

Prominent Australian journalist Mary Kostakidis speaks out for Assange

By Oscar Grenfell
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Mary Kostakidis, a prominent Australian journalist, attended the Socialist Equality Party's rally in Sydney yesterday, called to oppose the illegal arrest of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and demand his immediate freedom.

Kostakidis has been a leading figure in the media industry for many years. Kostakidis was the main presenter for the national television program "SBS World News" for over two decades, until 2007. She is known and respected by millions of people across the country.

The journalist has a lengthy record of opposition to inequality, war and oppression. She has been outspoken in her defence of Julian Assange, issuing public statements and participating in Unity4J online vigils in his defence. She spoke to the WSWWS after the Sydney rally.

"I'm here today because our government has allowed an Australian to languish in a foreign embassy for so many years. They've stood by as Ecuador broke international law last night, and basically gave him up to be handed over to the United States.

"This was never about a Swedish sex case, it was never about jumping bail. It was always about extradition to the US. It was always about revenge. It was always about our right to know.

"This is why journalists, all over the world, who have published material that WikiLeaks made available, should stand up for Julian's rights. Because it goes to the heart of journalism, and publishing and editing.

"So all those media organisations need to stand up and be counted. It goes to the heart of journalism because this is a core journalistic value. This is why the fourth estate is a critical part of democracy.

"Our government has acted appallingly. We expect them to protect us when we are overseas. There's no

difference between Liberal and Labor.

"They support all the things the United States stands for. Assange is accused of placing 'national security' under threat, with the documents he has released. What places national security at risk, and the citizens of a country at risk, is the wrongdoing of their government: war-mongering, land-grabbing, resource-grabbing."

Kostakidis contrasted the perfidious role of the Australian political establishment with British Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn's statement yesterday that he would oppose Assange's extradition to the US. She noted the importance of the decision by former Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa to grant asylum to Assange in 2012 and expressed gratitude for his ongoing statements in support of the WikiLeaks founder.

"Julian is in great danger now. We cannot stand back and let this happen. They talk about 'bracket creep.' This is human rights creep. It's going to get worse and worse for us, the citizens of this country.

"They will tighten media laws and make things far more difficult. This is not just about WikiLeaks and Julian Assange. This is about frightening other people and making sure that journalists don't speak to whistleblowers, because by speaking to a source, you could be extradited."

Asked about the role of the corporate press in relation to Assange, Kostakidis stated: "It's appalling. It's a combination of being envious and resenting him. There is this notion that he's an ego-maniac and a cult figure.

"The day we start locking people up on the pretext that they've got a big ego, and the day we start saying that persistent support for someone who's exposing corruption and wrongdoing is 'cultish' is the day we've all gone nuts.

"There has been a whole wave of people studying

media studies, who are really more interested in working in marketing, but who are also working in journalism. We, as journalists, are not there to market government press releases. We are there to question them, and to be there with the courageous people who reveal deceit.”

In conclusion, Kostakidis declared: “We’ve got to stop the UK from extraditing Assange to the United States.”

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>