be aware, Mr Assange's extradition hearing has recently finished taking evidence. Judgement on his extradition will be handed down on 4 January 2021. Depending on the outcome, it is possible that the case will go before several more courts before it is concluded. One similar case took a decade from arrest in the UK to final conviction in the US.

It is vital that we build a campaign to oppose Mr Assange's extradition and prosecution that is located in the mainstream of progressive concerns – and only trades unions have the reach to achieve this. I am hoping that you will join in this campaign.

Below is a motion based on one adopted by the NUJ's National Executive Council. I would be grateful if you would circulate this (or something like it tailored to your own conventions) to your executive, branches and workplace organisations.

The NUJ had an observer in court throughout the extradition hearings. If any of your meetings would like a speaker on this topic, he would be happy to oblige (time constraints allowing). We recently held a Zoom 'public meeting' on this issue that was well received by our members – I would encourage you to consider something similar. I have also attached an article 'Why trades unionists should oppose Assange's extradition' which you may wish to use, in whole or in part, in your union's journal.

Yours sincerely



MICHELLE STANISTREET
General Secretary

Model motion

"We condemn the detention of Julian Assange pending his extradition proceedings. We further condemn the attempted use of the US Espionage Act to prosecute Assange for his work exposing the war crimes committed by US service personnel in the Iraq and Afghan war logs.

It is our view that the use of these judicial measures by the US constitutes a grave threat to free speech and a free press. It further notes that this attempted prosecution is without precedent in US law.

We further note the report of UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Nils Melzer, that concluded that there was "overwhelming evidence that Assange had been subject to psychological torture". This report also notes the conclusion of more than 60 doctors from around the world that Assange's health has deteriorated to such an extent that he is in no fit state to stand trial.

We applaud campaigns to draw to broad attention concern about the implications for free speech of Assange's detention.

We call on our union to campaign to draw this case to the attention of our members and to make the case that trades unionists oppose the persecution of Julian Assange.