

Guardian newspaper spearheads new accusations against Assange and WikiLeaks

By James Cogan
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The *Guardian* has stepped up its contemptible role as one of the main media conduits for the persecution of Julian Assange, publishing unsubstantiated and sensationalist allegations that the WikiLeaks publisher met with American political lobbyist Paul Manafort.

One of the two authors of the *Guardian* article was, predictably, Luke Harding. Harding has penned a stream of material aimed at undermining support for Assange and WikiLeaks and attempting to justify the efforts of the US government to prosecute him for espionage or conspiracy. Assange aptly described an error-filled 2014 book written by Harding about whistleblower Edward Snowden and WikiLeaks as a “hack job in the purest sense of the word.”

The allegation that Assange met with Manafort is another desperate effort to implicate WikiLeaks in the lurid claims of the Democratic Party, US intelligence agencies and much of the media that the Russian government “interfered” in the 2016 US presidential election to promote the victory of Donald Trump.

Manafort was, from the outset, one of the key persons of interest in the investigation headed by Special Counsel Robert Mueller. Between June and August 2016, he served as the chairman of Trump’s election campaign. In October 2017, he was convicted of conspiracy to launder millions of dollars he was allegedly paid for lobbying until 2014 on behalf of Russian-backed Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, who was ousted in a US-backed political coup the same year. No charges, however, have been laid against Manafort relating to the 2016 election.

The *Guardian* article makes wild assertions that meetings between Manafort and Assange took place in 2013, 2015 and early 2016 in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where the WikiLeaks editor has been confined since he sought political asylum on June 19,

2012. The article insinuates that the last meeting has some relationship to the publication by WikiLeaks of leaked Democratic Party emails. It baldly asserts that “Vladimir Putin’s spies” sent the emails to WikiLeaks in July 2016.

The *Guardian* omits the fact that the only evidence of such a file transfer is an assertion by an erratic and dubious hacker calling himself Guccifer 2.0, who US agencies and the Mueller investigation subsequently declared to be a front for Russian intelligence.

At the time, Assange had already publicly revealed that WikiLeaks had information on the Democratic campaign in June. It began publishing the emails on July 22, 2016. Assange has denied that WikiLeaks received the emails from Russian sources. Craig Murray, a former whistleblower in Britain and defender of WikiLeaks, has stated that he was told the emails were given to the media organisation by disgruntled Democratic Party staffers.

Regardless of the source of the emails, it was entirely correct for WikiLeaks to publish them. They revealed the underhanded efforts of the Democratic National Committee to ensure that Hillary Clinton won the party’s nomination for president by undermining the campaign of Bernie Sanders. Other Clinton campaign emails subsequently published by WikiLeaks documented Clinton’s sordid relations with Wall Street banks and Gulf state oligarchs and her desire to wage war on Libya because she believed it would help her get elected as president.

The exposure of the Clinton campaign underscored that the so-called “choice” between the fascistic billionaire real estate speculator Trump and the right-wing, militarist, anti-working class former senator and secretary of state was, as Assange himself stated, like having to choose between “gonorrhoea or

syphilis.”

As award-winning journalist Chris Hedges wrote this month: “Should this information have remained hidden from the American public? You can argue yes, but you can’t then call yourself a journalist.”

Mueller spent months probing allegations that it was one-time Trump associate Roger Stone who had served as a go-between for the Trump campaign, Russia and WikiLeaks. His investigation came up with nothing, so attention was shifted back to Manafort via the *Guardian*.

In its rush to contribute to the vendetta against WikiLeaks, the *Guardian* has gone to print under conditions where it has no evidence that any meetings between Manafort and Assange even took place.

Manafort issued an immediate rejection of the allegations. He stated: “I have never met Julian Assange or anyone connected to him. I have never been contacted by anyone connected to Wikileaks, either directly or indirectly. I have never reached out to Assange or Wikileaks on any matter. We are considering all legal options against the *Guardian*, who proceeded with this story even after being notified by my representatives that it was false.”

Jennifer Robinson, one of the lawyers representing Julian Assange, told CNN that “no such meetings took place.” WikiLeaks has launched a GoFundMe appeal to raise funds to “sue the *Guardian* for fabricating a story that Julian Assange had secret meetings with Paul Manafort.” It tweeted that it was “willing to bet the *Guardian* a million dollars and its editor’s head that Manafort never met Assange.”

Assange is not able to make his own statement as the Ecuadorian government of President Lenín Moreno cut off his ability to communicate with the outside world on March 28 this year, under pressure from the Trump administration. Ecuador is actively conspiring with Washington to pressure Assange to leave the embassy in London and preparing to renege on its provision of asylum and evict him if he does not.

As soon as Assange is forced from the embassy, he will be seized by British police and imprisoned. An American court document that surfaced this month has confirmed what Assange and his defenders have always suspected: the US Department of Justice has filed and sealed criminal charges against Assange over WikiLeaks’ publication of leaked information

exposing US imperialist war crimes, anti-democratic diplomatic conspiracies and the spying operations of the CIA.

The active collaboration of publications like the *Guardian* in the US effort to prosecute Assange and intimidate all whistleblowers and critical journalists underscores the abandonment of any defence of democratic rights within privileged upper-middle class layers that once postured as liberals or even “lefts.”

The *Guardian* nevertheless has the nerve to carry an appeal for donations at the end of all of its articles declaring that it serves to “give a voice to those less heard, challenge the powerful and hold them to account.”

The surfacing of the US charges against Assange and the renewed stream of media accusations can only be interpreted as a part of a coordinated effort to undermine the broad support for Assange and condition public opinion for his detention and extradition to the US to face a show trial.

It is urgent that the working class and youth internationally be alerted and the campaign to defend Assange be intensified.

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