

Labour leads “rape” smears against Julian Assange demanding Swedish extradition

By Laura Tiernan
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Britain’s Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) is spearheading a political witch-hunt, smearing WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange as a “rapist” who must be extradited to Sweden. This filthy campaign has been abetted over the weekend by Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn.

More than 100 MPs have signed a cross-party letter to Conservative Home Secretary Sajid Javid and Labour’s Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott, demanding they “champion action that will ensure that Julian Assange can be extradited to Sweden,” where politically-manufactured rape and sexual molestation allegations were made in 2010.

Blairite MPs Stella Creasy and Jess Phillips initiated the letter on Friday. Most signatories are fellow Blairites, but other signatories include Independent Group MPs Chuka Umunna, Luciana Berger and Anna Soubry; Tory, Liberal-Democrat and Scottish National Party MPs; and several Labour peers.

“At present,” this right-wing cabal complains, “media attention has been on the decision made by the US authorities to seek extradition.” “We urge you to stand with the victims of sexual violence and seek to ensure the case against Mr Assange can now be properly investigated,” they demand.

This is the Blairites’ answer to global public outrage over Assange’s brutal seizure from the Ecuadorian embassy in London on Thursday.

UK police arrested Assange after Ecuador illegally terminated his political asylum, leaving him facing computer crime charges issued by US law enforcement agencies. These are a legal trigger to effect Assange’s extradition to the US where he will face additional charges under the 1917 Espionage Act.

A coordinated state campaign is now underway to shift the political narrative, smearing Assange and diverting public attention from the grave threat to democratic rights posed by US extradition proceedings. This is the purpose served by the bogus Swedish “rape” allegations. Assange’s onward extradition to the US can be fast-tracked under Temporary Surrender treaty arrangements in place between Sweden and

the US. On Thursday, Sweden’s deputy director of public prosecution, Eva-Marie Persson, told Reuters she is reviewing the case against Assange.

The Swedish playbook has been made clear. On Saturday, Labour’s Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry told BBC Radio 4 she was “disgusted” US extradition proceedings had been allowed to “eclipse” sexual assault allegations made by the two Swedish women against Assange.

“I think that what should happen is that he should be extradited to Sweden and then the Americans can make a further application to have him extradited from Sweden,” she suggested.

Gender politics is being deployed for nakedly pro-imperialist objectives. On Saturday, the *Guardian*’s front page headline insisted, “Give priority to Assange rape victim, Javid urged” with a prominent news article headlined, “Failure to extradite Assange to Sweden would endorse ‘rape culture’, say women’s groups.”

Editorials in Saturday’s *Guardian* and Sunday’s *Observer* called for Assange’s extradition to Sweden, with the *Observer* combining vindictiveness and slander in equal measure: “It’s not difficult to despise Julian Assange. For seven years, he has attempted to evade rape and sexual assault charges in Sweden by seeking asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy in London... His excuse for refusing to face trial in Sweden—that he would then face extradition to the US—has always been hogwash.”

In fact, the warnings by Assange and his legal team over US extradition—long denounced as “conspiracy theories”—stand confirmed. Ecuador granted political asylum to Assange in 2012 because of his “well-founded” fears of persecution by the US, British and Australian governments, after revelations of a secret Grand Jury investigation into the WikiLeaks publisher. In relation to the “rape” allegations, Assange offered to travel to Sweden if authorities would guarantee against onward US extradition. He invited Swedish prosecutors to the Ecuadorian embassy so he could clear his name, but such offers were refused.

Swedish prosecutors dropped preliminary investigations into “rape” and “molestation” allegations as early as August 2010, concluding that “no crime at all” had been committed. The investigation was only revived for political reasons. “[I]t was the police who made up the charges” wrote one of the women in a text message. Assange’s accusers admitted they had consensual sex with him, boasting of it afterwards to friends. Anna Ardin, who arranged Assange’s “safe houses” in Sweden—one of which was her apartment—was employed by leading Social-Democratic Party politicians. It was Ardin who introduced Assange to her co-accuser, Sofia Wilen. Assange’s visit to Sweden took place amid mounting US intrigue following publication of the Iraq and Afghan war leaks.

Labour is playing the central role in isolating Assange. When Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May announced his arrest to cheers from Tory and Labour MPs on Thursday, Corbyn was silent. Later, when Sajid Javid made a formal statement on the arrest and charges, he exited the chamber, leaving Abbott to speak on his party’s behalf. “It is whistleblowing into illegal wars, mass murder, murder of civilians and corruption on a grand scale that has put Julian Assange in the crosshairs of the US administration,” she said.

Abbott’s speech was welcomed by WikiLeaks supporters, but a tweet later that day made clear the duplicitous character of her support: “Assange skipping bail in UK, or any rape charge that may be brought by Swedish authorities shouldn’t be ignored,” she wrote. Abbott’s speech in parliament had been carefully worded, making clear that any US extradition request was “now in the hands of the British law courts” and registering Labour’s “utmost confidence in the British legal system.” She made no undertaking that a future Labour government would block Assange’s extradition to the US.

Nonetheless, her statement met furious opposition, with Labour MP Diana Johnson telling parliament, “I am concerned that a man suspected of rape, *which is what in this case actually happened*, was able to do what he did for several years to escape justice.” (emphasis added)

Within hours, leading Blairites, including Phillips, Creasy and Stephen Kinnock, had begun their counter-attack, with the cross-party letter on Friday, and a full media pile-on with Kinnock and other war-mongers denouncing Assange.

Then came Corbyn’s ITV news interview on Saturday, in which he declared that Assange’s possible extradition to the US was “a matter for the courts in Britain,” before noting that a “case from Sweden which was dropped in 2017... is now possibly going to be reinstated. If it is reinstated, then obviously he must answer those questions and those demands about the accusations made against him by people

in *There can be no hiding place for ~~Sweden~~ kin accusations.*” (emphasis added)

On Sunday morning Julian Assange’s mother, Christine, responded by tweeting, “Weasel words from #Corbyn! NO to UK/US extradition but YES to recycled UK/SWEDEN extradition! He knows full well Swedish (no charge!) ‘case’ was a political fit-up! Sweden/UK Bilateral Treaty allows fast track rendition to US under Temporary Surrender!”

Corbyn knows perfectly well that the Swedish allegations and extradition proceedings were only ever a step toward US extradition. In July 2015, just months before he became party leader, he explained to the *New Statesman* that Assange had “taken himself into the embassy because he felt that, had he been taken back to Sweden, he would be taken forcibly to the US.” He knows that Assange has been targeted for courageously exposing war crimes and state conspiracies against the public, but refuses to challenge the Blairites on anything, instead echoing their threats against Assange.

Political conclusions must be drawn. Had Corbyn issued a call this week for mass demonstrations in defence of Assange, tens of thousands would have been mobilised and the Blairites and their supporters would have been exposed as an isolated cabal. It is not primarily the Blairites that Corbyn fears. His overriding concern is to prevent the independent intervention of the working class. It is to this social force that all defenders of Julian Assange and democratic rights must urgently turn.

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