

Protesters against London NATO summit speak in defence of Julian Assange

Our reporters
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Several thousand people protested in London Tuesday evening against the visit of US Donald Trump to London for the two-day NATO summit.

The protest was organized by the Stop the War Coalition, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and other groups. Demonstrators held signs saying "Cut war, not healthcare", "Stop Trump's nuclear arms race", "Stop arming Erdogan", "Trump - special relationship? Just say no" and "Trump—Hands Off Palestine".

A delegation of health care workers focused on the plans being hatched between Boris Johnson's Conservative government and the Trump administration to allow US corporations access to profit from the state-run National Health Service--as part of a future free trade deal. They held placards reading, "Trump—Hands off our NHS."

Before marching to Buckingham Palace, where NATO leaders were meeting the queen, demonstrators listen to speakers including Lindsey German, the Stop the War Coalition convener.

German called for the election of an "anti-war government" and to "make sure on December 13 we have Jeremy Corbyn in 10 Downing Street". This was made despite Corbyn standing on a manifesto that pledges Labour "will maintain our commitment to NATO and our close relationship with our European partners..." and "spend at least 2 percent of GDP on defence," guaranteeing "that our armed forces are versatile and capable of fulfilling the full range of roles and obligations."

The manifesto also promises a "Strategic Defence and Security Review to assess the security challenges facing Britain, including new forms of hybrid, cyber and remote warfare."

Two speakers, Tariq Ali and John Rees, called for WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to be freed from Belmarsh maximum security prison, where he is being

held prior to a show trial next February in which the US government is seeking his extradition for opposing their war crimes. This was the first mention of Assange at a Stop the War Coalition event and reflects a shift in support for Assange internationally and growing anger at his treatment and persecution.

At the Socialist Equality Party's stall in Trafalgar Square, many were attracted by posters calling for Assange's freedom. SEP general election candidate for Holborn and St Pancras, Thomas Scripps, explained, "We're here today campaigning at an anti-NATO demonstration in central London with our statement "Opposing NATO and Trump means fighting to free Julian Assange!"

"Any claim to anti-war politics is worthless without a fight to free this man who has exposed war crimes, illegal state surveillance and corruption on an industrial scale."

Margery said, "I'm from Windsor and I've travelled in for the anti-Trump demo. I've been behind Julian Assange from the beginning and thought everything against him was a stitch up, from the start. Because it's been so long, nine years, since the first action was taken against him, it can be very easy for people to forget. Especially with what's going on at the moment, the general election, Trump et cetera.

"I would urge people to support the Socialist Equality Party and any other groups supporting Assange and to remember that this man who is suffering enormously is innocent. We should be behind him in the interests of free speech."

David from Birmingham said, "It's very important because this man stood up for democracy, against the American government who have lied for years, and taken our country to war twice. This man had the courage to tell the truth. He's now being extradited. You know he's going to spend the rest of his life in prison if he is. And he's an innocent man. It's so important we protest

against this.”

Tom Marwick, originally from Australia, said, “Everything that’s going on makes it obvious to me that the decision has already been made to extradite Julian Assange. It’s only through a mass public outcry that we can save him. If he is extradited to the US, we will never see him again. He will be in prison for 175 years and could even face the death penalty.

“There is no justification for what is going on. He is a journalist. If we lose Julian, every journalist is threatened.

“Already, our view of the world is distorted by what the Home Office allows us to see. We need Julian and we need journalists like Julian. We need whistle-blowers. There is a sea of corruption out there that needs to be arrested, and it can only be arrested by free journalism.

“I am deeply ashamed of my government. The government in Australia, in Britain and the US are all in the same basket, there is something wicked going on there.”

Susan Armstrong is a retired mental health social worker. She said, “I am appalled that Julian Assange is in Belmarsh, which is an extremely punitive prison. I don’t think he is a well man. I am aghast that the Home Secretary Sajid Javid agreed an extradition request from to the United States.

“I think it is dreadful what the British government is doing to him. I am surprised that Jeremy Corbyn has not said anything... The issue of Palestine has barely passed his lips. Talking about Palestine and Israel in one breath is now said to be anti-Semitic.”

Brendan from Northern Ireland said, “I think that Julian Assange has been illegally treated, being stuck away in solitary confinement at risk to his life. His father said that the longer he stays in solitary, the nearer to death he comes. He should not be there. He has done no more than any other newspaper proprietor in passing on information that was handed to him and exposing what has been going on at government level. He should be released forthwith. Free Julian Assange!”

Fred from London said, “We live in a very sick world. The war criminals, Tony Blair, Barrack Obama, George Bush are all free. Chelsea Manning and Julian Assange, those who expose their crimes, are being persecuted and prosecuted.

“I’m not a Corbyn fan. I used to be but there are too many of Blair’s disciples in the Labour Party and he is scared of being ousted.”

Alan from London said, “I would do anything to get Assange out of prison, anything. I’d give up my job, I’d

just do anything possible, but I just feel completely powerless.

“The case is so unjust and it’s been 10 years. It’s nothing to do with justice. The British justice system has exposed itself, it’s just a government tool. Hopefully if we have a change of government in a couple of weeks’ time, that would be interesting to see what difference that makes.

“The fundamental issue here is journalists’ freedom to be able to do proper investigative reporting. If he gets put in prison, it’s quite clear that anyone else that raises a finger against the British or American establishment risks being jailed for life.

“People are upset about Trump, there’s a lot of anti-Trump things about. But Britain is more shameful at the moment.”

Zoe from London attended the protest along with a delegation from the Committee to Defend Julian Assange. She said, “I have been involved for quite a few months now, a few weeks before he was taken out of the embassy. I strongly believe in fighting for Assange’s freedom because he is innocent and he has done a great service to the people, to humanity in revealing information that is in their interest. He shouldn’t be punished and he should be freed as soon as possible.”

Zoe said of the persecution of Assange, “Everything has been a cover-up for what the real reason is--that the information that he revealed was not in the interest of the US government. He exposed the crimes that they committed, the war crimes, so they have just been trying to cover-up by lying about Assange. This started from the Sweden case.”

A WSWs reporter showed her articles detailing the groundswell of support for Assange all over the world, including a global coalition of doctors demanding that he receive urgent medical treatment and that his torture at Belmarsh is ended. Zoe said, “That is a sign that people are becoming more aware about what is happening in the world, they are becoming more involved in politics.”



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