Interviews from SEP (UK) public rally

“The working class needs to demand that Assange is released, not that the ruling class do it on their behalf”

Our reporters
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World Socialist Web Site *reporters spoke to some of those attending the* public rally *held by the Socialist Equality Party (UK) in defence of Julian Assange on Sunday in London.*

Frankie, a 23-year-old PhD student in maths, travelled to the meeting from the north west of England, He said, “I was clarified [by the meeting] on how various political parties in Australia and here have failed to defend Assange. Corbyn gets his support for standing up for democratic freedoms, but he won’t stand up to his own party or its backers for principles he claims he stands for.

“The working class needs to demand that Assange is released, not that the ruling class do it on their behalf. They can’t leave it up to the courts because it’s clear they serve the interests of the state.”

Diane, a counsellor from Merseyside, said, “We should support Assange, it’s a human rights issue. If they are allowed to get away with it and send him to America, it gives them carte blanche to get away with other things.

“I found the meeting very inspirational. It hit home and made perfect sense. I want to contribute more.

“I voted for Corbyn [in the December general election], I thought he was left and there was no alternative. He can talk the talk, but he can’t walk the walk. I’ve completely lost faith in the Labour Party, and I suppose a lot of people think that there doesn’t seem to be the right leadership.”

Sasangi, 19, said, “I thought that [SEP National Secretary] Chris Marsden’s speech was very inspiring and very informative. I read the *World Socialist Web Site* most days, especially the Perspective articles. I agree completely that the defence of Julian Assange is nothing to do with winning the support of a few celebrities. As the speakers said, only the mobilisation of the working class will gain freedom for Julian Assange.

“I found Jeremy Corbyn’s lack of action disappointing. He had a huge opportunity to tell everyone and to win broad support for Assange, but he didn’t take it. It shows he is a coward.

“Assange is in jail to demonstrate what will happen to anyone who dares to tell the truth to the working class.

“I was nine years old when Assange was first victimised and had to ask for asylum in the Ecuadorian Embassy. For the past 10 years, the media has been completely silent about what was happening to him and why. This means that most young people of my age know absolutely nothing about his imprisonment. I am sure that as soon as they learn the truth, they will support his cause.”

Alex, a Bournemouth university student, said it was the first time he had attended an SEP public meeting. “I thought it was overwhelming. The support, everybody turning out, for my first time it has definitely been an experience, a positive one.

“Seeing the difference between what the SEP does and what the Labour Party does and having that laid out for you by people that have carried the torch and banner of the socialist movement, that fights for the interests of real people, is really something to behold. I thought the speech from Oscar Grenfell was fantastic. He laid out quite clearly the historical narrative which represents what’s happening in democratic nations in the treatment of Assange. The meeting was enlightening and encouraging.”

Jane Anderson said, “I have never been to one of these meetings before, and coming to the meeting today has really inspired me. I think I am going to join the SEP. I have read and studied a lot about Julian Assange, and I felt very inspired by everything that was said. I felt that the information was very grounded, it wasn’t airy fairy. I think that my biggest disappointment in the Julian Assange case is that ordinary people, working class people, aren’t getting what’s going on.

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"I have been lucky enough to really look into this case and read up a lot about it, talk to other people about it and to build up a picture of what is going on for him.

"I think the ruling class is scared of Assange because he just reveals the truth no matter what. He's on the side of the citizens of mankind. He sees it as his mission, in his heart and soul, to tell the citizens of the world what is going on, shining the light into the dark revealing the corruptness and the warmongering of the government and the world leaders. That's his job, and we want to support him in that."

Aikaz and Zaman are journalism students at a university in London. Aikaz said, "I always kind of knew about Assange, everyone kind of knew a lot about WikiLeaks and all the documents he released. It was a huge amount of information. And I just happened to find out that his trial was happening soon, and we decided to come and see the whole moment ourselves. But it's not as covered in the mainstream media, as you would expect.

"I think that the media is very threatened nowadays, because before it was always the media providing information. Now everyone tries to be a journalist or claims to be a journalist, and the media still wants to keep their role as gatekeepers and as watchdog. It threatens their authority as journalists when someone else does what they are supposed to do. That's why they might not be satisfied with Assange, but essentially what journalists must stand for is what he stands for—that the information is in the public interest and there is the right to freedom of speech as well. So, it is in the interest of journalists to support him, because it sets the precedent in the future. If he's charged and sent away, it's journalists who will suffer the consequences."

Zaman said, "The meeting came from an international viewpoint. We come from Kazakhstan. We are international students, and in our country they do not cover the issue at all. Even here in the UK, journalists tried to hide it. It's not covered as much as it should be, and that's why even British people, even people from the European Union and in the US, they don't know what's actually happening and what kind of threat is being presented towards press freedom.

"When Julian got dragged out of the embassy, it was surprising because for a lot of people it's considered normal nowadays that if you go against someone powerful, you'll get killed or hid away somewhere in a place that no one knows about. Even with my peers, if you start talking about it, my friends, they are always thinking he brought it on himself and they don't always see. They think he was too brave and courageous, and they just think it's not the way the world works, and you don't see any hope in the future, which I think is tragic and we should probably change. It's possible enough people want to change the world, and there is always a chance for a better future.

"It's really hard to go through life and hard to go to your work and realise that somewhere else in the world someone is dying, and you can't do anything about it is because of your government and you have no power in your hands."

Kate from London said, "I have been involved in the Assange campaign for a while. I send out a lot of information to my friends and family. Apart from that, I have been to Belmarsh, I have been to the magistrate's court in Marylebone.

"Mobilising the students, mobilising the working class, this is really what we need to do. There are still a lot of people who say, 'Oh well, he did this, he did that.' It is so important to defend Assange because of the issue of freedom of speech, freedom for journalism. If Assange is extradited, no journalists will ever speak the truth, they will be afraid to do so. If this happens, if he really is taken and jailed for the rest of his life, then who will dare to speak out? I am afraid for young people, and they are the ones that should be concerned.

"Nothing has been done by the Labour Party and I am very disappointed about it.

"The day they dragged him out of the [Ecuadorian] Embassy, I was so shocked and depressed. Many of us here were in tears. It was not ideal that he was kept in there for seven-and-a-half years, but he was relatively safe in comparison to what has happened since, which is horrendous."

Ruby said, "I thought the meeting today was inspiring and vindicating because we are on a daily basis nourished with distractions, with fake news from the press, and sometimes we hear from people who have the courage to really express their views and not be part of the establishment.

"I think the fight for Assange is the fight that awakes in us a sense of what is important and what is not. It awakes in us a sense of wanting the truth and that you are no longer satisfied with half-truths or with vanity projects.

"I think the fight for Assange has to be for the man that he is, who had the courage to establish the means to reveal to the world the secrets of the deep state."

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