Protesters at London's Trafalgar Square speak out to demand freedom for Julian Assange

Our reporters
18 November 2019

World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke to some of those protesting at Saturday's demonstration in London's Trafalgar Square to demand the freedom of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

Aria said, "I'm here today because the media is completely silent about Julian Assange. He hasn't done anything wrong. All he's done is reveal the truth and we should be concerned with the crimes he has revealed.

"If he goes down, it will be the end of free speech and investigative journalism … Journalists should be very concerned about what happens to Julian Assange. He's being treated worse than a murderer. He's in solitary confinement for 23 hours out of 24 hours. He hasn't got access to his folders or anything so how is he supposed to prepare for this [extradition to the United States] case?

"We know about the media blackout on this but people need to think for themselves and do their own research. This is an innocent journalist in prison."

Shayla, a student from Australia who is travelling in Europe told us, "At the hostel where I'm staying I saw a woman making signs last night, and writing a speech which it turned out was for the protest today.

"We had a chat and she explained to me what was going on and I decided to join. Julian Assange is a name all Australians have heard, but the day-to-day person isn't clear on the details or why the case is so important. I think it's due to the lack of media coverage. It frustrates me that we can have the fact that someone is being tortured because they decided to speak out and it will still be allowed to continue. These big governments choose not to listen. If they're going to call themselves democracies, they should be listening to the people's voice and respecting democratic rights.

"If we allow this to take place then it sets a precedent for the future. Freedom of speech is a basic human right and if we allow it to be violated then it will only continue to be violated. Governments need to be held accountable. We don't want to live in a dictatorship."

Olaniyi, a student in London whose family moved from Nigeria 20 years ago, explained, "I'm an avid follower of Julian Assange's case. I think it's terrible how they are trying to limit what we can say and to attack our freedom of speech. A brave man came out and tried to enlighten the general public about the atrocious crimes that governments are involved in and because he chose to exercise his human, democratic right, now he's in prison.

"Examples like this will make people scared to come out and break stories. That's what the governments want because that's how they get away with everything that they're doing. Everyone should come out here and show their support, get involved. I don't know how this campaign to free him would actually work, but it's important that we do something. Because silence is a crime as well. Let's do whatever we need to do to support this brave man."

Olaniyi responded to the SEP's perspective of basing the fight to free Assange on the mass struggles of the working class spreading across the world by saying, "Of course. That's what it's going to take."

Ricky, a former teacher in Spain, said "Julian Assange should not be in prison, he's a political prisoner. He's being tortured. He's being slandered by the press. If he is extradited to the US it has treble repercussions for press freedom, such as it is. It's a

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really crucial issue. And sadly, not enough people have joined the campaign yet."

Asked why he thought this was the case, Ricky said, "The billionaire media don't report the truth, they spread misinformation and lies. They constantly say he's been charged with sexual assault but he has never been charged. Anyone can research this issue but you won't hear it in the mainstream media. And they're using these lies to dehumanise him so that they can extradite him with the least amount of friction. The journalists are just stenographers to power and the political elite. It's disgraceful that the government are allowed to break the law when it suits them and that the media does nothing to hold them to account."

When the WSWS reporter raised the role of the main political parties in relation to Assange, including the Labour Party who have not lifted a finger in his defence, Ricky responded, "I'm a [Labour leader Jeremy] Corbyn supporter. I followed his progress in the leadership elections. I had never voted before, no politician appealed to me whatsoever, but Corbyn did. And the thing that made me want to support him more were all the smears in the right-wing media, and the PLP's [Parliamentary Labour Party's] attempt to manipulate the votes, and to prevent members voting. But he's inherited a party corrupted by Blairism. He and [Shadow Home Secretary Diane] Abbott did say something opposing Assange's extradition initially, but then they backtracked and have been very quiet ever since. I don't know why, is it because of the election? He also has to be careful, he's facing all sorts of smears himself with these anti-Semitism accusations."

Asked what he thought of the anti-Semitism accusations, Ricky said, "I think it's a load of bollocks. This is how manipulative the media are; you almost have to admire their expertise in being able to make Jeremy Corbyn, a lifelong anti-racist campaigner, apparently a racist. They've turned the world upside down."

Learning about the Socialist Equality Party's decision to stand in the elections and make the fight to free Assange a central issue in its campaign, Ricky responded. "I absolutely agree … go for it. It should be part of the election. I mean I'm curious, why do you think that Corbyn's been quiet on it?"

Our reporter explained the SEP's sympathy with the anti-austerity, anti-war sentiment that led hundreds of thousands of people to vote for Corbyn as leader—based on his professed opposition to austerity and war. But Corbyn betrayed the mass movement and works only to protect the Blairite PLP against the membership. He has capitulated repeatedly to their right-wing agenda and surrendered in the face of their vicious anti-Semitism witch-hunt. Corbyn is disarming the working class, explained the WSWS reporter, in the face of serious threats from UK generals and US politicians to "push back" against any left-wing government.

Ricky replied, "Yeah, I mean they won't allow a socialist government in South America so why would they allow one in their own country?"

Our reporter asked if Corbyn was the sort of political leader he thought likely to take up a fight against such powerful opponents. Ricky responded, "Maybe not. Well, what's the alternative? Can you fight from within? I mean there's [former Labour MP] Chris Williamson, he's a long-time Corbyn supporter, even while he was being hounded and expelled—illegally expelled. This is an area that I need to know more about I think, but I can definitely see that there is a big problem there. I've held faith with it, but I have seen growing criticism of Corbyn. I will read up on it more on your website."

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