

# Shrewsbury 24 flying picket Terry Renshaw: “Only the power of the working class, not the official courts, is going to provide any perspective for freeing Julian Assange.”

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*Terry Renshaw spoke to WSWs reporters at Saturday’s demonstration to mark the 35th anniversary of the Battle of Orgreave that took place during the 1984-85 miners’ strike. The Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign is demanding a public inquiry into the police brutality used against the miners.*

*Terry describes WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange as a class war prisoner, referring to his own experiences as a young picket during the 1972 building workers strike and to the 1972 London dockers strike.*

*Terry was a 24-year-old painter and decorator, member of the UCATT union and a “flying picket.” The pickets travelled from site to site encouraging workers to join the strike for a minimum wage of £30 a week, a 35-hour week and abolition of the “lump,” which institutionalised casual cash-paid daily labour without employment rights.*

*Five months after the successful strike ended, 24 pickets were arrested in police raids and charged with over 200 offences, including unlawful assembly, intimidation and affray.*

*The prosecution focused on picketing in the Shrewsbury and Telford area. In October 1973, three pickets were found guilty of conspiracy to intimidate, unlawful assembly and affray. Des Warren was imprisoned for three years, Ricky Tomlinson for two years and John McKinsie Jones for nine months. In a second trial, three other pickets were convicted. The workers were charged under 19th century conspiracy laws—the first time they had been used in an industrial dispute. The strikers were blacklisted by employers and unable to work in the building industry again.*

*Terry discusses the experience of the Pentonville Five, docks shop stewards jailed in July 1972 by the National Industrial Relations Court for refusing to obey a court order to stop picketing a container depot in East London. Their imprisonment saw all the major ports come to a standstill, as 170,000 dockers struck. Printers in Fleet Street walked out, stopping virtually all the national dailies, and rolling strikes were implemented by other sections of workers. A blockade of the prison by tens of thousands of workers led to the intervention of the hitherto little-known Official Solicitor, who, using ancient powers, ordered the release of the five.*

Renshaw said, “The persecution of Assange is horrendous, he’s lost all his democratic rights. He was taking refuge in the embassy. All he’d done is tell the truth about what is going on around the world, especially with the American government. They’ll carry on persecuting him until the wider public—worldwide—wake up to the situation with governments around the world that are there to look after the financiers and the bankers, certainly not the workers.

“We don’t have democratic rights, apart from what they allow us to have. They’ve removed our democratic rights a long time ago. I’ve been campaigning about the Shrewsbury pickets for 46 years, a long time, and we’re finally getting justice and starting to win in the courts. But it’s cost us a lot of money, financed by the trade union movement and the public, to take the government to court.

“War has always been something not brought about by working class people. A working-class person has

never, ever gone to war because they wanted to. The ruling classes create the wars because every time a cruise missile is fired a cash register rings somewhere. People make millions on war, but not the people who are fighting, who are there at the diktat of the ruling class.

“To defend class war prisoners like Julian Assange, the perspective has got to be to raise the awareness and mobilise the masses. It can’t be any other way. Marx said that if the masses act together they will win. Unfortunately, the masses aren’t gelling today.

“The Orgreave rally is the biggest in years. Its historical relevance is coming back. The Orgreave miners have been refused a public review of their case by the Tories.

“All these issues are political. There has been nine years of austerity and the rich are getting richer while the poor get poorer. People are starting to realise that they need to come together in solidarity.

“When the Pentonville Five dockers were locked up, industrial action meant that Britain came to a standstill. As soon as that happened, the government brought out this person called the ‘Official Solicitor’, who allowed them out because they realised the dangerous situation caused by mass solidarity. We need to get those times back.

“Only the power of the working class, not the official courts, is going to provide any perspective for freeing Assange. Hopefully, I’ll be around for the revolution.”



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