

Socialist Equality Party (UK) member Robert Stevens speaks at rally to demand release of Assange from Belmarsh prison

Our reporter
15 April 2019

Below are the remarks made by Socialist Equality Party (UK) member Robert Stevens at Saturday's rally outside Belmarsh prison to demand the release of WikiLeaks editor, Julian Assange.

My name is Robert Stevens and I am speaking on behalf of the Socialist Equality Party.

Securing freedom for Julian Assange is not just essential for Julian, but for the defence of the democratic rights of working people in Britain and the world over. It is this social force that must be politically mobilised.

If you want to know why, look at what happened in parliament on Thursday.

Theresa May came back from Brussels to report to parliament on the latest in the Brexit crisis. This is the most deeply divided parliament in post-war history. But what May had to say when she addressed MPs at the start of her statement united the House of Commons.

She announced that the Metropolitan Police had dragged Assange out of the Ecuadorian Embassy and that he would now be subject to the full force of UK law. MPs bayed their approval.

Jeremy Corbyn, at that point, didn't say anything.

Later, Home Secretary Sajid Javid made a statement on Assange's arrest. There were few MPs listening, including no more than 12 on the opposition benches.

For all the attention they gave to this outrageous assault on democratic rights and breach of all norms of due process, they might just as well have been debating regulations about dog collars.

Corbyn was nowhere to be seen when Javid spoke. Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott made a statement opposing Assange's extradition to the US. Nobody supported her.

Only later did Corbyn publish a single tweet stating that Assange should not be extradited to the US.

This is why we have to step up our fight for Julian's release. Julian Assange is a hero. He is a real journalist, whose life and liberty is in imminent danger!

We have to do everything to mobilise all supporters of free speech to prevent him from falling into the hands of the US government.

The Socialist Equality Party and *World Socialist Web Site* make the broadest appeal today:

Join the fight to defend Assange, Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden. Workers and youth internationally must mobilise immediately to defend these class war prisoners. Their lives depend on it!

The arrest of Julian is a vast political crime. It involves governments on four continents—North America, South America, Europe and Australia—who are seeking to silence a man whose only crime is that he told the world's population the truth about what they do. He told us about their war crimes and their behind-the-scenes conspiracies against billions of people.

No one can believe for a second claims that Assange will face just one charge in the US that carries a five-year sentence.

The secret grand jury empowered under the Obama administration didn't spend over eight years to charge Assange with manipulating passwords.

Once Assange is in their hands, he will confront a series of additional charges, including espionage.

The grand jury indictment against him claims the release of the classified Iraq war file and US diplomatic cables "reasonably could be expected to cause serious damage to the national security."

This is almost word for word what the Espionage Act says which bars releasing information “relating to the national defense.”

It criminalizes anyone who “communicates, delivers, transmits or causes to be communicated, delivered or transmitted” such information.

The indictment makes clear the government is targeting Assange for political reasons. It states: “The primary purpose of the conspiracy was to facilitate [Chelsea] Manning’s acquisition and transmission of classified information related to the national defense of the United States so that WikiLeaks could publicly disseminate the information on its website.”

We know who supports Assange because of their record over the last 10 years. People like the Julian Assange Defence Campaign who are here today, some real journalists including John Pilger.

All the parliamentary parties in the UK, including Labour under Corbyn, have done nothing to defend Assange since he was first arrested nine years ago and since he was forced to take refuge in the Ecuadorian Embassy seven years ago. They’ve not released a single statement in opposition to his treatment or called a single protest. They have abandoned him.

Corbyn’s tweet is his first comment on Assange in nearly four years since he became Labour leader. He decided that it was more important to maintain unity with the Blairites.

Within a matter of hours of Julian’s arrest, these Blairite political criminals opened a campaign to insist Assange be extradited to Sweden to face allegations we all know are fabricated.

Yesterday, more than 70 MPs and peers, from the Labour Party, from The Independent Group of Blairites, and the Tories, as well as Scottish National Party and Liberal Democrat MPs, wrote to the Home Secretary demanding he support the reopening of the Swedish investigations and that Assange be sent there instead.

The *Guardian* has joined the chorus that he be sent to Sweden. So has the venal, disgusting Socialist Workers Party, which said today that Assange “should face trial in Sweden” if the Swedish authorities pursue their vendetta against him.

They are all doing everything possible to continue the hounding of Assange and to see him locked up in prison for good. Sweden would only be an alternative

route to the US, but the main thing they want to do is to tar Assange as a sexual predator and rapist to justify their refusal to defend him.

Assange has no friends in the political establishment in Britain, only enemies. If a vote was held in parliament today for Assange’s extradition to the Sweden or the US, it would be easily passed, and passed with the backing of a large part of the Labour Party.

He has no friends in the mainstream media—the Vichy journalists as John Pilger rightly describes them.

Just think about it. If Corbyn had made defending Assange an issue over all these years, do you think the police would have dared to turn up and drag Assange, an ill man, out of the front door of the Embassy in the centre of London in broad daylight and treat him like a criminal? Do you think that could have been done had a campaign been mobilised in Julian’s Assange’s defence?

Throughout history the only social force who have defended democratic rights is the working class.

Now is the time to act when these rights are under assault as never before. The fight to defend Julian Assange is your fight. Workers and youth must come forward and take an unequivocal stand in defence of Assange.

We must continue to organize meetings, protests and solidarity demonstrations to demand Julian’s immediate release from Belmarsh prison and his safe return to Australia or any country where he chooses to live.

We say to Julian Assange: You can count on the support of the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site*.

We have held protests in Sydney and Melbourne this week. We will organise more.

We will work with the Defence Campaign to secure maximum attendance at every protest called in the UK and we call for attendance at the next public meeting called in London in defence of Julian, to be held on Friday April 26. Thank you very much.



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