

Media blacks out Roger Waters' performance in defence of Assange

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On Monday evening, Roger Waters and John Pilger staged a powerful event in defence of imprisoned WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange outside the British Home Office in central London.

Waters delivered a moving rendition of Pink Floyd's iconic song "Wish You Were Here," dedicated to Assange, while Pilger issued a scathing denunciation of the British government's attempts to facilitate his extradition to the US, where the WikiLeaks founder faces life imprisonment for exposing war crimes.

In his first public appearance, Gabriel Shipton, Assange's brother, outlined the brutal conditions in which his sibling is imprisoned in the maximum-security Belmarsh Prison and made an appeal for his freedom.

The event was attended by around 1,000 workers, students and defenders of democratic rights. It was an objectively significant and newsworthy event, bringing together Waters, a famous musician, and Pilger, an acclaimed investigative journalist, in defence of the most prominent political prisoner in the world today.

However, if one judged solely on the basis of coverage in the major corporate publications in Britain, continental Europe, the US and Australia, the event simply did not take place. In an extraordinary act of political censorship, none of the major news outlets even carried a brief report on the rally.

A search of Google News indicates that the number of publications that have covered the event can be counted on two hands. They primarily include the *World Socialist Web Site* and other alternative and anti-war websites.

The censorship is most stark in Britain, where Assange is imprisoned. The *Guardian* and the *Times* have not said a word about the protest, which was within walking distance of their plush London offices.

In Europe, France's *Le Monde* and Germany's *Der Spiegel*, both trumpeted for their supposedly "liberal" editorial inclination, have not said a word.

In the US, the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Washington Post* have published nothing. In their silence, they are joined by publications such as the *Intercept*, the *Nation* and *Jacobin*, which claim to be "left-wing" and "progressive," but promote the Democratic Party, which has played a central role in the pursuit of Assange.

In Australia, the blackout of the Waters/Pilger protest has extended from "liberal" outlets, such as the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Age* and the state-funded Australian Broadcasting Corporation, to the Murdoch-owned *Australian*, *Daily Telegraph* and *Herald Sun*. The lack of any reportage in that country is all the more glaring, given that Assange is the most well-known Australian imprisoned abroad and that his plight is the direct outcome of the refusal by successive Labor and Coalition governments to meet their responsibility to defend a persecuted citizen.

There is no innocent explanation for the almost universal media blackout.

The *Guardian*, for instance, has published four articles this year extensively referencing Waters' stance on a host of political issues, including his defence of children trapped in Syria; his opposition to the Israeli regime's persecution of the Palestinians; and condemnations of the right-wing shift in the political life of South America.

In October last year, the publication featured an on-the-spot report of a Waters' concert in Brazil, which occurred amid the singer's condemnations of the country's reactionary government. Apparently, the *Guardian* was able to dispatch a reporter to Rio de Janeiro to cover a performance by the former Pink

Floyd singer, but not to central London, within a stones' throw of its headquarters.

The blackout of the London protest goes hand-in-hand with the silence in the corporate press on recent statements by Pilger and Gabriel Shipton that the conditions in which Assange is being detained in Britain amount to torture, and warning that his health is deteriorating.

It is also paralleled by the silence on the plight of Chelsea Manning, who is being detained for refusing to give false evidence against Assange before a secret US grand jury.

The media has also said next to nothing about the fact that Manning has now been joined in the holding pen for Trump's kangaroo court by Jeremy Hammond, an online activist who released documents exposing government and corporate spying to WikiLeaks. Hammond, like Manning, is being pressured to commit perjury so the US government has a pseudo-legal pretext to condemn Assange to prison for the rest of his life.

For years, the *New York Times*, the *Guardian* and virtually every other media outlet has slandered and maligned Assange. No ink has been spared to present the WikiLeaks founder as a dubious, and even criminal individual.

Until April, all of these publications presented WikiLeaks' warnings that Assange faced extradition to the US as a "conspiracy theory." They instead promoted the Swedish investigation into manufactured sexual allegations against Assange, obscuring the fact that he has never been charged in that country and a "preliminary investigation" has been dropped twice.

The establishment media has also repeatedly accused Assange of being a "Russian agent" because WikiLeaks published in 2016 newsworthy leaked emails which exposed corruption in the Democratic Party and the militarist, pro-big business policies of its presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. In August, a US federal court threw out a civil case brought by the Democratic National Committee, rejecting "with prejudice" the false assertion that Assange conspired with Putin and Trump against Clinton and upholding WikiLeaks' right to publish under the First Amendment. The response of the American press has been to simply not report the ruling.

In other words, the media silence on Monday's rally

is part a broader, conscious political agenda. For coming on nine years, the establishment media has actively sought to assist the US, British and Australian governments and state apparatus retaliate for the exposure of their crimes by doing everything possible to undermine support for Assange and WikiLeaks.

They were joined years ago by a myriad of fake-left groups, which abandoned Assange after they lined up behind the US-led regime change operations in Libya, Syria and Ukraine—which WikiLeaks has done so much to expose.

Monday's event, and the responses to it, confirm that the movement in defence of Assange, Manning and democratic rights must continue to develop independently of, and in opposition to, the entire political and media establishment.



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