

Protest in London against Ecuadorian President Moreno's persecution of Julian Assange

Our reporters
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A protest against Ecuadorian President Lenin Moreno took place in London's Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park yesterday morning, outside the Global Disability Summit.

Organised at short notice, a small group, mainly Latin American migrants and exiles, condemned the new President for his right-wing social policies and threats to withdraw protection from WikiLeaks' editor Julian Assange.

The formally given reason for Moreno's visit to the UK was to attend the Summit. A growing number of credible reports, however, suggest that Moreno's real purpose was to discuss secret plans with British government officials to evict Assange from the Ecuadorian embassy in London and then arrest him.

Assange has spent over six years inside the embassy, seeking asylum from ultimate extradition to the United States, where he could face a Grand Jury on possible charges of espionage that can carry a death sentence. The UK is playing a key role by maintaining breach of bail charges against Assange—relating to a case that no longer exists—as a pretext for taking him into custody if he steps out of the Embassy. A United Nations working group ruled in February 2016 that this amounted to arbitrary detention.

Now Moreno is preparing the way for an even greater injustice. His presidency has been marked by a shift to the right in Ecuadorian politics and a related reorientation towards an alliance with American imperialism. He and his government see Assange not as an asylum seeker and whistle-blower of international significance, but as a bargaining chip in negotiations with the United States. A major step was taken in this direction four months ago, when Assange's contact

with the outside world—excluding only his lawyers—was cut off, under increasing pressure from the US.

Both the fraud of Moreno's official reasons for visiting the UK and his importance to the British state were made clear yesterday. He spent less than two hours at the summit he had nominally travelled so far to attend. He was whisked into and out of the building in a motorcade, and protected by a police presence, wholly disproportionate to the 20 or so peaceful protestors in attendance—including some with children.

The extent of the machinations Ecuador was carrying out against Assange were further exposed yesterday when WikiLeaks tweeted, "An Ecuadorian press report states that a double agent at the Ecuadorian embassy, who was spying on @JulianAssange, defected to the UK last month when she was dismissed. The agent had been formally working for Ecuador's intelligence agency SENAIN under diplomatic cover.

WSWS reporters spoke to Mayra, a dental hygienist currently studying in the UK for a master's degree in public health. Asked why she was attending the protest, Mayra explained, "There are various issues. In my opinion, it is totally wrong that Lenin Moreno is here today supposedly representing disabled people, because he is applying a neoliberal agenda in Ecuador. In addition, he is persecuting Julian Assange by trying to remove him from the Ecuadorian Embassy.

"It's not just a question of me or you, it's a question of defending the whole planet against the abuses of the United States and other countries that are attacking innocent countries because they don't like the president and want to get rid of him for not following their agenda... Julian Assange was one of the people who exposed these abuses, abuses of human rights and of

the laws governing war.

“He’s not just protecting people in Iraq and Syria, for example. With his efforts to find out what is actually going on in those countries he’s actually defending the human rights of the whole world.”

On the role of the UK government, Mayra said, “This government does not stand up for human rights at all. It abuses everybody. It has a completely different agenda. It acts to protect the rich, following the United States and their criminality. Julian Assange is an innocent person and freedom of speech must be respected.”

Also attending the protest was Clara, a long-time campaigner in defence of WikiLeaks, who regularly attends a vigil outside the Ecuadorian Embassy. Clara said, “Moreno’s main purpose [in Britain] is to negotiate with the UK government to get rid of Assange. This conference is a cover. It has been in the press in Ecuador, with the new foreign minister, publicly saying that the asylum [case of Assange] is taking too long, so it’s another way of saying that they want him out.”

Clara explained the political context of Moreno’s actions, saying that the US was playing a greater role in Ecuadorian politics. “They already have troops in Ecuador from the US. The ex-President got rid of US bases, but now Moreno has opened all the doors to get them in. Mr Moreno, when he got into power, made a comment about Julian saying that he was a hacker, which he’s not, and saying that he should be very careful about what he’s doing in his embassy, in his territory. Since then, he keeps saying that Assange is a stone in his shoe, that he got lumbered with this problem.”

Clara continued, “And there are rumours being spread in Ecuador in the newspapers that [former president] Mr [Rafael] Correa didn’t carry out any legal investigation about whether to give Julian asylum, because they were very close friends. That is a lie. I’ve been involved in this campaign for many years and it’s a lie. Correa took two months with a legal team to investigate whether Assange was politically persecuted. There was a legal investigation, suggestions otherwise are a smear.

“And they have been helped by the *Guardian*. They [Ecuador] have this man called Fernando Villavicencio. One minute he’s a reporter, the next he isn’t. And he is giving the Ecuadorian government smears about Mr

Assange. The *Guardian*’s attacks against Julian have been absolutely incredible—worse than any other paper.”

Asked about the protest and the need for further actions in defence of Assange, Clara said, “There should be more people protesting, obviously. We are very frustrated that there are only a few of us, practically.

“I think these [WikiLeaks] leaks regarding [Hillary] Clinton [in 2016] were a turning point. For example, we used to have a group, Women Against Rape, who bravely published a statement in the *Guardian* in 2012 in favour of Julian, without any doubts. They were with us for years. But the last message I had from them was that they were very angry with the revelations about Clinton. That had a lot to do with it.”

On Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn’s silence over Assange since he was elected, Clara said, “I’m very angry with Mr Corbyn, I don’t know what’s happened to him. I know he has worked all his life for human rights, so I don’t understand his position; why he hasn’t said anything about Julian Assange. But I think he’s under siege in his party. They’ve got that man gagged.”

Clara thanked the WSWs for its work in defending Assange, saying, “We are really grateful that your website has been so strong in defending Julian.”

There is immense support internationally for WikiLeaks’ work in exposing imperialist crimes and abuses of democracy. But that support finds no expression in the bourgeois media or existing political set-up. Support for Assange must be drawn into a powerful movement in defence of free speech across the world, based on the working class and directing all its energies to securing the freedom and safety of Julian Assange. The Socialist Equality Party and WSWs will continue the fight to organise such a campaign.

A further protest is planned for August 16th outside the Ecuadorian embassy, to mark the sixth anniversary of Assange being granted political asylum by Ecuador.



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