

Assange's father speaks to the WSWS: "Julian's resolve is fierce"

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John Shipton, Julian Assange's father and a leading campaigner for his freedom, spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) in Sydney yesterday about the conditions of his son's imprisonment in Britain and the fight to prevent his extradition to the US. The WikiLeaks founder faces the prospect of 175 years in a US jail for his role in exposing American war crimes.

Shipton had addressed a small protest outside the New South Wales State Library, where the Australian government was hosting US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo for annual Australia-US Ministerial Consultations. Pompeo is seeking to drum-up support for US preparations for war against Iran, and for its confrontation with China.

Pompeo has played a central role in the persecution of Assange. As CIA director, he declared in 2017 that WikiLeaks was a "non-state hostile intelligence service" and that Assange was a "demon" undeserving of the First Amendment protections of the US Constitution. As secretary of state, he was intimately involved in the US campaign to pressure Ecuador into illegally terminating Assange's political asylum.

Addressing the protest, Shipton declared that Pompeo's visit was another "occasion where Australia welcomes a warmonger or mass murderer to its bosom, holds him tight and is bitten by the viper."

Speaking to the WSWS, he said: "We're shocked that the government is hosting Pompeo. Criticism of the United States, where would you start and where would you end? It would fill libraries with books as to the difficulties of dealing with the United States at any geo-political level."

"Pompeo's what we would call in Australia a loudmouth, a blowhard. Nobody takes much notice of what he says. The statement he made, that WikiLeaks is a 'non-state hostile intelligence service,' is not

reflected in the court cases that have been launched against Julian, which have upheld his status as a journalist and publisher."

Shipton condemned the Australian government's refusal to raise the issue of Assange with the US, or to take any action in his defence. "Silence is complicity," he stated.

The WSWS asked Shipton about the dismissal last week of a civil case brought by the US Democratic National Committee (DNC) against Assange.

The lawsuit had claimed that WikiLeaks' 2016 publication of leaked emails, exposing the DNC's attempts to rig the Democratic Party primaries against self-described democratic socialist Bernie Sanders, along with secret speeches delivered by Hillary Clinton to Wall Street banks, was illegal.

Shipton commented that the verdict was "tremendous. The DNC brought a civil case against WikiLeaks, Julian Assange and a couple of other not so notables, like Trump and Russia. The judge ruled, on the basis of the Pentagon Papers precedent, that what WikiLeaks had published was in the public interest, and dismissed the civil case that the DNC had brought. The DNC seems to be a deeply corrupt organisation, as proved by the emails that WikiLeaks published.

"There is some action among the lawyers that says that this reflects on the charges against Julian for espionage. At the moment, though, WikiLeaks lawyers have to address the extradition case that is being heard at the magistrates court in England. That's the first thing. They have to win there, or appeal to the Supreme Court in England. But the foundations of the US charges, in my view, were never substantial."

Shipton outlined the draconian conditions of Assange's detention in Britain's maximum-security Belmarsh Prison. "At the moment, there's no access to

the library, no access to computers, 23 hours a day in a cell and limited access to lawyers,” he said. “I imagine that it’s deliberate. The governors of the prison want to show their authority, so they make things as uncomfortable as they can.”

Assange’s prison sentence on trumped-up bail charges will expire in September and he will be placed on remand. Shipton explained that this would lead to an easing of his conditions, including the right to “three visits a week, plus access to computers, access to libraries and free access to his lawyers.”

Shipton stressed the determination of WikiLeaks and its lawyers to defeat the US extradition bid. He recounted that, “In an interview with the commissioner for the United Kingdom’s Metropolitan Police, Gareth Pierce, Julian’s lawyer, said: ‘If you arrest Julian Assange, we will fight this extradition until the end of time.’ Her resolve is fierce, as is Julian’s resolve, and mine, and all of the people who are fighting for his freedom.”

Assange’s father pointed to a broader assault on fundamental rights. “My concern is defending our right to speak freely here in Australia,” he said. “It’s clear that this government has intentions to restrict our access to the internet and that’s my concern. I see it as an attack on our right to information.”

Shipton noted the pernicious role played by the corporate press: “The centre of gravity, to use a Clausewitzian term, of knowledge, is the mass media. They control what we think and how we relate to events, so our first attack is upon the mass media, through alternative media, blogs, forums and a little bit of Twitter and none of Facebook.”

He commented on a recent two-part “Four Corners program on Assange by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Both episodes spent an inordinate amount of time airing subjective attacks on Assange’s personality. They gave almost free reign to opponents of Assange, including supporters of the US government, to malign him.

Shipton said the programs were “appalling. A staggering disgrace actually. We will make a formal complaint to the ABC about it.

“I’ll illustrate it with one point. Domscheit-Berg [a critic of Assange who was featured in the program], was involved with WikiLeaks nine years ago. He was given the sack because he stole 3.5 gigabytes of leaks

plus the servers they were on. He had nothing to do with the Collateral Murder video. He ran away from Iceland because he was frightened. Using him as a voice is just absurd.

“Alan Rusbridger [former editor of the *Guardian* who was also featured in the program] had an involvement with Julian and WikiLeaks for two weeks nine years ago in the release of the Iraq and Afghan war logs and US diplomatic cables. Since then, they have had nothing to do with WikiLeaks, so they are in no position to make any comment.

“The *Guardian* has since pursued Julian, even to the extent of completely falsifying evidence against him.”

Shipton noted that the *Guardian* last November published an article claiming that American political lobbyist Paul Manafort met Assange at the Ecuadorian embassy in 2013, 2015 and early 2016. The assertion was aimed at tying Assange to Manafort, who later served as a Trump campaign adviser and was a central target of the US investigation into supposed collusion between Trump and Russia.

“Julian was being watched 24 hours a day at the embassy, and there was no evidence of a visit, so it was a complete fabrication,” Shipton declared.

In conclusion, Assange’s father stressed the importance of ordinary people taking a stand in defence of the WikiLeaks founder. “Pressure your members of parliament, federal MPs, state MPs, local MPs. Write to them and ask ‘what’s cooking here?’ This is an Australian who wants to come home, he’s been locked up for nine years. Our government can fix this, but only with your encouragement.”



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