Protesters condemn show trial of Julian Assange at the Old Bailey

Our reporters
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Demonstrators gathered outside the Old Bailey Central Criminal Court in London yesterday demanding freedom for WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

Longstanding supporters were joined by others who had travelled from across the UK. Despite difficulties posed by COVID-19, some came from Switzerland, France, Portugal, the United States, and Australia.

Placards included, “Jail the War Criminals—Free Julian Assange,” “Don’t Extradite Assange! Journalism is Not a Crime” and “Political Prisoner—Tortured by UK Govt: No Extradition.”

Assange’s father John Shipton addressed the protest from a speakers’ platform opposite the court’s entrance. Holding his phone to the microphone, Shipton played the soundtrack to WikiLeaks’ Collateral Murder video published in April 2010 which had exposed US war crimes in Iraq. The sound of an Apache helicopter and the crew’s voices could be heard. The gunship’s pilots request permission to open fire, with the chilling response, “Light ‘em all up.”

Shipton explained, “Just as you heard the lie that those people had weapons, the same lies are spread about Julian over and over again. It’s 11 years that he’s been banged up. Julian has two young children. What concerns me today is the rights of those children… They were able to visit [Belmarsh Maximum Security Prison] the other day, but they weren’t allowed to embrace their father under the regulation that if they touched each other, Julian would have to spend two weeks in self-isolation in quarantine, in jail—as if the circumstances are not dire enough.”

John Pilger, investigative journalist and documentary filmmaker, told the crowd, “Assange believes that journalists are the agents of people, not power; that we, the people, have a right to know about the darkest secrets of those who claim to act in our name. If the powerful lie to us, we have the right to know. If they say one thing in private and the opposite in public, we have the right to know. If they conspire against us, as Bush and Blair did over Iraq, then pretend to be democrats, we have the right to know.”

Pilger delivered an impassioned attack on those who have enabled the US State Department’s war on Assange and WikiLeaks, “The imperial shock troops would be those who called themselves journalists: the big hitters of the so-called mainstream, especially the ‘liberals’ who mark and patrol the perimeters of dissent.

“And that is what happened. I have been a reporter for more than 50 years and I have never known a smear campaign like it—the fabricated character assassination of a man who refused to join the club, who believed journalism was a service to the public, never to those above.

“Assange shamed his persecutors. He produced scoop after scoop. He exposed the fraudulence of wars promoted by the media and the homicidal nature of America’s wars, the corruption of dictators, the evils of Guantanamo.”

Pilger continued, “He exposed the official truth-tellers in the media as collaborators—those I would call ‘Vichy journalists.’ None of these imposters believed Assange when he warned that his life was in danger, that the “sex scandal” in Sweden was a setup and an American hellhole was the ultimate destination. And he was right, and repeatedly right.”

The extradition proceedings at the Old Bailey were described by Pilger as “the final act of an Anglo-American campaign to bury Julian Assange. It is not due process. It is due revenge. The American indictment is clearly rigged, a demonstrable sham. So far, the hearings have been reminiscent of their Stalinist equivalents during the Cold War.”

He continued, “It is said that whatever happens to Julian Assange in the next three weeks will diminish if not destroy freedom of the press in the West. But which press? The *Guardian*? The BBC, the *New York Times*, Jeff Bezos’ *Washington Post*?

“No, the journalists in these organizations can breathe freely. The Judases on the *Guardian* who flirted with Julian, exploited his landmark work, made their pile then betrayed him, have nothing to fear. They are safe because they are needed.”

Both Pilger and WikiLeaks Editor-in-Chief Kristin Hraffnson were denied access to the court.

Hrafnsson told reporters, “I wasn’t allowed in the courtroom…I was offered a seat on a balcony overlooking another room where journalists were working and watching a video screen that I couldn’t see… I could barely hear anything as well.”

Asked how he felt about being excluded from the courtroom, Hrafnsson replied, “How does it make me feel, to be a representative of the organisation on trial here alongside Julian Assange, and not sitting in the courtroom? I call this an absolute abomination… As far as I’m concerned it’s a secret trial.”

WSWS reporters spoke with demonstrators outside the court.

Agatha said, "I have come from Germany because Julian Assange’s case is so important. For him as a human being, to save his life, for press freedom and freedom of speech. It’s important for the whole world that democratic values should be upheld.

“I became active in Assange’s defence last February when I read Nilz Melzer’s account of the smears and lies. So I came over to Britain in February for the hearings and to demonstrate in front of Belmarsh Prison.

“The governments in the US, in Britain and Australia are persecuting Assange because he revealed their war crimes. He showed the world the ugly crimes they committed in Iraq. They want to make an example of him, to intimidate journalists.

“It should be an international fight to free Julian Assange. The people of the world should stand up to save his life, free speech, free journalism and democracy.”

Anna Price is a teacher and psychotherapist. She said, “I'm absolutely shocked by the assault on Julian Assange’s human rights and all our human rights in this case and I think the UK needs to stand up and stop it. We need public opinion behind Julian Assange.”

“Assange is being persecuted because they want to hide from us their crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan and government corruption. This is a warning to any whistle-blowers or journalists or publishers who tell us

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what's going on in the world."

After seeing Assange dragged from the Ecuadorian Embassy, Anna said, "I realised something really horrific was happening in our society. I could not believe that a publisher and journalist was being arrested like that. What shocked me the most was that there was only one camera that filmed it, one camera! So where were the rest of the press? You know they've all been silenced on this case. I think public opinion is incredibly important and ever since April 2019 my main goal has been to try and raise awareness of Julian Assange's fight and how it affects us all."

Cheryl, a longstanding campaigner in defence of Assange, said. "I think that he's not going to get any justice. It's a kangaroo court. He's still not able to talk to his lawyers on a regular basis… Remember he said that 'when they have finished with me they are going to come for you too'? He also said that the US uses the UK as a vassal state to get him. This is exactly what they wanted, to get him on spurious charges.

"He has no charges to answer. They lied about this rape allegation [concocted by the Swedish authorities]. When the rape allegation served its purpose, they kicked him out of the embassy and he is now theirs to torture. It was always a vindictive campaign to attack this guy and put him away for daring to expose war crimes. Nothing more, nothing less.

"Judge Vanessa Baraitser has connections to the case, which undermines the whole objectivity of all her rulings. She should not even be there. The US is in charge of that judge, I suspect, and she does what they tell her to do. You would expect that sort of thing to happen in some small South American country. The government talks about the rule of law, and nothing they do is about the law.

"Home Secretary Priti Patel went to Israel using government funds, chatting to a murderous rogue state. She was never persecuted. Boris Johnson is dropping bombs on Yemen, and he's not been prosecuted. But Julian Assange must be tortured because he dared expose their crimes.

"The media is now the parrot of the state. They are not the Fifth Estate anymore. They are the Fifth Column. Nicely dressed, but enforcers of the surveillance state, the rogue state. They just do as they are told. They are not there to do the news and journalism. They are there to pacify us and make us think that we get the news, but it's all fake.

"The Labour Party has become a version of the Tories, and I noticed a lot of bad things happened under Jeremy Corbyn. He never stood up for his followers. Corbyn had the momentum, and he could've told his followers about Assange, the same ones that took him to victory. In this supposedly democratic country, we should've been fighting. Instead he remained silent.

"When they were calling Corbyn anti-Semitic, he knew it was a lie. But he wouldn't take them to court. When people who supported him were thrown under the bus, he let this happen, like Ken Livingstone, Marc Wadsworth and Chris Williamson. He never said anything. Now I see him talking on Twitter. We should say where were you when you were our leader? Why didn't you talk up when you were our leader? Now you're back to being a backbencher, now you are talking. That is cowardice. The Labour Party is like the Tory's brother. We have no opposition now."

"Corbyn lost a lot of support because of this. He will never be anything now, because people see him as a bloody coward. The same thing happened with Bernie Sanders in the US. They had the momentum and they threw it away.

"Assange should be freed and compensated. He's being persecuted for doing journalism, the type of journalism that they all should be doing. I pray that he is never extradited to the US because going there would be a death sentence, The US is a rogue state. It's an international criminal state that has no concern for justice, for democracy, for free speech. They are quite happy to see people being killed on the streets, so I say that we should never let this man leave for the United States, never!"

Martin Zuker, a retired history teacher, said, "The USA, as it says on my notice here, does not have universal jurisdiction. That is why we are here today, to make sure that Julian Assange is freed from the corrupt system, the kangaroo court, which is continuing in this building today.

"The allegations are that he exposed the war crimes in Afghanistan. Because they want to gag freedom of speech. They don't want to be accused of war criminality, the invasion of Iraq, with the UK in collusion. The media is being governed by the big corporate companies, the BBC and Sky News. There is no socialist media where we are allowed freedom of speech. They want to keep the truth covered about why they are operating with such injustices. It's an industry of stealth."

Elsa said, "We are here to support and to protect Julian Assange. He's the greatest journalist of our time. He has been punished for telling the truth. He has been brutally persecuted by the United States and the United Kingdom.

"They wanted to keep war crimes concealed. But Julian Assange published those crimes and we the people must know because we must hold our governments to account.

"We are here because this extradition case has been very unjust. They are not delivering justice. They are delivering business, bending down to whatever the United States administration wants. We must fight in this historic battle to free Julian Assange. We must fight to win, or our children will be next. If we don't defend Julian Assange, journalism is dead. The truth is dead. The freedom of the press is dead.

"The media does not represent the people. The media is there to represent corporations and the rich. They only defend their salaries. They don't care about the truth and about the rights of many people suffering in the UK and across the world."

Elleane Green said, "I have supported Julian for a long time now. I'm convinced that if we don't manage to turn this around, we are the last free people on the planet because no future generations will ever hear the truth about anything.

"They will never hear about evil because evil will be hidden and it's a future which I cannot bear to contemplate. All our children, our grandchildren, will live in darkness and evil and I'm not prepared to go into that without a big fight.

"Julian has been in incarceration for nearly 10 years and all the media which benefited from his exposure of diplomatic cables has abandoned him. I can't forgive the *Guardian* for many things, but this is one of the biggest. They are a most despicable, disgusting newspaper. They are short of money and I hope no one is giving them any or buying their paper."

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