

Imperialist lawlessness and the witch-hunt against Julian Assange

By Chris Marsden and Barry Grey
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Britain's aim in deporting WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to Sweden is to create the conditions for him to be transferred to the United States and tried for treason. It is a filthy enterprise, carried out on instructions from the Obama administration in Washington.

Its aim is to punish and destroy someone who has done much to expose the bloody crimes of successive US and UK governments. The American ruling elite and its international accomplices want to make an example of Assange. They aim to intimidate all those who seek to counter the wall of official lies, promoted by a corrupt "mainstream" media, used to conceal or justify war crimes and conspiracies against the peoples of the world.

Those who are guilty of conducting wars of aggression in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, waging a covert war against Syria, and carrying out targeted assassinations, rendition and torture have no compunction trampling on fundamental precepts of international law. These include the right to political asylum.

The UK's Conservative-led coalition government has threatened to withdraw its recognition of the Ecuadorean embassy in London and send police to storm the premises and seize Assange. The imperialist arrogance of this threat was rightly denounced by Ecuador as "an unacceptable, unfriendly and hostile act and an attempt against our sovereignty." Ecuador's foreign minister added at a Thursday press conference announcing his government's decision to grant Assange's request for political asylum, "We are not a British colony."

The Vienna Convention specifically defines a foreign embassy as sovereign space. Such a diplomatic post is considered the territory of the foreign nation.

Such legal trifles could not matter less to the British government and its American overlords. British Foreign Secretary William Hague reiterated his government's rejection of safe passage for Assange and its determination to seize him the moment he sets foot out of the Ecuadorean embassy. He declared, "The United Kingdom does not recognise the principle of diplomatic asylum."

Piling one contemptible lie upon another, Hague continued: "It is important to understand that this is not about Mr. Assange's activities at WikiLeaks or the attitude of the United States of America. He is wanted in Sweden to answer allegations of serious sexual offences."

The Swedish government—the willing accomplice in the imperialist frame-up of Assange—piped up to support Britain's violation of the right of asylum. It had made use of highly dubious charges of sexual misconduct to demand that Assange appear in Sweden for questioning, providing the pseudo-legal pretext for his extradition. "It is unacceptable that Ecuador would want to halt the Swedish judicial process and European judicial cooperation," said Swedish foreign ministry spokesman Anders Joerle.

There is no serious legal basis for the allegations of sexual abuse against Assange—the Swedish authorities have not even lodged formal charges against him. The accusations were made by two women who sought out Assange and had consensual relations with him.

In response to Ecuador's granting political asylum, Claes Brogstrom, the lawyer for the women making the sexual assault claims, declared disingenuously, "There's no demand from the United States that he should be extradited to the US."

Not yet. But as Brogstrom is well aware, the Obama administration convened a secret grand jury to draw up

charges against Assange. It is waiting for him to be shipped to Sweden to strike.

WikiLeaks has reported that special task forces have been established by US intelligence agencies and subpoenas issued compelling WikiLeaks associates to appear before a grand jury. Assange has every reason to fear sharing the fate of Private Bradley Manning, who is accused of disclosing classified military data to WikiLeaks and has already been incarcerated for more than 760 days, mostly under inhuman and abusive conditions.

A conviction on sedition charges could bring the death penalty. Alternately, Assange could be thrown into the black hole of Guantanamo or some other military prison. Assange has said, with every justification, that he fears for his life.

Everyone but the willfully blind knows that Assange is the victim of a witch-hunt, yet this has not stopped the nominally liberal media from continuing to back extradition and denounce Assange. The *New York Times* merely stated that “The Obama administration has refused to say what plan it has, if any, to seek Mr. Assange’s extradition to the United States.” It then gloated that “WikiLeaks has shrunk substantially in the months that Mr. Assange has been fighting his legal battle,” and denounced the organization as “an agency of the political left.”

The UK media is worse still. The *Guardian* issued a de facto lawyer’s opinion on behalf of Assange’s persecutors, editorialising that he had no “well-founded fear” of political persecution, but was merely seeking to avoid “allegations of sexual assault, which is in anyone’s language a serious non-political crime.”

The *Independent’s* editorial acknowledged that “both the UK and Sweden have reportedly refused to guarantee that he would not face extradition to the US,” before stating blandly that this “may fuel suspicion.” But it insisted, “In present circumstances, though, the US is a distraction. If Mr. Assange is to live up to the honesty and integrity he professes, he must defend himself in Sweden, then contest any US extradition on its merits.”

Not since the 1930s, with the triumph of fascism in much of Europe and the build-up to a second world war, has imperialism operated on the world stage with such brazen disregard for legality. Once again, the law of the jungle prevails in international relations. This is

the external expression of the turn to unmitigated class war within the imperialist countries, driven by a global breakdown of the capitalist system.

The persecution of Assange being orchestrated by the US has united a gang of cutthroats, thieves and professional liars. They are collectively the political representatives of an oligarchy whose fabulous wealth is coined from the blood, sweat and tears of countless millions throughout the world.

The defence of Julian Assange and WikiLeaks requires the independent political mobilisation of workers and young people against the offensive being waged by the ruling class and all its political defenders. Such a fight must be based on a socialist perspective, aimed at establishing workers’ governments committed to the reorganisation of society on the basis of social equality, freedom and genuine democracy.

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