

Concert for Assange outside UK Home Office demands “No extradition!”

Laura Tiernan
6 November 2019

Hundreds gathered outside the UK Home Office in central London last night for a concert in support of imprisoned WikiLeaks founder and multi-award-winning journalist Julian Assange. Rap artist M.I.A. performed and was joined by Assange’s father John Shipton and fashion icon Vivienne Westwood.

The event was organised by Don’t Extradite Assange, a newly formed campaign group that works closely with Assange’s legal team.

Longstanding supporters of Assange were joined by fans of M.I.A. and fellow rap-artist Lowkey. Chants of “There’s only one decision: No extradition!” rang out. Cries of “Shame on you!” were directed at UK Home Secretary Priti Patel and Prime Minister Boris Johnson who on April 11 welcomed Assange’s brutal arrest at the Ecuadorian Embassy.

Assange’s father John Shipton was the first speaker and was joined on stage by Julian’s cousin, Dylan. “From Belmarsh this afternoon Julian sends his greetings and appreciation for your strength and determination to free him from Belmarsh and allow him to return him to his family,” Shipton said.

“We are faced here with a great task, all together, to ensure that Julian is free from the persecution that has been going on now for nine years.” Pointing to recent opposition voiced by parliamentarians in Australia and Europe to the US Espionage Act charges against his son, Shipton declared, “Not only *can* we win, but let me tell you we *are* winning.”

Vivienne Westwood delivered her remarks wearing a mask with Assange’s name written on it. Against a backdrop of hand-painted bunting with slogans including “media abuse,” “Rot \$ War” and “Growth = Destroy,” she declared, “I am here to protest government corruption and the death of justice.”

Westwood cited former UK diplomat Craig Murray’s

description of last month’s case management hearing for Assange at Westminster Magistrates Court as a “show trial.” She explained, “The guilty verdict is already decided. The process is a sham.”

“Julian Assange will die unless we set him free,” she told the crowd.

Srecko Horvat, co-founder of Diem 25 with Greece’s former Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis, also addressed the rally. Having visited Assange at Belmarsh Prison earlier that day, he had asked Julian if he had a message for those assembled. Assange had replied, “This is not about me—this is about you.”

“This is not just about Julian Assange, a courageous publisher,” Horvat explained, “It is about freedom of the press, freedom of speech, it is about human rights. It is about democracy.”

Horvat told the crowd: “Vote only for those who are ready to stop the extradition of Julian Assange.” Yet not a single capitalist party—including Labour, the Greens and the Scottish National Party—has opposed Assange’s extradition to the US.

In April, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and Shadow Home Secretary Dianne Abbot spoke publicly against Assange’s threatened extradition to the US, but after the pair faced a backlash from the Blairite warmongers who dominate the Parliamentary Labour Party, public mea culpas followed. Corbyn insisted that Assange was “not above the law” and should face extradition to Sweden—even though no extradition request had been received!

Since then, the pair have maintained silence, even after the US unveiled Espionage Act charges against Assange that carry a 175-year prison term. Corbyn’s supporters, including John McDonnell, Rebecca Long Bailey and Laura Pidcock have also refused to come to Assange’s defence.

Last night's event concluded with a performance by M.I.A., who visited Assange at HM Belmarsh last month. She reiterated Assange's message from prison, telling the crowd: "This is not about me. It's about Julian Assange. And he says it's not about him it's about you. ... We just want the right to have respect for every living being, whether he is American, Russian, Iraqi or Syrian. We don't care. We just don't want war. Just because he isn't part of corporate news, that makes billions of dollars handing out fake news, he shouldn't be the one that pays the price."

M.I.A. performed "Borders," "Born Free" and "Paper Planes"—songs with a strong anti-war message and which oppose social inequality and the persecution of refugees.

Lowkey sent apologies for having been unavoidably delayed.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact