

UK workers, youth and students demand the freedom of Assange and Manning

“It’s a political imprisonment and completely unjust, so please support, donate and spread the message”

Our reporters
27 May 2019

Socialist Equality Party members and supporters in a number of UK cities won a strong response in recent days in demanding the freedom of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who is being held at London’s notorious Belmarsh maximum security prison, and courageous whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

The teams raised the importance of workers and youth supporting the May 30 protest outside Westminster Magistrates Court (see below) against the threat to extradite Assange to the US. They publicised and sold tickets for the upcoming SEP public meetings being held in Manchester, Sheffield and Leeds in defence of Assange and Manning.

London

On Saturday, a team of Socialist Equality Party members and supporters campaigned at the Highbury and Islington underground station. They met a warm response as they handed out hundreds of leaflets in defence of Assange and Manning. Nine local residents signed up to join the international campaign aimed at winning their freedom and asked for more information as to how they could assist.

A number of residents raised their concerns that local MP and Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn had not spoken out to demand Assange’s release. Although Corbyn said Assange should not be extradited to the United States, he supports his extradition to Sweden on bogus accusations of sexual assault. A majority of people who spoke to the campaign team said they understood that the Swedish allegations were just another means by the ruling elite to ensure Assange’s eventual extradition to the United States.

A young man, Adam, said, “Julian Assange has been arrested illegally. If they come for him, they will definitely be coming for any of us one day. I think it’s an important issue to fight for this man to be free. It’s a political imprisonment and completely unjust, so please support, donate and spread the message.” Adam said he would attend the May 30 protest.

Andrew, a student based in London, also supported the protest

and hoped to attend at Westminster Magistrates Court. He said, “Julian Assange has provided very important information. It’s important that we stand up for his freedom of speech, a right that comes from the Enlightenment. It’s very important that is preserved as one of the high points of humanity.”

Sheffield

The team in Sheffield on Saturday sold five tickets campaigning in the city centre for the public meeting “Free Julian Assange! Free Chelsea Manning!”, to be held on June 11.

Zina is originally from Bulgaria and works in the food sector. She said, “I don’t think Assange would get a fair hearing in any court in the West. I agree that he should be given safe passage to his home country of Australia.

“They [the authorities] are not human in how they are treating him.

“My country, Bulgaria, is run by the United States. The social systems in Eastern Europe which existed before have been destroyed to make these countries easier to control and rule over. This is all because of imperialism. School children in Bulgaria had been ranked around tenth in the world for education in the past. Now it ranks alongside countries like the Congo. I would not have left my country if it wasn’t for all of this.

“Rather than address the problems that Assange and WikiLeaks have brought to light, the powers that be treat him as the problem. They have decided to take him out.

“I first became aware of Wikileaks back in 2010/11 with the [2010 Collateral Murder] video which showed the US forces gunning down civilians and journalists in Iraq. That is when they really started to try and discredit him with the accusations of sexual assault. People have to get more engaged and educated.”

Rob, a retired auto delivery driver, said, “I think it’s a travesty of justice. I also feel that he’s done nothing wrong. He’s exposed governments’ corruption and mayhem. He shouldn’t be in prison; he should be having an award given to him for true journalism.”

“It’s no different to what Woodward and Bernstein did in the 1970s, exposing the Republicans and Nixon, etc., in the White House and the Watergate scandal. It’s no different to that. He’s exposed corruption. This applies to Chelsea Manning as well. They should be commended rather than be in prison. That’s what she [Manning] believes in.

“I think America is one of the most corrupt countries in the world and you can see that by Donald Trump in the White House. He’s nothing but a slime ball. He’s not a very nice man. The ones who are in power who have the most money, they’ll not help the people down below. I agree with your perspective, we should have socialism.”

Neil, a member of the Fire Brigades Union, was petitioning with a colleague against cuts to the South Yorkshire Fire Service.

He opposed Assange’s treatment, saying, “First of all, the way Assange is being treated poses a threat to democracy.

“The wheels are fully in motion to smear a journalist who has made a valuable contribution to make the truth publicly known.”

“The state is powerful. We know from experience how it can be used against workers. You only have to look at the example of the Shrewsbury Two and Des Warren.”

This was a reference to the 19th century conspiracy laws which were brought against the building workers strike in 1972—the first time they had been used in the case of an industrial dispute and led to Warren and another strike leader being handed down three and two years prison sentences respectively.

Bristol

Socialist Equality Party members campaigned at Bristol University last Thursday and found a lot of support for Assange and Manning. Dozens of leaflets were distributed among university students and people passing by. Many stopped to discuss the fate of Assange and Manning, with eight people, including university students, signing up to support the campaign and receive the weekly SEP newsletter.

Kenny, a law student at Bristol University, said, “I think the imprisonment of Julian Assange is a double standard. The government should be held accountable for what they do, especially for their wars. Assange essentially exposed war crimes in illegal wars. Now this poor man has suffered for it and spent six years having to hide. Shame on the US government and shame on the UK government for allowing it to happen. They should take responsibility.”

Adam, also at Bristol University, said, “It is a disgrace that Assange is in prison. He has exposed the things we should know about, what our governments are doing. These things are normally hidden. This is especially the case about the US in the 2016 election.

“I think it is illegal to drag Assange out of the Ecuadorian embassy. He was having asylum there. UK police had no right to be there at all. It is awful that his possessions have been sent to the US. It is a disgrace that he is not allowed to see his family. When I

was walking in the Ecuadorian Embassy street, I was thinking that secret police were watching him. They were always on him. I totally agree that this part of a wider attack on democratic rights and the freedom of speech.”

Manchester

SEP members campaigned outside the entrance to the Envirolution festival being held in the city’s Platt Fields park on Saturday. People stopped to look at the stall and discussed with the team, with one man saying, “Julian Assange was innocent. This is all a setup.” He added that WikiLeaks had exposed war crimes, and “that’s why they wanted to shut him up.”

Another attending the festival said, “Getting him to Sweden will be the first step in getting him to the US, he’s innocent.” Another, pointing to the sign on the campaign stall, commented, “I’m 100 percent behind him and Chelsea Manning, they have done nothing wrong but told the truth.”

The SEP calls on supporters to attend the protest on Thursday May 30 outside Westminster Magistrates Court to oppose the attempt to extradite Assange to the United States. The protest, called by the Julian Assange Defence Committee, is supported by the Socialist Equality Party and World Socialist Web Site.

Free Julian Assange! No US Extradition!

Westminster Magistrates Court

Thursday May 30, 9 a.m. 181 Marylebone Road

London, NW1 5BR

(nearest tube stations: Marylebone Station, Edgware Road)



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