

Chris Marsden at Solidarity Vigil for Julian Assange

“Britain now plays the key role in the conspiracy to silence Julian Assange once and for all”

Chris Marsden
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The following speech was delivered by Socialist Equality Party (UK) National Secretary Chris Marsden at the Solidarity Vigil for Julian Assange held March 10 outside the Ecuadorian Embassy in London.

We are all here to demand justice for Julian Assange but, I'd like to begin by addressing the disgusting decision to imprison Chelsea Manning.

On Friday March 8, federal judge Claude M. Hilton, an arch reactionary, ordered the brave whistle-blower to prison for an indefinite period.

Why? Because she refused on principle to answer any questions before a secret grand jury investigating Wikileaks and Julian Assange.

Chelsea Manning, like Julian Assange, is a hero. She was jailed, abused and tortured for seven years for having exposed US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan.

What did Assange and WikiLeaks reveal thanks to Manning's leaks in 2010?

- The “Collateral Murder” video showing US forces gunning down Iraqis suspected of being militants and killing two journalists in the process.

- The routine killing of civilians in that conflict.
- The existence of US death squads in Afghanistan.
- What really happens in Guantanamo Bay.
- Spying and black ops by the US around the world—against enemies and allies alike.

Manning was just 22 when she handed WikiLeaks 750,000 classified and sensitive documents. For that she was court-martialled and sentenced to 35 years in prison. She stayed in prison for seven years, often in solitary confinement, on suicide watch, and at times being stripped naked, before being pardoned by Obama.

For these exposures also—and not to avoid a trumped-up and now abandoned “preliminary investigation” in Sweden—Julian Assange was forced to seek refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy. He has now been involuntarily detained there for nearly seven

years at terrible personal cost physically and mentally.

Contrary to deliberately falsified media reports, Assange has never been charged with a crime, let alone “sexual assault” or “rape.” In 2010, Swedish prosecutors fabricated a case that he was under “suspicion” for alleged offences, against the express wishes of the two women they claimed to represent, and then sought his extradition to answer “questions.”

Sweden would only have ever been a stop-off point before Assange was extradited to the United States. This is what forced him to seek asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy.

Chelsea Manning is being targeted as a means of finally getting Assange. Their fates remain inextricably linked.

Manning is being pressured to testify so that Assange can be handed a sentence more severe than the 35 years she initially received in 2013. The grand jury she refused to testify before has been empanelled to bring espionage and conspiracy charges against Julian Assange and WikiLeaks.

The judge threatened Chelsea Manning with what could be many more years in prison, warning, “[E]ither until you purge yourself [agree to testify] or the end of the life of the grand jury.”

She replied in a statement, “I will not comply with this, or any other grand jury... a secret process that I morally object to,” that, she added, “has been historically used to entrap and persecute activists for protected political speech.”

These events confirm irrefutably that Assange is being involuntarily detained and that if he leaves the embassy he will be shipped to the US by the British government. Anyone who says differently is a liar and an accomplice in attempts to get Assange and silence WikiLeaks.

The big business media has denied the truth for years. Rotten publications like the *Guardian* demanded instead that Assange must agree to go to Sweden—knowing he would end up in a US jail.

Most of what passes for the “left,” which we have called pseudo-left groups, such as the Socialist Party and Socialist

Workers Party, effectively proclaimed their solidarity with the Swedish prosecutor's office. Since 2012 they have never written once in defence of Julian Assange.

Jeremy Corbyn did the same as soon as he was elected Labour leader and maintains his silence to this day. He has done nothing to challenge the plot against Assange or any assault on democratic freedoms by the state apparatus. And he would not do so, even if he formed a government.

They all know exactly what they are doing. Last November, some incompetent individual in the federal prosecutor's office accidentally revealed that criminal charges have been filed against Assange. The person did so by cutting and pasting information into a file on an unrelated case.

The clipped passage referred directly to the need for maximum secrecy "due to the sophistication of the defendant and the publicity surrounding the case, no other procedure is likely to keep confidential the fact that Assange has been charged."

It added, clearly in relation to Sweden, that state that documents "would need to remain sealed until Assange is arrested in connection with the charges in the criminal complaint and can therefore no longer evade or avoid arrest and extradition in this matter."

On January 31, Julian's legal team argued that their client "cannot hope to receive a fair trial" in the US, after a US judge said there was no proof that Assange has been charged. A matter of weeks later former WikiLeaks volunteer David House accepted an immunity deal offered by prosecutors and testified against Assange before the grand jury that did not supposedly exist. Chelsea Manning refused to do so and was jailed.

We live in a new age of show trials, mass surveillance, media censorship, both official and voluntary, frame-ups and witch-hunts.

Julian Assange is the most prominent victim of this turn to state repression and its most steadfast and courageous opponent. But the same tidal wave of reaction has left Edward Snowden an exile in Moscow, Chelsea Manning behind bars and members of the Labour Party in Britain expelled and tarred as anti-Semites for opposing Israeli war crimes.

There are profound reasons for this shift. World capitalism is in the grip of an historic crisis. After suffering an economic heart attack with the 2008 crash, rival imperialist powers have responded with a still sharper turn to trade war, wars to seize control of vital resources in Iraq, Libya, Syria and advanced preparations for war against Russia and China.

At home, wages are being slashed and social services destroyed to make the workers pay for the crisis and keep the super-rich living in unimaginable luxury.

None of this can be done democratically and the ruling class knows it. That is why states the world over are preparing to confront a massive oppositional response from those they rule over.

We are already seeing the initial stages of such a fight-back in

a wave of strikes and protests after years in which the class struggle was suppressed by the trade unions—the "yellow vest" movement in France, strikes by auto parts workers in Mexico, teachers across the US, mass anti-government protests in Algeria—all taking place now, today.

The movement in defence of Julian Assange and WikiLeaks gathers together the very best representatives of the intellectuals and the professional middle class, who are animated by a profound commitment to democracy and opposition to imperialism and war. But to defeat the powerful machinery of US imperialism and its allies, Britain and Australia, now levelled against Assange and Manning, a massive and more powerful social force is required.

The Socialist Equality Party is determined to break the wall of silence erected by the mainstream media and to mobilise workers and young people in Assange's defence.

On March 3, our comrades in Australia held their second rally in Sydney in defence of Assange—an event supported by journalist and filmmaker John Pilger, whose speech we heard at the beginning of this rally, civil rights advocate Professor Stuart Rees, Consortium News editor-in-chief Joe Lauria, Pink Floyd co-founder Roger Waters and Julian's mother, Christine Assange. Today, a similarly successful rally was held in Melbourne.

We in the SEP UK support today's rally and all efforts to free Assange and the efforts that must now be made to free Chelsea Manning. Success depends upon linking this fight to a broader struggle by the working class against the capitalist profit system and all its political defenders.

The rallies in Australia demanded the Morrison government do its duty and intervene on Assange's behalf to secure his release from Britain with the right to return home to Australia.

Britain now plays the key role in the conspiracy to silence Julian Assange once and for all. Julian Assange cannot be free unless we here take the fight to the workplaces, colleges and schools. We must raise the demand on Westminster and on Number 10 to drop the arrest warrant against Assange and guarantee him free passage to Australia.

The SEP and our comrades in Europe, Australia, the United States and all over the world, together with the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, pledge to redouble our own campaign in this united struggle for freedom and justice for Julian Assange. Thank you very much.



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