

Audience members at London meeting discuss way forward in fight for Assange and Manning's freedom

Laura Tiernan
16 May 2019

Last Sunday's public meeting in London convened by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) to defend jailed WikiLeaks publisher and journalist Julian Assange and whistleblower Chelsea Manning provoked wide-ranging discussion.

Audience members took to the floor to voice their opposition to the brutal persecution of Assange and Manning, to express their agreement with the platform's speakers, to ask questions and propose further action.

Maxine Walker, from the Julian Assange Defence Committee (JADC), told the meeting, "I'm not a member or connected with the Socialist Equality Party. But I must hand it to them. They are the only left group that I'm aware of that has put its heart and soul and resources into this struggle and for that I congratulate them."

She explained that journalist John Pilger had described the "uncanny silence" surrounding Assange and his potential extradition and treatment. "I've been in various campaigns for decades, and I have never encountered the wall of silence that I have encountered when I have raised this issue, both with people and with organisations. It seems to me it's either a wall of silence or a wall of lies.

"There are two things we are up against and I have spent sleepless nights trying to understand 'Why this wall of silence now?' Some of the answers have been given, but the thing that finally occurred to me was that what WikiLeaks exposed was just too big.

"The fact is the NGOs and the liberals can bear to campaign on one tiny topic, one atrocity, one imprisonment. But what WikiLeaks exposed was an organised, ruthless, systematic war machine and its

murders and its renditions and lies and propaganda. It exposed the hundreds of thousands of civilian casualties who no-one thinks about, nobody mentions them. That was what was too big for the liberals and intelligentsia in this country. They couldn't bear it.

"Because while they may voice a little opposition, the token opposition we saw on the day Julian Assange was dragged out of the embassy, they want to be comfortable. They want to live comfortably in what I call Winnie the Pooh land. 'Everything is all right. We're not listening. We can't see.' That is how they live with themselves. Our job as a defence committee is to break the silence and to say very clearly to people, 'Which side are you on? Are you on side of the war machine or of the truth tellers?'"

Describing the picket held by the JADC at the National Union of Journalists World Press Freedom Day event, Walker explained, "they responded with outright hostility to the very thought of mentioning Julian Assange. We have to challenge them. That is why we are breaking the silence. We have to challenge every single thing being done to Julian Assange. His prison conditions have to be challenged. There has never been a bail case that has ended up as a Category A prisoner in isolation. That has never happened. We need some of these tame MPs to at least raise this question in the House of Commons."

Walker's remarks from the floor, especially her scathing attacks on the duplicity of Britain's petty-bourgeois liberals and intellectuals, were repeatedly interrupted by applause.

Another audience member observed that the internet "is a virtual representation of how power consolidates. Fifteen years ago, we saw a great diversity of sites all

over the internet and now everything has consolidated into Amazon, eBay and a few places. It's a digital representation of how power works."

She called on people to "get away from these sites like Facebook, eBay and Amazon and look for alternatives," but other audience members were unconvinced, as these platforms are part of everyday life for billions of people.

The Swedish "rape" allegations against Assange were also discussed. Jerome pointed out that "Assange has always maintained he was willing to submit to extradition to Sweden if the Swedish government would guarantee they would not extradite him to the United States." This was being "ignored" by Labour MPs, including Dianne Abbott, who had called for Assange to be extradited to Sweden if investigations are reopened.

A woman from Oxford congratulated International Youth and Students for Social Equality speaker Alice Summers, who had described the conformist climate on universities cultivated by pseudo-left groups and the National Union of Students. Summers had explained how NUS officials had slandered Assange as a "rapist" based on their anti-Marxist gender and identity politics. The woman from Oxford said that campus life in her town was "absolutely as dead as a door nail," concluding, "It would be great to have a speaker on Assange come to Oxford University."

A man in the audience relayed, to applause, that a hoarding in Aldgate East had just been painted with the words "Free Julian Assange." "We cannot wait for the media. Julian needs our help now." The speaker praised the work of online journalists and bloggers including Caitlin Johnstone and Jimmy Dore, but concluded that change had to happen not just online but "on the streets." "Julian's name has disappeared. Years ago, there was a thing called a D-Notice. They did it during the IRA time when everything was silenced. This is far worse than a D-Notice." A D-notice (Defence and Security Media Advisory Notice) is used by the British state to veto the publication of potentially damaging news stories.

A woman from the United States asked Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP-Socialist Equality Party) national secretary Uli Rippert how many US military bases and personnel were located in Germany. Rippert explained that Germany was still "the military platform

for the organisation of NATO, and for American forces in the Middle East. While Germany opposed publicly the Iraq War in 2003, that war was launched from German military bases."

He emphasised that the eruption of US militarism was part of an international process: "After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Germany came back as an old military power and is trying to organise the European Union from economic unification to military unification.

"Germany's opposition to the US is growing—the transatlantic conflict is intensifying—but there is nothing progressive in that. We cannot base our opposition to American militarism on the German government or the German political parties that sit in the Bundestag. Our opposition to American imperialism is based on the mobilisation of the German, European and American working class against imperialism."

Responding to the discussion, Rippert explained that Assange and Manning would not be freed by appeals to MPs or the establishment parties, "Their opposition to Assange is bound up with their support for the war policy which the governments in all countries are following.

"If we say, 'We must get bigger', that means turning to the working class to build our support. That is the big political challenge. It is not to the parliament in Germany or Britain or any other country—It is to the factories and the universities we have to turn to and mobilise the movement from below on a clear anti-capitalist, socialist and internationalist basis."



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)