

“The media and government want to keep us silent.”

Students and workers in Iowa demand freedom for Julian Assange

Marcus Day, George Marlowe
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On Saturday, *World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke with students and workers in Iowa City, Iowa, about the persecution of WikiLeaks founder and publisher Julian Assange. The city is the home of the state’s oldest university, the University of Iowa. There was widespread support for Assange and the role he has played in exposing the crimes of American imperialism.

“A lot of the things that have been said about Assange have not been true,” said Cali, who is 26 and works at an assisted-living facility in Muscatine, Iowa, along the Mississippi River. “And it’s not fair. It’s not right.”

Assange has been persecuted for doing the work of a genuine journalist, she explained, “I think it’s because he’s been so vocal. He put himself out there. And that’s what happens to people who do that. The media and government want to keep us silent. And he wasn’t.”

Cali said she appreciated the information Wikileaks had revealed about government surveillance, such as the Vault 7 documents showing the CIA’s tools used to spy on a multitude of consumer electronic devices. She said, “Being in my generation, I do think about, ‘Oh, is my iPhone recording me right now? Is what I’m watching on TV right now going to be put in some database?’ You can’t live like that.”

Patrick, who plans to study history at the University of Iowa in the fall, said he disagreed with the claims that Wikileaks and Assange broke the law by revealing evidence of war crimes and government surveillance. “I think at the very least what Assange did, to give the public a greater awareness of what’s going on, like with our information and how the government’s

filtering through that, I think that was something that needed to happen. It wasn’t a criminal action like the government portrays it to be. It’s something that should be out there.”

Referring to the propaganda used to justify war and attacks on democratic rights, he continued, “They claim to be in the interests of the American people, but a lot of everyday people either don’t care or don’t want to be a part of those issues that the higher-ups of the government feel the need to get their hands on and manipulate.”

Money was being squandered on war, he added, and “for things that are really not in the public’s best interest when talking about where that money could be going instead, to places like education and things like that.”

Melissa, who works at the University of Iowa and is a student at a local community college, said she opposed the persecution of Assange because “it’s oppressive to torture people who are trying to expose government corruption. You just see throughout history that that’s never an okay thing to do.

“Obviously we need to know if our government is invading our privacy or going against our rights. So, I think it’s good that Assange is doing these things.”

Randall, a former high school history teacher from Wisconsin, denounced the attacks on Assange. Referring to the torture of Chelsea Manning—the US Army whistleblower who revealed evidence of war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan—by the Obama administration, he said, “They were monsters. That was the crime, what was done to her. What she presented was what was of interest, not a crime. And that was the right thing. How would we know otherwise? How is

that different from the Pentagon Papers, or any of that?”

Randall also praised the rebellion by teachers in West Virginia, Oklahoma, and elsewhere, and spoke about the growing anger over social inequality he had seen. “We’re reaching a tipping point. I’ve traveled a lot of places and worked a lot of terrible jobs and in hard situations. There are a lot of angry poor people. And as soon as they figure out who’s whipping them, something’s going to bust. There’s going to be a revolution.”

Braxton, a young restaurant worker in Iowa City, spoke out against the attacks on Assange. He said, “Julian Assange showed how deceitful our government can be. We’ve been totally blindsided by a lot of things. A lot of things were kept hidden from us, which he helped report.”

He agreed that the reason Assange was being persecuted was because he exposed the war crimes of the ruling class, and the super-rich. Reporters from the WSWS explained that an anti-war, socialist movement in the working class was necessary to defend Assange. “There’s no difference between a Democrat and a Republican,” Braxton said. “I don’t think they stand for us. The money supports them.”

Hannah chimed in, agreeing that the defense of Julian Assange was bound up with the fight for socialism and social equality. She noted sarcastically, “But we can’t have that because they won’t be on top anymore. I think it’s very important we have an equal society, but it’s hard to fight for equality when we are kept at the bottom. I also think education should be free and affordable.”



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