

“The people are behind you!”

Students, faculty and staff at University of Michigan oppose persecution of Julian Assange

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On Monday, an International Youth and Students for Social Equality campaign team spoke to students and faculty at the University of Michigan about the confinement and persecution of journalist Julian Assange of WikiLeaks.

For six years, Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, has been living under conditions of house arrest in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, UK. If he steps outside, he faces the threat of immediate arrest, extradition, imprisonment and possibly the death penalty, through a conspiracy of the British, Swedish, and US governments to silence him for publishing secret government documents.

Since tweeting criticism of the arrest of Catalan regional president Carles Puigdemont in Germany, Assange has had his access to the Internet revoked by Ecuador. He is also being denied any visitors—cutting him off from communication with the outside world.

IYSSE members spoke to students and faculty at UM about Assange and promoted two upcoming meetings on Internet censorship: Organizing Resistance to Internet Censorship at the University of Michigan on April 3 and the April 22 conference in Detroit, The Class Struggle and the Fight Against Internet Censorship.

“It is quelling free speech, to say, ‘you can’t post this,’ and to cut somebody’s Internet access, that’s absurd,” said Isaac, a third-year computer science student who was on his way to a class on Internet law.

“I don’t really think that Internet censorship is something that the government should have any responsibility over,” he added. “In class, we’re talking

about basically how the government is trying to say to Google, you have to show the searches that we want, the content that we want. But I think the government and providers should be agnostic to the material being sent out.”

Lecturer Nina O’Connor said that what was being done to Assange was “terrible.” “The people are behind you! Hopefully he will be freed, and at least in the interim have access to the Internet to communicate with the world.” She agreed that everyone has a right to access the Internet. “In today’s world,” she said, “it’s like water. It’s part of our world, and it’s one of the positives of this global world we live in.”

Nina is following the strikes of teachers across the United States on social media. “I think it’s fantastic,” she said. “It’s a big wave of people getting motivated and protesting. It’s been one of the positive outcomes to the otherwise horrible, disastrous situation in this country. I have 26 years teaching experience, a master’s degree in teaching, and I make \$34,500/year. Some of my peers are taking on second jobs, driving Uber and Lyft. So we’re fighting for a fair contract. We may strike next Monday and Tuesday.”

Sue, a librarian, said, “Julian Assange is a hero! He’s very brave for doing what he’s doing.” She said that WikiLeaks releasing the emails that reveal the content of Hillary Clinton’s speeches to Goldman Sachs and other financial institutions was “absolutely the right thing to do.”

Caleb, an art student, said he didn’t believe that Google and Facebook were trying to fight “fake news.” “They’re actually blocking the *World Socialist Web*

Site,” he said, “and Democracy Now and Truth Dig and sites like that. It’s horrifying.”

Caleb added, “The reason I think we all love the Internet is because it’s an open forum. That’s what we don’t get enough of these days. This university is a public institution, it’s supposed to be the place where we can come and say whatever we want, how we want, and that’s the best way people can discuss.”



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