

Protesters at Ecuador embassy vigil in London demand freedom for Julian Assange

Our reporters
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The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to some of those attending Tuesday evening's vigil in London to demand freedom for WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange. The vigil marked six years since Assange was forced to take refuge in the Ecuadorean embassy.

Wiesje from the Netherlands came to support Assange because he had exposed the lies of governments and the press and was now being treated "vindictively."

She noted how the Netherlands government was implementing laws to suppress information under the guise of "fake news."

The European Union, which includes the Netherlands, is voting this week on a Copyright Directive, Wiesje explained, "that installs copyright filters to censor information and restrict the sharing of links as had happened with YouTube's changing of its algorithms. It means information will be even more concentrated in the hands of the big corporations.

"All the governments of the European Union say they are opposed to 'fake news' but the real distributors of fake news are papers like the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. In Holland, the TV we get fed is pure propaganda, a narrative of the government."

Clara has been involved in the Free Julian Assange campaign from when he first took refuge, protesting outside the Ecuadorean Embassy every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

"Julian has been confined to a small box room for years, unable to see friends and families or access the internet. His health has been suffering. His detention is an abuse of human rights and equivalent to torture.

"Even in the dark days of the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, where I come from, the government would let people who claimed political asylum in embassies leave the country. And look at the difference in the way Julian is being treated to the way [Chilean dictator Augusto] Pinochet was allowed to stay in a seven-bedroom mansion before being released."

Clara explained that the lawyer who represented Pinochet in the House of Lords, Clare Montgomery, also led the prosecution team in the Swedish request for the extradition of Assange.

Clara described how the campaign to defend Assange once

had support from liberal and pseudo-left organisations who had now abandoned him. "Stop the War and others supported us at the beginning but now they have stopped. Originally it was about the 'rape' allegations, which the Women Against Rape answered in their 2012 *Guardian* article. Now I think it is because of WikiLeaks releases about Hillary Clinton. Since then the *Guardian* has been absolutely terrible."

Jennie from London said the speech to the vigil by Socialist Equality Party assistant national secretary Julie Hyland was a "very good and very concise call for freedom of speech and defence of Julian Assange. I thought the point she made about Jeremy Corbyn not saying anything about him for the last three years was very interesting. It shows he is with all the other politicians. They are all afraid of Julian and the secrets he revealed about American war crimes. They want him hung, drawn and quartered."

Cristina, 55, is from Chile and has lived in the UK for 42 years. She has supported Assange throughout his persecution and addressed the vigil in his support.

She said, "Assange is brave to show how they are destroying democracy. I wish we would have had Julian Assange in Chile to release documents from the CIA when [President] Allende was overthrown [in a CIA backed military coup in 1973]. Perhaps many deaths would have been avoided. I was in prison in 1974-76, until I came to the UK as a political refugee. I was disappeared for a month."

Cristina said she understood that the Allende's Popular Unity government were wrong to claim that the military, led by the fascist Pinochet, would not attack the working class. "We underestimated their power," she said. "We must pressure the UK government to give a statement that they don't extradite Julian to the US," adding, "his health is not great."

Susana, from Portugal, has lived in the UK for 12 years. She said, "I hope Julian can get safe passage to Australia or where he wants to go. I found out what has been happening to him on Twitter and have been following his case for two years. He was framed. We don't know anything about these women [who originally made allegations of sexual misconduct, that were then dropped by Swedish prosecutors for lack of evidence but only after years had passed]. He knows about the criminal acts of governments and the corruption from the roots."

Lucy is an actress who attended the vigil with her father. She said, “[My father] introduced me to what’s going on and sent me an article from the WSWS about it. I wanted to come along for more information. At the end of the day [Assange] is a human being with human rights.”

Lucy was particularly concerned about the democratic principle of innocent until proven guilty. “It’s not fair what happened to him, it’s like McCarthyism. Anyone can say anything now. If I dislike someone and say they abused me, it’s like a witch trial. People are going to be scared to speak out. And what’s [Labour leader] Corbyn done about it!?”

Lucy was concerned about growing government and corporate control over social media. “Our generation is influenced by social media but who is in charge of it? I was looking at Ray-ban sunglasses on Facebook and within 20 minutes adverts were showing for Ray-ban sunglasses.

“People I’ve spoken to didn’t know who Julian Assange was. I’ve taken some WSWS leaflets to take home [to distribute].”

Retired financial adviser, **Lincoln**, said he has been a WSWS reader for “four or five years. I was planning to attend these vigils for a long time and seeing [independent journalist] John Pilger doing the same thing, I decided it was long overdue.

“There are people trying to control the agenda and everything we know. If someone tries to tell the truth they are shut down. It’s hard to find balanced news in the US. One side supports Clinton, Fox News supports Trump. RT [Russia TV] has to register as a foreign agent, the same happened to [Iranian broadcaster] PRESSTV. But we have American propaganda like in the cold war with Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty.

“Governments want to make an example of anyone who goes against the status quo or threatens to take control of the agenda away from them. It’s Julian Assange now, it’s us tomorrow. Something they don’t control is the Internet and they want to control it.

“I don’t believe Britain has a foreign policy, it comes from the US. If people don’t understand the importance of supporting Assange, it will be too late, they will have no say, and won’t know the difference between lies and truth.”

Mehdi lives in North Africa and has “been supporting Julian Assange since late 2010, since he was arrested. I was very shocked by his arrest and all the accusations of ‘rape’. It sounded very fishy to anyone familiar with these made up cases. I was very angry when I saw they had issued an Interpol ‘red notice’ against Julian, and also the European Arrest Warrant. Well, he went himself to the police, he wasn’t arrested or anything. He went voluntarily to the police... that was what flipped a switch in me. I understood that it was a very important case, because WikiLeaks had been revealing... all the crimes that many had suspected, but there was no proof, no evidence.

“Suddenly WikiLeaks was pouring evidence online for everyone to see, like the ‘Collateral Murder’ video. And suddenly you have this guy, the founder of WikiLeaks, being

accused! No charges! Just accusations! All over the mass media, of rape, Interpol red notices, is it Hitler? No, it’s just a publisher, but he published very annoying things for the US empire.

“That was when I really started being active for WikiLeaks and Assange. I created a non-profit organisation in France, called Liberte Info. I gathered some volunteers for counter-propaganda. In late 2010 to 2012, all the mass media were attacking Assange and WikiLeaks daily with lies. But if you attack people with lies on this scale, unfortunately people tend to believe it if there is no counter-argument.

“I am here today for this sad anniversary; six years of confinement and it has got worse. I would not have imagined that it would get worse. His communications have been cut.”

Mehdi said he opposed Ecuador’s new president, Lenín Moreno, saying he “has betrayed everybody. Apparently, he ordered that Julian’s communications be cut.”

Mehdi also opposed the role of the media in attacking Assange, saying he has “zero respect for the *Guardian*. I have been using the non-profit organisation I founded to attack Luke Harding, a very corrupt [*Guardian*] journalist. As John Pilger says, they are not journalists, they are Vichy journalists, they work with the fascists and neo-liberals and they are very happy to do it... he’s lying in his articles.

“The *New York Times* was sitting on the [US] Pentagon Papers for six or nine months, because they were negotiating with the Defence Department for that time. It just tells you what kind of cowards these people are and they call themselves journalists!

“For me the real journalist is Julian. And the fact that he gets all the heat is because he is doing a real job and he is courageous. He makes zero compromise. They can’t negotiate with him. He receives truth and truth is in the interests of the people.”

Mehdi expressed concern about Assange’s deteriorating health. “He needs medical care and has been needing it for years for serious medical issues, as doctors reported when they examined him back in 2015, but he got nothing...”



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