

# John and Gabriel Shipton speak at event in defense of Assange in New York City

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Last Thursday, Gabriel and John Shipton, the stepbrother and father of Julian Assange, spoke at an event in New York City as part of their US tour aimed at garnering support for the dropping of charges against Assange.

Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, has been persecuted for over a decade by US imperialism and its allies. In the course of this persecution, Assange's democratic rights have been trampled on systematically and he has been subjected to psychological torture. He has languished in the high-security Belmarsh prison in London since 2019. At the beginning of 2021, a British judge, who maintains close connections to the MI6, ruled against his extradition to the US, arguing that it would almost certainly mean his death. The Shiptons are also gathering money for a \$2 million fund to pay for the legal defense of Assange.

About 120 people attended the event at Manhattan's "People's Forum." In addition to the Shiptons, the panel featured journalist Chris Hedges, prominent musician and Assange supporter Roger Waters, comedian Randy Credico as well as Aaron Maté from the Grayzone website.

In opening the event, a member of the NYC Defend Assange campaign stated: "Julian is the most important publisher of our time. WikiLeaks published over 10 million documents and there was not a single case of human error. This is the political trial of the century. Freedom of the press and [the defense of] Julian's life are inseparably connected."

The first speaker of the event was Jocelyn Gay, a reporter with *Haiti Liberté*. The newspaper was one of about a dozen that received cables from WikiLeaks in 2011 that had been leaked by private Chelsea Manning, exposing massive US intervention in oppressed countries. Since leading news outlets in the US,

including the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, the UK's *Guardian* and Germany's *Der Spiegel*, had shown no interest in the documents, WikiLeaks gave them to some of the most important outlets in the affected countries.

Based on these leaks, Gay explained, *Haiti Liberté* has published dozens of articles in the past decade exposing the US intervention in the island's politics, including the 2004 coup against the government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide and occupation plans. She concluded, "Thank you Assange, thank you Manning, thank you WikiLeaks, for your courage and solidarity."

Comedian Randy Credico took up the glaring refusal of Democratic senator Bernie Sanders, who falsely postures as left-wing, to defend Assange. Imitating Sanders, Credico said, "Assange exposed why I didn't get the [Democratic] nomination [in 2016], shouldn't I publicly support him?"

When Credico referenced the case of journalist Craig Murray, whose appeal of an eight-months prison sentence was just rejected, the audience gave a standing ovation, chanting that he should be released. Credico stressed that fundamental democratic rights were at stake. He said, "This is an American crisis. This is about Thomas Paine and the First Amendment. Everything that Tom Paine stood for is at stake."

Credico added that the "horrific" sight of Assange being placed in a glass cage during the trial in London had reminded him of the trial of Nazi criminal Adolf Eichmann, who was tried in Israel in 1961 for his leading role in orchestrating the Nazi genocide of European Jews. He too had been put in a glass cage. "But he [Eichmann] had access to his lawyers [while Assange didn't]. Julian exposed people like Eichmann."

Gabriel Shipton recounted that they had encountered

immense support in the US, which “really lifted our spirits.” He said, “Six months have now passed, and we still don’t know when there’s going to be an appeal. What we’re seeing is just another instance of this abuse of process from which Julian has been suffering going on 12 years now.”

John Shipton, Assange’s father, spoke about the “irony” that he and his son were now “wandering advocates in the United States for the First Amendment.” He noted several examples of leaks that exposed war crimes and other atrocities leading to significant victories, including Iraq’s refusal to renew the status of forces agreement with the United States, the release of Guantanamo Bay prisoners, and justice for environmental crimes off the coast of Africa.

Following the event, Shipton told the WSWS that he continues to be cut off from regular communication with his son, which is limited to infrequent ten-minute phone calls while Assange remains imprisoned. Commenting on why his son’s fate is so important for American workers, Shipton stressed, “None of us can get anywhere without solidarity. Without solidarity, we’re gone.”

Journalist Chris Hedges called the Assange case “the most important battle for press freedom of our era.” However, while he referred to a “criminal ruling class that cannot be reformed” in his speech, later in the discussion he called upon the audience to “put pressure” on this very ruling class and cited Occupy Wall Street as a role model.

The Grayzone’s Aaron Maté took up the shameful role of the media in the persecution of Assange. He denounced progressive media, including outlets such as The Intercept, in particular, for falling in line in this campaign. He also noted that the OPCW whistleblowers, who revealed that reports about the alleged use of poisoned gas by Assad in Syria had been fabricated to provide a pretext for military intervention, were being ignored by the media. However, like Hedges, he stressed in the discussion that the Democratic Party had to be pressured into dropping the charges against Assange. He said, “This is a Trump policy. So optically does the Biden administration want to pursue this? No.”

In reality, the Democratic Party, no less than the Trump administration, has for over a decade been set on the destruction of Julian Assange and WikiLeaks.

From day one, the Biden administration has made clear that it will continue the Trump administration’s brutal persecution of Assange and seek his extradition to the US.

Last week, the *World Socialist Web Site* stressed in a comment on the Shiptons’ US tour:

No faith whatsoever can be placed in such soporific gestures tailored to the political imperative of supporting the Democrats. The US ruling class is determined to see Assange destroyed as a pre-emptive strike against mass opposition to its imperialist warmongering. The only force which can secure Assange’s release is a movement of the international working class, whose American contingent must play a leading role.

There is strong support for Assange’s defense in the working class. Jazmine, a young woman who passed by the venue, spoke to the WSWS before the event. “They should drop the charges. They’re slowly killing him. Exposures [like those of WikiLeaks] beget awareness and once there’s awareness there’s disruption. We as the people need to know the truth to make informed decisions.

“We do have rights. The people are supposedly in control, and we should support him in any way we can. If we don’t have a voice and if we don’t have rights, that’s when a revolution starts. Assange exposed war crimes, but we have a war going on in our own country. The working class are fighting for basic rights. That’s where I see a similarity. I believe if the only hope right now to establish support for freedom, increase awareness and seek justice for Assange is to rally the people, so be it. I genuinely identify with Assange and the cruel and unusual punishments that these tyrannical governments are imposing. I don’t know if he knows how many people support him.”



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