

# Transcript: Davey Heller's speech at World Press Freedom Day protest in Melbourne

*Below is an edited transcript of the speech given by Davey Heller on May 3rd, World Press Freedom Day, outside the UK Consulate in Melbourne. The protest was part of a global call out of protests to Stand up for Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning and all targetted whistleblowers and journalists.*

Hello my name is Davey Heller, I write for classconscious.org and am one of the organisers of today's protests and classconscious was one of the initiators of the call out for protests internationally today.

May 3rd, World Press Freedom Day is recognized around the world as a day to defend journalists. The growing attacks on journalists by governments throughout the world is putting them and all whistleblowers under threat. There continue to be not only threats against journalists but torture and murders.

There is a need for a united front globally to protect journalists and whistleblowers. This is critical in every country of the world and we urge supporters of journalists, journalism and whistleblowers to speak up and stand up wherever they are in a unified voice to support freedom for Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning and all journalists and whistleblowers around the world.

People are doing just that today and in the coming days at

protests not just here in Melbourne but Sydney, Brisbane, Massachusetts, Boston, Dublin, Toronto, Wellington and London.

To put the plight of journalists in context I will provide just a few recent examples from around the world.

- Turkey – today under Erdogan has the worst record for jailing journalists in the world, with 96 convicted, 95 arrested and 167 wanted as of 2019.
- Israel – The Israeli military just this week shot and injured four journalists on the border of Gaza during the weekly Great March or Return protests.
- France – The French Government has also just moved to prosecute the journalists who exposed the French Government's complicity in the barbarous war in Yemen and its attempts to cover it up. They are aiming to prosecute them for 'compromising national defence secrets
- Wikileaks – even in the case of the prosecution of Wikileaks it is worth noting that two other individuals are currently in jail. Joshua Schulte is accused of blowing the whistle on CIA spying tools used against the public. Ola Bini a software developer is being held in Ecuador over his alleged ties to Wikileaks.
- Australia – The Australian Government is also moving increasingly to clamp down on journalists and whistleblowers.

Witness K and his lawyer Bernard Colleary are both facing prosecution over their alleged involvement in making public the fact the Australian spy agency ASIS bugged the Timorese Government in order to get an advantage in negotiations over oil and gas. The two are being prosecuted under "War on Terror" era legislation which enables the trial to be held virtually in secret.

Former defence lawyer David McBride is being prosecuted for exposing the criminal behaviour of Australian special forces in Afghanistan.

Behrouz Boochani is an Iranian Kurdish refugee who has been held on Manus Island since 2013, along with hundreds of other refugees, as part of the gulag system that Australia maintains as part of this country Trump style xenophobic "border control" system. Despite the terrible condition Behrouz has managed to published around the world as a journalist and even written an award winning book describing his imprisonment.

Last year saw the introduction of new "Foreign Interference" legislation which made it a crime to merely possess classified material even if its not published.

However the focus of today's rally and the reason we are standing outside the UK Embassy is the case the Australian Wikileaks publisher, Julian Assange and the Whistleblower Chelsea Manning who passed on evidence to him of U.S. War crimes.

Both of these brave principled individuals have been "disappeared" into the prison system. First Chelsea Manning was jailed for her refusal to participate in the legal witch hunt of Assange and Wikileaks. She refused to testify in the Grand Jury in the U.S. investigating them. She has already served a month and a half in jail and faces up to 18 months in prison in addition to the seven years she spent in jail under Obama.

Julian Assange is now facing an effective “extraordinary rendition” to the UK. Snatched in broad daylight by UK police at the behest of the Trump Administration and with the permission of the craven Moreno Government, Assange had his political asylum rights trampled. Once again the imperialist west showed that as far as they are concerned international law does not apply to them.

He was immediately transferred to Britain’s “Guantanamo”, the maximum security prison at Belmarsh before being sentenced for 50 weeks on MayDay of all days, for the “crime” of “skipping bail” eg being granted asylum as a political refugee. On May 2nd, he faced his first extradition hearing. When asked by the judge whether he assented to be being extradited to the U.S., Assange replied “”I do not wish to surrender myself for extradition for doing journalism that has won many many awards and protected many people”.

Questions must be asked, why has a publisher and journalist become the most wanted political prisoner in the world by the U.S. Empire? What does this tell us about the world we live in?

The reason that Assange and Manning are being persecuted is related to the broader context of the crisis of capitalism. Since the 2007 Global Financial Crisis, the ruling classes in country after country have slashed and burned public spending as part of austerity policies to pay for the bank bailouts. Companies under conditions of a global slump have only been able to maintain profitability by ruthlessly attacking working conditions and suppressing wages. Policies such as Quantitative easing have pumped billions into the sharemarket pushing Wall St to historic highs. Wealth has flooded to the top one percent of society at a dizzying pace, increasing wealth

inequality to staggering levels.

Meanwhile competition between the capitalist states has also increased. The U.S. has unleashed trade war measures against both allies and its enemies. Global military spending is also at record levels as the capitalist ruling classes understand that to protect their interests they must prepare for a potential new world war to once again "redivide the world" just as occurred twice in the 20th century. This time however the U.S. and its allies are threatening to unleash a nuclear armageddon in their desire to subjugate China and Russia in particular.

Attacks on the working class at home and preparation for waging even bigger wars abroad lie at the heart of the increasing persecution of journalists and whistleblowers, a process personified in the jailed Assange and Manning. Such policies cannot be achieved through democratic means. They can only be forced on the international working class through the policies of repression, censorship and a move to authoritarian or even outright fascist forms of rule. If the working class is able to access the truth it has the capacity to fight back. As angry as the ruling class is at Assange, Wikileaks, Manning, Snowden and others for exposing their crimes the ruling class is acting now so that it can commit even greater crimes in the future. This is why the journalists and the whistleblowers must be silenced. This is why an example must be made of Assange and Manning

The solution to this situation however is building exactly the kind of movement that the ruling class fears most, a united international movement of the working class to fight to Free Assange, Free Manning and all targeted journalists and whistleblowers!

As mentioned rallies are occurring in other cities around the world today. A significant rally is occurring in Sydney today where John Shipton (Julian's father), Mary Kostidis, Scot Ludlum and Greg Barnes are speaking. Since Julian's arrest there have been protests in Germany, US, UK, France, Sri Lanka, Mexico and Ecuador amongst others. The outline of such an international movement is beginning to be seen.

The reality however must be faced that despite the millions of people around the world, such a movement has not yet eventuated. The reasons for this are complex. One cannot discount the impact of the tsunami of lies published against Assange in the last decade. Much of the corporate capitalist press and the major political parties in the UK, the US and Australia have aligned with themselves fully with the efforts to persecute Assange and Manning and participated actively in the conspiracy to jail and silence him.

Many of the middle class groups who supported Assange in 2010-11 vocally have either facilitated this conspiracy through being largely silent since. In Australia this includes groups such as Get Up, human rights organisations, corporate media outlets, the Greens and the Trade Unions.

This silence was broken with a flurry of statements after Assange's arrest from Human Rights Watch, Amnesty, International Commission of Journalists, American Civil Liberties Union and even a handful of politicians such as Jeremy Corbyn in the UK. However these words are empty in the absence of action. These organisations must now once again attempt to mobilise their members in the streets in an active campaign to Free Assange and Manning. They must be actively pressured to take action and they must be exposed if they do not.

Classconscious.org has been involved in getting journalists from around the world to sign an open letter to the Media Arts and Entertainment Alliance, the Australian media trade Union, calling on them to mobilise their members in defence of Assange who is a member of the union. We welcome the fact that Marcus Strom the President of the MEAA did break 8 years of silence from the union in the aftermath of the arrest by appearing in the media and writing a letter to the government to oppose Assange's extradition. However this is not enough! The MEAA has not done anything to activate its members and is not speaking out in any kind of sustained way. Unless this occurs its initial statements are meaningless and hypocritical. I emailed the MEAA President directly and messaged him via Twitter to invite the MEAA to today's rally for example and received no reply. The National Union of Journalists in the UK has been similarly inactive

There is an important role for honest journalists to now speak out and organise collectively to participate in this campaign. The call out for action today and the letter to the MEAA was endorsed by prominent and respected journalists internationally and within Australia. There are sections of the mainstream press who can join forces with more independent outlets to speak in defence of press freedom. If the MEAA will not facilitate this process then it will have to be done by rank and file media workers themselves.

After this rally here, I invite everyone to accompany me to the offices of the MEAA at ACTU house in Queens St to present the open letter to the MEAA.

The union bureaucracies through their silence have thus far by and large lined up with the ruling class's persecution of Assange and its broader imperialist aims.

There has been some breakthroughs in eliciting support from the labor movement . The call out for today's rallies was supported by the Queensland branch of the MEAA and the General Secretary, Media Workers Association of South Africa. In February of this year the San Francisco Labor Council passed a motion against the prosecution of Assange.

This can and must be built on but the lead will not come from the right wing union bureaucracies. It is clear that workers will need to take this issue into their workplaces themselves. Rank and file workers must pass motions at their sub-branch meetings that state that the fight for Julian Assange and Manning and the fight for press freedom is a struggle for the whole working class. If the working class loses these political rights then it can advance none of its economic concerns either. Workers and their organisations do not fair well under fascist dictatorships.

If workers and youth are not in a union then they can form rank and file committees based on their workplace or school to pass such motions that assert the importance of the defence of Assange and the defence of democracy to the struggle of the working class.

In Australia we also have a responsibility to expose our own government's despicable role in the jailing of Assange, an Australian citizen. Both Labor and Liberals have since 2010 washed their hands of Julian and in fact have participated in the conspiracy against him. This is because our government owes more allegiance to the "five eyes" and the U.S. Alliance than it does to any of its own citizens. The Australian ruling class is committed to this alliance as the best way to prosecute its own interests. Australian youth and workers must demand that they intervene to protect Julian from extradition

to the U.S.

So what can you do from here

- Join Free Julian Assange on FB or one of the country “action pages” you can find from them and find others to organise with
- Sign up to the classconscious.org email
- Pass a motion in your workplace and school
- Continue to attend protests – better yet – organise your own!

In terms of the timeline of the legal case. The Next hearing in Assange extradition case is on May 30 which will be another procedural hearing. Then, a more substantial hearing will occur on June 12. A full extradition hearing likely many months away.

We will now have an open mic session, then down to Queens St to the MEAA offices at ACTU House

The struggle to get Julian out of maximum security and to stop him being extradited to the U.S where his life in danger, is inseparable from the struggle against war, fascism and the defence of press freedom and democratic rights more broadly.

Kristinn Hrafnsson, editor of Wikileaks made a statement outside the court to the press on May 1st. “My hope in general is that the general public will stand up and rise up and acknowledge this fight for what it is, a fight for the freedom of the press, the media which is in the public

interest to be free. Journalists must acknowledge that this is the real case, this extradition case to the U.S. Unfortunately I do not have much hope in the politicians or the branches of power and the government, its up to the people to rise up and show their support”

As Julian was being arrested on April 11th he yelled “We must resist, we can resist” and “resist the Trump Administration.”

We all can and must resist to fight his extradition to face trumped up charges brought forth by the U.S. imperialism led by the fascist Trump and to demand he and Chelsea are free.

We all can and must resist all the attacks on journalists and whistleblowers around the world from governments of all stripes.

WE CAN RESIST WE MUST RESIST \_ FREE ASSANGE AND MANNING

Watch most of the speech on video on Youtube [here](#) (first few minutes missing)