

Britain's Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party back extradition of Assange

By Chris Marsden
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Britain's largest pseudo-left groups have lined up behind the demand that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange be extradited to Sweden.

Both the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party echo the propaganda of the liberal media that Assange must face rape charges and that the allegations of sexual assault have nothing to do with the efforts of the United States, Britain, Sweden and other governments to silence him and destroy WikiLeaks.

The SWP's Tom Walker writes, "Julian Assange must face rape charges, not US revenge." He notes the fate of Bradley Manning, "the US soldier accused of leaking state secrets who has so far spent more than 800 days behind bars without trial in military prison." He points out that Manning has been chained hand and foot and mostly held "in solitary confinement for 23 to 24 hours a day and denied clothes and blankets at night."

But he does so only to then claim that the "case of Assange...is far more problematic" because his extradition to Sweden, thwarted by his being granted asylum by Ecuador, is "for arrest and questioning over accusations by two women of rape and sexual assault."

"Assange and some of his supporters have refused to take the rape allegations seriously," he complains, before admitting, "We know that Assange faces a secret 'sealed indictment' in the US, and a grand jury has been convened against Wikileaks."

To square the circle, he urges the Swedish authorities to guarantee that Assange will not be extradited to the US, which would "clear the way for him to face his accusers."

Walker is, of course, well aware that Sweden has refused to give such an undertaking and that it would be meaningless even if it did so.

The Socialist Party reproduces an edited article by one of its Australian co-thinkers bearing the telling headline, "No Extradition to the USA." The article tacitly supports Assange's extradition to Sweden, arguing that "in a

society where crimes against women are often ignored and trivialised, such allegations cannot be dismissed and should be properly investigated..."

"It is important for socialists to reject any idea that some rape does not need to be taken seriously," the SP insists, going so far as to compare Assange's supporters with the US Republican senatorial candidate Todd Akin, who created a stir last week with his reactionary and ignorant remark about "legitimate rape."

The SWP and SP had maintained a deafening silence on the attempt to railroad Assange. The SWP last published a five-sentence item on Assange on March 5, 2011, and the SP last wrote on the issue on December 15, 2010!

The reason for their reticence is now clear. Both have long been in agreement with the extraordinary campaign by the right-wing as well as the nominally liberal press to tar Assange as a sexual criminal, but were reluctant to say so publicly. Now the time to procrastinate is over. To do so would risk alienating the upper layers of the petty-bourgeoisie to which they are oriented—those who have long promoted the politics of gender and race in opposition to class-based socialism—and who are now being whipped up against Assange.

The media's howls of outrage over Assange's alleged conduct in bed, the high-sounding posturing as defenders of women and the invocations of natural justice are so much hot air. The sole aim of the press pack is to muddy the political waters, conceal the real issues at stake, and intimidate those opposed to extradition by casting them as misogynists or even "defenders of rape."

There is nothing to distinguish the SWP and SP's stand from that of various faux liberal commentators such as Owen Jones, who wrote in the *Independent* that people such as Assange who "do otherwise commendable work" if "presented with rape allegations" must "face them like anybody else... Let's be clear, rape is rape."

What unites all of these media commentators, the

ex-left included, is an insistence that the *allegations* charges have been laid) against Assange are grave and must be taken seriously. By “seriously” they mean entirely uncritically and, above all, without reference to the context in which they were made. To do otherwise, they insist, is to somehow question not only his two accusers, but to endorse the exploitation of womankind by predatory males everywhere.

This endlessly repeated injunction must be rejected. It is only in the deeply disoriented circles to which the *Guardian*, *Independent*, et al. cater, of which the SWP and SP are an essential component, that the presumption of innocence can be replaced by an insistence that all women tell the truth and all men are liars and sexual predators.

The reason why there are still no charges placed against Assange is that the claims made by his accusers are not credible. His relations with the two women were consensual. Indeed, both of the women had repeated sexual encounters with Assange over an extended period, including after the alleged incidents that led to their complaints.

The European arrest warrant against Assange alleges “unlawful coercion” when he purportedly held plaintiff one down with his body weight and sexually molested her by allegedly failing to use a condom. The same accusation of not using a condom is made for plaintiff two, along with a claim that she was asleep when sex was initiated by Assange. The final claim is that he “deliberately molested” plaintiff one by pressing his erect penis against her body.

The police statements made by the women make no reference to a stated lack of consent or threat of force and refer to a split condom, rather than a failure to use one. The testimony regarding Miss W (plaintiff two) being asleep is contradicted by her own tweets—referring as they do to being only “half-asleep.” Plaintiff one had thrown a party for Assange after the alleged incident of sexual assault against her and invited Assange to stay in her room afterwards.

The women had initially gone to the police after conferring with one another, but then only to insist that Assange take an HIV test, which, in an extraordinary breach of standard procedure, the police did. The women did not allege rape.

That is why the initial investigation of August 20, 2010 was dropped and an arrest warrant against Assange cancelled the next day by one of Stockholm’s chief prosecutors, Eva Finne, who said in a statement to the

press: “I don’t think there is reason to suspect that he has committed rape.”

The reissue of the warrant took place only after the intervention of Swedish Chief Prosecutor Marianne Ny on September 1, 2010.

Under normal circumstances, such flimsy and unsubstantiated allegations would not be considered the basis for criminal charges, especially after the two women were allowed to confer and give evidence together by the police. But these are not normal circumstances.

Whatever weasel words are employed by his accusers, the levelling of sex allegations against Assange was clearly politically motivated. It was done only after consultation between the police, public prosecutors and the Swedish government.

Equally, the determination of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government in the UK to deport Assange, even if this means breaking diplomatic relations with Ecuador, can have nothing other than political motives. This is, after all, a country that worked might and main to ensure that the fascist mass murderer Augusto Pinochet was not extradited to Spain.

Those journalistic hacks who deny the involvement of Washington in these events know they are lying. They do so because of a shared desire to see Assange silenced. Those such as the SWP and SP who insist that the threat of his being shipped off to the US should not impede a supposed struggle against gender-based violence are more shame-faced, but contribute to the same outcome.

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