

UK: Stop the Extradition of Julian Assange

Dave Stockton Wed, 26/02/2020 - 10:04

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Wikileaks publisher Julian Assange is now on trial at Woolwich crown court in south-east London to decide whether he will be extradited to the United States, where he faces 18 charges of breaching the Espionage Act. Assange, of course, is not a US citizen nor did he commit his 'crimes' on American soil. Yet governments around the world, including his own in Australia, are only too happy to see him silenced.

The reason is straightforward enough. In pulling back the curtain on the secret diplomacy and murderous actions of United States imperialism he, and courageous whistle blowers like Chelsea Manning, have revealed the collusion of various states including France, Germany and Britain, not to speak of its key allies in the Middle East, Egypt, Israel and Saudi Arabia.

In short, he is on trial for having revealed information on a host of US war crimes, including extraordinary rendition, diplomatic conspiracies with dictatorial regimes and wholesale corruption of US allies. Those revelations played an important part in fuelling the Arab Spring Uprisings.

This is a purely political trial if ever there was one. The judge's acceptance of a claim by the US Department of Justice that Assange is 'not charged with disclosure of embarrassing or awkward information that the government would rather not have had disclosed' could have come straight from the trial scene at the end of Alice in Wonderland.

The treatment of Assange was bad enough, even while in the London Ecuadorian Embassy, from June 2012 to April 2019. He was kept in cramped conditions, with no access to natural light or to adequate medical care, his room bugged and conversations with lawyers and friends tapped.

Then, after Lenin Moreno was elected President of Ecuador and was bribed or coerced into ending Assange's sanctuary, he was dragged away by police and kept in harsh conditions in maximum security Belmarsh Prison. He was handcuffed 11 times and stripped naked twice, in what medical experts have classified as relentless physical mistreatment and 'psychological torture'.

All this in an attempt to break his morale. After the first day in court, he even had his case files confiscated and was bundled from cell to cell. The next day the judge denied that she had any powers to determine the conditions of his detention.

This harsh treatment was not as severe as that meted out to former US army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning, the source of the biggest Wikileak. She was arrested, abused, tortured and sentenced to 35 years' imprisonment, spending seven years in a cell before her sentence was commuted in 2017. For much of that time, she was kept in solitary confinement and stripped of clothing at night as part of a 'suicide-watch' which even US army doctors deemed unnecessary; woken up at 5 am each day, and forced to stay awake until 10 pm.

Pardoned by Barack Obama just before he left office in January 2017, Donald Trump called Manning an "ungrateful traitor" who "should never have been released from prison?". In March 2019, she was rearrested and is still in jail for courageously refusing to testify to a grand jury against Assange. Her treatment is a warning of what Assange could face if British justice and Johnson's government hand him over.

Coming on top of the 2010 publication of hundreds of files on inmates at the Guantanamo Bay prison on Cuba, Wikileaks' revelation of over one million confidential US government documents, including up to 250,000 classified diplomatic cables, in 2010-11, together with several hundred thousand official documents related to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq from 2007, laid bare the dark world behind the democratic smokescreen of US propaganda.

They exposed US violations of the human rights of inmates held at the Guantanamo Bay and shone a spotlight on the attitudes of the US administration towards the actions of national security institutions in constant secret (and illegal) activities within foreign states across the globe. They showed that that the US, despite denials, certainly was engaged in targeted assassinations by drones. Trump however glories in them.

The cables and emails presented a clear picture of a power that regards itself as having the right to interfere in the internal politics of other states as it likes. The hypocritical complaints that Putin and Russia are interfering in US politics should be greeted by scornful laughter.

The cables reveal how US security chiefs used the "War on Terror" to generate the view of a world-wide insurgency lasting for decades and needing huge resources, a world full of "insurgents" and "ungoverned spaces". A world in which, as Madeleine Albright said, America is the "indispensable nation" which "sees further" than any other power.

What it sees, and what it does about it, has to remain secret so that it can continue to pose as a human rights promoting, conflict-solving, peace-seeking power. Even if Trump, faced with the threat of a dynamic China and a resurgent Russia, has dumped much of this ideology, he most certainly has not dismantled the web of spying and dirty tricks or the murderous actions of the US military.

Without Wikileaks we would not have had proof positive of the large number of civilians killed in US drone attacks in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Yemen.

Despite coming to power condemning various illegal actions of George W Bush, and promising to restore America's good name, Barack Obama's administration declared the leaks "an attack on the entire international community?". Those who hoped that Obama would reverse the trend were to be disappointed. During his presidency he oversaw the six-fold expansion of drone attacks and extended their use from the Middle East to Africa.

Politically, whistle blowers like Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden, are sincere liberals who believe that by revealing the dirty secrets of our rulers, a more perfect democracy can somehow be created. Nevertheless, they perform an invaluable task in providing evidence that the great powers and their subordinate states constitute a system built on secret diplomacy and the deception of their own peoples. This system is what Lenin called imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism and we must work tirelessly for its destruction before it destroys the world, either by a third world war or by climate catastrophe, or both.

Today, we have to do all we can to mobilise the trade unions, the Labour Party in the UK and parties of the

working class worldwide to speak out against the hounding and persecution of the whistle blowers who revealed the truth.

No Extradition of Julian Assange

Free Chelsea Manning

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