

Workers and youth in UK speak out against continued persecution of Julian Assange

Our reporters
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August 16 will mark six years to the day since WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange was granted political asylum by the Ecuadorian government, after seeking refuge in Ecuador's London Embassy on June 19, 2012.

In recent months, Ecuadorian President Lenín Moreno, who is seeking closer relations with Washington and US investment, has stepped up moves to remove Assange from Ecuador's Embassy in London. In a tweet and television interview August 6, Moreno declared he will "take measures" against Assange unless he stops "intervening" in the politics and affairs of countries.

Were Assange to be forced out, he faces immediate arrest by the British police and imprisonment on minor bail infringement charges relating to a case dropped by the Swedish authorities over a year ago. Assange fears that if detained by the British authorities, he will be extradited to the US by the Trump administration.

These moves are aimed at denying free speech to Assange and WikiLeaks, who over the last decade have exposed the war crimes, coup plots and mass surveillance carried out by the US government and its allies.

World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke to workers and youth in the cities of Sheffield and Salford about the persecution of Assange and the international campaign waged by the International Committee of the Fourth International to demand his freedom.

Outside Central Library in Sheffield, South Yorkshire, Joseph, who comes from Africa, said, "It is terrible to hear that the UK government is denying Assange his democratic rights. They have forgotten human rights laws written by their own lawyers and signed to protect democratic rights.

"The world is not a safe place. They want to cover up

the violations of human rights by the United States that Julian Assange has exposed. The UK is killing democracy and consequently has no right to lecture the developing countries on these issues. They have an 18th century mentality.

"We live in a digital age where information can be exchanged freely. That is what democracy is meant to be about.

"The UK is following Trump on everything. This is bad. He denies global warming and argues for trade war. There is the danger we will be dragged into further wars.

"Under Obama the wars continued. His drone killings claimed the lives of hundreds of innocent civilians. The US is backing Saudi Arabia in its war against Yemen. The Saudi rulers are worse than Saddam Hussein. This whole mess has got to stop."

Stephen, a self-employed gardener, was critical of the silence of Jeremy Corbyn and the officially designated left.

"I've followed Julian Assange and his situation for many years. After in-depth reading, I formed the conclusion that he is an innocent man who has been framed.

"He's basically been imprisoned by forces of the state, forces of capitalism, forces of the empire. He should be free. He's a truth-teller. He's somebody who supports whistle-blowing, which is something we desperately need.

"WikiLeaks has exposed state and corporate crimes, not just in this country, but in America and around the world, and this is really important.

"There's a real cynicism amongst the journalistic class in that they've been quite content to use the information released through WikiLeaks, but at the same time demonise the organisation and the person at

the top of it who actually facilitated those revelations.

“I don’t hear much defence or support for Assange from the mainstream political left in Britain. A lot of them, even [Labour Party leader Jeremy] Corbyn and [Shadow Chancellor John] McDonnell, seem beholden to narratives built up in the media that Assange is a suspect character and he is fleeing from legitimate charges brought up in Sweden. It’s all been completely debunked. It’s a straightforward case of a man being framed. They should say that. They should come out and support him.”

Also registering support, Lynne, a student, explained, “I like whistle-blowers. There is too much corruption.” She recounted how, after watching the WikiLeaks video “Collateral Murder” containing live footage of the US Apache helicopter mowing down civilians and journalists in Iraq, she was moved to write an anti-war poem.

Richard, a musician working mostly in France, said, “It’s really vital we support whistle blowers, otherwise secrets will remain secrets and we will never find out about spying or military atrocities.

“If Assange is extradited to the USA where he can face the death penalty, that would be a sad day for the world. These people, Assange, Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning, are the heroes of the modern age.”

Mohamad, 35, who was born in Iraq and left on the eve of the US-led invasion in 2003, described WikiLeaks and Assange as “speaking the truth. Most of the news of Iraq on the TV is not true.”

Mohamad first heard of WikiLeaks after watching the Collateral Murder video in 2010. “They were killing somebody without knowing who they are killing. It’s murder basically, and afterwards they’re trying to cover it up.

“The UN went to Iraq and found there were no weapons of mass destruction. The only reason they invaded the country was to get the oil and resources and try to create wars within the country as well so that they could get control. 2003 was an illegal war. It’s not for the benefit of humanity.

“It had a huge impact. It was one of those wars in my lifetime that’s been a disaster. A dictator has gone, which a lot of people were happy about at the time. But there were no bombs or killings before then, people had money to buy things and food to eat. Now if you go to Iraq there’s no electricity, no healthcare, no water.

Basically, it’s like a shanty-town.

“So this war had a lot of negative impacts. Millions of people were killed and they’ve created a lot of division in the country—Kurds against Arabs, Shia against Sunnis, and they’ve created areas controlled by ISIS.

“This is all for the benefit of a group of people taking the resources and oil. It’s not to bring about democracy and they have brought in dictators who are worse than Saddam Hussein.

“Assange is just doing journalism. You are talking about freedom of speech and freedom of journalism. It’s worrying for me, because if I have freedom of speech, I should be able to exercise that right.”

WSWS reporters spoke to shoppers on Saturday at Salford precinct in northwest England.

Court translator Richard from Eritrea said there was “no justice. Assange disclosed what America has been doing. He is jailed like a refugee for committing no crime. It’s time for organizations to act and help this man.”

Eric said, “What we’re seeing here is a McCarthyite witch-hunt. They tried to bring sexual abuse charges against Assange. If anyone gets in the way of capitalism, they will do whatever they have to do to ruin that person.

“Look at the situation with the miners’ strike (1984/85)—a lot were blacklisted. This is capitalism’s response.”

Steph, a pharmacist, said of the US government, “If they didn’t have anything to hide, they shouldn’t be so upset about WikiLeaks’ disclosures.

“Assange is using information they want hidden and they’re using him as a scapegoat. What’s happened to Assange shows that governments can do what they like. Using this example people should think that could be my head on the line.”



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