

Don't Extradite Assange campaign calls on Boris Johnson to intervene

By Robert Stevens
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Saturday's demonstration in London by the Don't Extradite Assange (DEA) campaign was attended by some 1,500 people. The march and rally marked the first such event organised by the official WikiLeaks-endorsed campaign group.

It is fronted by the founder of the pseudo-left Counterfire group, John Rees, a leading figure in the Stop the War Coalition.

The rally assembled at Australia House in the Aldwych district of the city before marching to Parliament Square. Speaking at the rally were Assange's father, John Shipton; the former finance minister of the Greek Syriza government, Yanis Varoufakis; WikiLeaks Editor-in Chief Kristinn Hrafnsson, the former Pabloite Tariq Ali, and leading Counterfire member and convenor of Britain's Stop the War coalition, Lindsey German. Also speaking were musicians Roger Waters and Brian Eno, the fashion designer Vivienne Westwood, and former diplomat Craig Murray.

While those who attended showed their determination to fight for Assange, the DEA, established only last autumn after Assange had already suffered nearly a decade under arbitrary detention, has focused for weeks on an attempt to rehabilitate the Labour Party and the trade unions, their "left" representatives in particular, and to corral the movement in defence of Assange under their control.

In recent weeks, the DEA has joined with Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and his shadow chancellor John McDonnell in urging a focus on appeals to the Conservative government, pleading with Boris Johnson to oppose an "unequal" extradition treaty with the US.

In his speech, Hrafnsson stated that "dark forces" were seeking to silence Assange forever and destroy WikiLeaks. "It is a dark force that now wants Julian

extradited to the United States and thrown in a cell to spend the rest of his days there. We must stop it. We must stop this force."

In line with the new focus on appeals to Johnson, he added, "This is not about left or right in politics. We can unite on this. It's a dark force versus us who want justice, transparency, accountability and truth."

Such a statement can only disarm those seeking to free Assange, an effort that requires an implacable struggle by the working class against the Johnson and Trump governments now conspiring to silence him forever.

Other speakers made clear that their appeal was directly to Johnson.

This is the same man who was London mayor when Assange was first arrested in the capital in 2010 and who authorised a Metropolitan Police operation to surround the Ecuadorian Embassy to arrest Assange "at a moment's notice."

As foreign minister in Theresa May's government, when Assange was illegally arrested last April and dragged out of the embassy by the Metropolitan Police, Johnson gloated in a tweet that declared: "It's only right that Julian Assange finally faces justice. Credit to @foreignoffice officials who have worked tirelessly to secure this outcome."

That Johnson, who now heads the most right-wing government in living memory, is considered a potential ally by the DEA was summed up by Tariq Ali, who said of the prime minister: "You actually have been a journalist yourself. We may not agree with what you wrote and I never did. You know what it is to publish a piece which annoys people, which irritates people. And are you prepared to sit silently and acquiesce in this judicial farce that is to begin in a few hours time? Are you going to do that? Because if you do, effectively

you are opening the door to the United States being able to pick any foreign journalist from anywhere and demand his or her extradition.”

As editor of the pro-Tory *Spectator*, Johnson specialised in churning out anti-working class statements and racist bile, which was also the staple of his output as a *Telegraph* columnist, for which he was paid £250,000 a year. To speak of Johnson’s “journalism” in the same breath as Julian’s Assange’s pioneering and brave contributions, which earned him the enmity of the world’s ruling elite, is obscene.

The comments of Varoufakis to the rally summed up the opposition of the DEA to the mobilization of the working class.

The fact that the London demonstration was attended by only hundreds of people rather than many thousands is due to the opposition for an entire decade of the Labour Party and the unions to any mass mobilization in Assange’s defence.

Corbyn and his shadow chancellor, John McDonnell, have led the party, with a membership of over 500,000, since 2015. Over that entire period they did not lift a finger to mobilise the membership in support of Assange. Instead, they kept silent in order to appease the warmongering Blairites in the Parliamentary Labour Party, who insisted that Assange be extradited to Sweden to answer concocted allegations of sexual misconduct. Sweden, as was well known, would have simply been a stopping point in Assange’s extradition to the US.

But Varoufakis claimed that the workers themselves were responsible for the relatively low numbers turning out to defend Assange. He said, “You know Julian’s worst enemy, freedom’s worst enemy, are not even people in smoke filled rooms plotting against good people. No, Julian’s worst enemy, freedom’s worst enemy, is apathy, it is fatigue. It is good people too tired, too exhausted, too disheartened by working zero hour contracts or whatever to be able to expend the energy that you and I have the privilege of expending today.

“It is people who are neither good nor bad working in these offices in Whitehall. You know, they are not evil. They are just banal. Too banal to care. We have to make them care.”

Such comments could be uttered only by someone who speaks for smug and self-satisfied social layers

that are remote from any of the concerns of the working class. Varoufakis is a millionaire many times over, along with his wife, Danae Stratou, an artist from a family of wealthy capitalists.

After signing an extension to the European Union and International Monetary Fund austerity programme in Greece, Varoufakis claimed that an agreement could be reached with the EU to end the austerity drive. When the population voted against the austerity demands of the EU in the June 2015 referendum—confounding the calculations of Varoufakis and Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras, who had assumed that the people would not defy the EU—Varoufakis promptly resigned. He then established the Diem25 political movement, whose declared aim is reforming the EU!

Aware that such a naked right-wing stance can only discredit the DEA, Counterfire’s Lindsey German sought to make a few criticisms of the Johnson government, while reassuring everyone that the task was above all “To keep telling these MPs in Parliament we are not going to give up. We do not want to see Julian Assange extradited.”

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