

# Hundreds protest outside Woolwich Crown Court to demand Assange's freedom

**Our reporters**  
**25 February 2020**

More than 200 protesters demanding freedom for WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange demonstrated outside Woolwich Crown Court Monday during his extradition trial.

Supporters attended from throughout the UK and from countries including the United States, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland and Italy. The largest delegation was more than 100 Yellow Vests from France. Some brought tents and slept on the roadside, intending to stay for the rest of this week's trial.

Those protesting included a delegation from the Socialist Equality Party. SEP National Secretary Chris Marsden spoke outside the court calling for maximum support to be mobilised to secure the freedom of Assange and US whistleblower Chelsea Manning. See video here:

Protesters were kept behind barricades and an imposing steel fence by security and police. They chanted slogans including "Free, Free Julian Assange!," "US, UK—Hands off Assange!" and "No extradition!"

A group of police officers carried out the arrest of one Assange supporter, who poured red paint to symbolise blood on the road and laid in it.

During a break in proceedings, WikiLeaks editor-in-chief Kristinn Hrafnsson and other supporters of WikiLeaks, including Assange's father John Shipton and WikiLeaks ambassador Joseph Farrell, came outside to inform protesters and the media of what had occurred in court.

Hrafnsson denounced the court's proceedings, saying, "What we heard in the court this morning was astonishing in many ways because we heard nothing new. We were hearing the same argument that we heard 10 years ago about purported harm caused by the publication. However, the US administration has not been able to present any evidence of this.

"They had to admit in the [US whistleblower] Chelsea Manning trial in 2013 they couldn't find any harm, and now in 2020 they still can't prove any harm. So, to sit and listen to those empty words at the same time that it is dismissed how important it was the harm that WikiLeaks actually

revealed in the publications of 2010 and 2011 is outrageous. Why on earth are we sitting here in court having journalism on trial? That's outrageous.

"And I'm sitting there listening to these claims, these subjective claims, and thinking: Why aren't we discussing the harm that was revealed by WikiLeaks in 2010 and 2011? Why aren't we talking in court about war crimes, the assassination of innocent civilians by the military, the slaughtering of Reuters journalists?"

*World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke to protesters outside Woolwich Magistrates Court. Corinne travelled to London from France with Yellow Vest protesters in support of Assange.

She said, "We are 140 people [from France]. We came by bus and two people came their own way. There are people here from Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Italy and many more."

"We want Julian to hear us. We want him to know that we are many, many people here for him.

"If Julian is free [it] is very important for the rest of us and the evolution of society and for the society that we want for our children, because without truth, without freedom, free speech, it's not possible to have a just society; because now you have so much corruption, so much capitalism, that it's not possible anymore for workers to live."

Hubert, an electrical engineer from southern France, explained: "Everything in this story about Assange is false. A false history from powerful people who govern us and try to destroy liberty—liberty to speak, liberty of expression.

"Julian Assange is the greatest journalist living now, on this planet. We must help him to be free again against those who are destroying us if we don't react."

Children's social care worker Alex said, "The issue of Assange's incarceration is the tip of the spear when it comes to the right wing taking control over free speech.

"Many far-right elements are welcomed to join the Conservative Party now. Britain First is joining in droves. Meanwhile, they're criminalising the exposure of war crimes.

“I think they anticipate a degree of unrest in the future as resources become more scarce, global warming and climate change hit with a vengeance, I think that they are attempting to shore up their position so that they can maintain power as long as possible.

“I’ve been following the Assange case for about a decade now. It’s the most egregious case of judicial abuse that I’ve heard of personally in this country. You’ve got the main corporates, unfortunately the BBC and the *Guardian*, the liberal media. They’ve treated him abominably.”

Asked his opinion of the Labour Party, Alex said, “It’s a disgrace. You might have noticed recently that John McDonnell has come out in support of the Assange case, but I can’t help thinking, ‘Why didn’t he do that a bit sooner?’”

Referring to Corbyn’s and McDonnell’s overtures to Tory Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Alex said, “I think it’s an extremely bad idea to ascribe any kind of positive motivation to Boris Johnson, and I’m not sure why they did it, to be honest.”

Kevin Matlock said, “As a US citizen I feel obligated to intervene, and point out that what my government is doing is wrong, trying to extradite Julian Assange, who is not a US citizen, has committed no crime in the US and is accused of revealing true information.

“Once you set this precedent, any person in the world could be sent to the US from any country for publishing something that they don’t like, which is the absolute death of journalism.

“In many ways I feel like Assange is one of the last true journalists, sharing real information. It’s getting harder and harder to find any journalism for people who are brave enough to pose the truth. There are very few US outlets that will publish this kind of information anymore.”

With reference to the US elections, Kevin said, “Bernie Sanders has been effectively silent on the issue of Assange, which is a lot like what’s happening with Jeremy Corbyn. He was very quiet, and now he’s out of the Labour leadership, he says he supports him.

“Many people in the US that I know who like Bernie agree that he is weak on foreign policy. He believes what the CIA says and what the State Department says.”

Adrienne Kenny, from Veterans for Peace, said, “I am here today because I think that the attacks on Assange and attempts to indefinitely detain him and extradite him to the United States are one of the biggest threats to freedom of the press and our universal civil liberties as human beings on this planet that there is today.

“I served from 1994 to 2004 as an Arabic linguist in military intelligence, and over the 10 years I saw things change drastically after 9/11. Whereas before we used to

intercept the communications of foreign militaries, we began listening to NGOs, foreign aid workers, journalists, and we were told that we were allowed to listen to them even if they were Americans, because they might talk about seeing weapons of mass destruction.

“When I got out [of the military] in 2004, I think it was right around then that all the photos of torture were coming out of Abu Ghraib. We were finding out a lot of things that were going wrong in the military, finding out that people high up in the ranks had been pushing for these tortured surveillances.

“I was working in the VA [Veterans Administration health care system for military veterans in the US] from 2006 on. My first job was working with veterans coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan, who were at Richmond VA hospital for PTSD or traumatic brain injury, and to hear some of their stories.

“As much as I thought I knew about how screwed up things were in the military—their stories were even more horrendous.

“I think it is absolutely ridiculous that Chelsea Manning is in prison. ... General Petraeus was known to be sharing secrets with a journalist who he was having sex with and nothing happened to him, and yet Chelsea Manning tried to release that video through her chain of command, and nobody listened to her. She did what she thought was the right thing to do, and she’s in jail for that.

“I lived in Vermont for 11 years, and I know that Bernie Sanders can be good on some issues and on other issues like Palestine he is pretty quiet. He’s not really saying much about Assange. He’s not saying much about anything. The Democratic Party is just corrupt. The Democrats are just part of the problem, and I think we need to stop expecting them to fix the world’s problems. We need to fix our system that’s broken.

“Julian Assange needs to be freed. Chelsea Manning needs to be freed. We need to start taking accountability measures for the politicians who lied.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**