

Protest in London's Parliament Square demands release of Julian Assange

By our reporters
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Dozens gathered in London's Parliament Square yesterday to demand the release of Julian Assange. The WikiLeaks founder is incarcerated in Belmarsh prison in southeast London in conditions tantamount to solitary confinement, after police seized him from the Ecuadorian Embassy on April 11. He is due to reappear in court on May 2 for an extradition hearing.

The lively demonstration organised by the Julian Assange Defence Campaign (JADC) was supported by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and World Socialist Web Site. SEP and International Youth and Students for Social Equality members took part alongside Ecuadorian and South American citizens, journalists, and other workers and youth. Tourists and passers-by joined the protest.

Protesters assembled outside the Supreme Court, which has played a critical role in the British judiciary's trampling on Assange democratic rights over the last decade.

They chanted slogans including, "UK, USA, Free Julian Assange!", "There is only one condition. No extradition!" and "Free Press-Free Assange."

SEP placards read "Free Chelsea Manning—Free Julian Assange," "British government must grant Assange free passage to Australia," "No Internet Censorship" and "Defend Free Speech."

Emmy Butlin of the JADC said, "We're gathered here today in Parliament Square to protest at Julian Assange's incarceration. We're going to rally everybody together to build up popular support for his freedom. This morning WikiLeaks' Twitter account informed us that Julian has finally had some video contact with his lawyers and will meet with them on April 26. That is good news."

Conchi, a tourist from Spain said, "We did not know about this protest but when we saw we had to stop and

join in. Julian Assange has done a very good job showing all about the wars we have had. He was very courageous and what he did was very important for the whole world."

Conchi compared what has happened to Assange with the attacks on democratic rights in Spain. Commenting on the way Catalan separatism has dominated the April 28 election there, she said, "It is the economy, jobs and health that are the most important. The people in Catalonia should have a chance to say what they want. That is a democratic right. The Catalan politicians should not be in jail."

A London hospital doctor, Ezra, said that following Assange's removal from the Ecuadorian Embassy "people have to realise that this is a really crucial time. It is a turning point for his future and our futures too. We have to build up more momentum. We have to have a big presence at Belmarsh on Saturday and at Julian's May 2 court appearance."

Ezra criticised the way the media and politicians had whipped up lies that Assange had to answer "rape allegations" in Sweden stemming back to 2010. "The case was dropped [by the Swedish authorities]. Julian is very happy to go to Sweden to answer the allegations, but they can't guarantee he won't be extradited to the US.

"We have to make people more aware that there is a much bigger game going on here. If Julian is extradited to the US they will pile up the charges against him as they did with Chelsea Manning. She was let go but is now in prison again."

"There is no benchmark for those in power. They are a law unto themselves. The US, the UK, all these governments are above the law. They do what they like," Ezra concluded.

Another protester, Kyle, said, "The media has been

put to shame by WikiLeaks who are real journalists.

WikiLeaks reveals uncomfortable truths and makes the media—the BBC, the *Guardian*—look bad. Wikileaks has told us more about how the world works than all the media agencies combined.

“In the past the labour movement would have supported” people like Julian Assange, Kyle said, but it had collapsed. However, “All the potential for a socialist movement is there. We have to explain that all the problems we face are linked to the underlying cause—capitalism, imperialism and militarism.”

Maxine said, “I’m here today because Julian Assange needs support. He needs rescue from the jaws of imperialist states. Their reason for persecuting him is because he and WikiLeaks exposed their filthy war crimes, their torture programmes and all the covert wars that they fight against people in the world.

“If you cannot at this point defend Assange, you are worthless as a left-wing person or as a ‘liberal’, you are a fake.”

Asked why she thought so few on the nominal left have defended Assange, Maxine replied, “I think it’s absolutely despicable. Most of them have argued, ‘Why doesn’t he just get extradited to Sweden?’ and actually that’s disgraceful. Since when did the left become the police? He needs support. This is the acid test for what little remains of democratic rights. If we lose then just wait and see what happens next.”

Maxine said she “very much” saw the treatment of Assange as part of a broader attack on “the freedom of the working class and broader movements to fight for their rights and against the disgusting people who rule over us, the elites, and what they do to keep in power. We need to be able to expose that and WikiLeaks has helped us to do it. The struggle for democratic rights is essential.”

“I’m here to protest the injustice of this man being held in Belmarsh prison, as a political prisoner of the UK,” said another participant, Jeff. “I think the main political parties haven’t said anywhere near enough. That includes the Labour Party and nominal parties of the left. We need to see an awful lot more said and done.

“Assange is in a Category A prison for terrorists and murderers and yet so far he is just on a charge of bail violation. There have been no charges coming from Sweden and he’s not yet being officially extradited to

the US.

“I think there’s a problem on the left, or what you might call the liberal left, where people think that on the issue of an accusation of rape—which is very serious, obviously, whenever it’s made—that we can’t judge it for ourselves. I believe in always going where the evidence takes you. So if it looks like a spurious charge, then I think we should be able to say so without being accused of being rape apologists. That bothers me. It’s a very restrictive culture where you can very quickly be told you’re a part of the problem, that you’re involved in disempowering women and things like that. I find that poisonous.”

Jeff spoke of the significance of Julian Assange: “I think he’s scooped just about all the other journalists, particularly the *Guardian* which has a very squalid place in all this. They made a huge reputation from his material, had a multi-million-pound book deal and movie tie-in. They’ve profited from his leaks tremendously and they’ve spent the past seven years mocking the man. Even now, they weakly simper that they’re not in favour of him going to America, but they’re happy for him to go to Sweden, knowing that since 2000 Sweden has had a 100 percent compliance record with US extradition requests.”

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