

Chelsea Manning's lawyer refutes conspiracy allegation against Julian Assange

By Mike Head
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Whistleblower Chelsea Manning's lawyer Nancy Hollander this week unequivocally rebutted accusations that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange enticed or collaborated with Manning to obtain the thousands of secret documents that WikiLeaks published in 2010, revealing the war crimes and other abuses committed by the US and its allies around the world.

Interviewed for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's "Four Corners" program, Hollander emphasised that Manning, then a 21-year-old US military intelligence private, had initiated the contact with WikiLeaks after no corporate media outlet would even return her calls about the damning information she had obtained.

The WSWS will review the two-part "Four Corners" program after the second segment is broadcast next Monday evening. But Hollander's statements themselves constitute a significant exposure of the case concocted against Assange by the Trump administration, which is seeking to extradite him on charges under the US Espionage Act. On the basis of the charges already filed, Assange faces a prison term of 175 years.

Assange is accused of not just publishing the massive caches of material leaked by Manning—known as the Afghan Files, the Iraq Files and Cablegate—but actively conspiring with Manning to obtain the documents. Yet Hollander explained that Manning already had downloaded the files before she contacted WikiLeaks.

Hollander's interview also underscores why the Trump White House has re-imprisoned Manning—who already served seven years in jail under the Obama administration. Manning is being held indefinitely on contempt of court charges in a bid to coerce her to falsely testify against Assange before a grand jury impaneled to send Assange to jail for life, or even to

death row.

In 2010, Assange first received the now notorious "Collateral Murder" video via WikiLeaks' anonymous drop box—designed to protect the identity of the source. No one in WikiLeaks knew who had uploaded the video or where it came from. That video, which had horrified Manning, showed US helicopter gunships mowing down civilians, including two Reuters journalists, on a Baghdad street.

Hollander, an internationally recognised criminal defence lawyer, explained that Manning "felt affronted by what she saw" about the US invasion of Iraq, so she secretly downloaded masses of classified material and sought to find a media outlet that would publish it.

"Well, she reached out. She had the information. She was horrified by what she had seen, which many of us have seen now. And she wanted to get it out. She called the *New York Times*, she called the *Washington Post*. Nobody would even return her call. And she found WikiLeaks. Nobody really knew about WikiLeaks in those days, but she found it online."

Unlike the establishment media editors, Assange responded as a genuine investigative journalist and publisher. He commenced an encrypted online conversation with the unidentified source and sought to obtain as much of the incriminating material as possible, while also trying to protect the leaker from being discovered.

The encrypted exchanges on the Jabber online chat service would later be collected as evidence against Manning and Assange. "Four Corners" chose to interview Daniel Domscheit-Berg, who split from WikiLeaks in 2010 after it proceeded to publish the material leaked by Manning. He declared that the chat log showed Assange irresponsibly "milking a source."

Hollander refuted this claim. "I don't think Chelsea

was played at all,” she said. “I think she did what she did, Julian and WikiLeaks did what they did. They connected. And I’ve looked at those transcripts, and I think she was looking for an outlet for this information, she found it. I didn’t see anything in those transcripts where anyone was tempting her. She had the information. She released it.”

Manning’s identity only became known, eight weeks after she contacted WikiLeaks, because she was entrapped into revealing her role to an online informant. As Hollander recounted, Manning was swiftly detained, taken to Kuwait and then the Qantico Marine Base in Virginia. “And they treated her very badly. First of all, she was in solitary for 11 months, and they made her stand at attention naked.”

For refusing on principle to testify against Assange, Manning has now been re-imprisoned for more than four months. She is being subjected also to punitive fines, now \$1,000 a day, with the total already exceeding \$20,000. As a result, Manning has lost her apartment and could be financially ruined by more than \$440,000 in fines if the grand jury sits until its term expires in October 2020.

What Manning released, and WikiLeaks equally courageously made available to the people of the world, was devastating for the Obama administration, the Pentagon, the CIA and all their partners in allied governments around the globe. Posted online without being censored or filtered, the documents laid bare US-instigated war provocations, regime-change operations, diplomatic conspiracies, phone-bugging of foreign government leaders and mass surveillance.

As the “Four Corners” program records, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard vehemently denounced Assange as a criminal and immediately set the police and intelligence agencies to work to find means to silence him forever.

Today, the ferocity with which the Trump administration is persecuting both Assange and Manning must be taken as a warning. Washington and its partners are perpetrating and preparing even greater crimes, intent on keeping their activities shielded from media and public scrutiny. The US is being assisted by the British government, which arrested and jailed Assange on April 11, and the Australian government, which refuses to object to the frame-up and extradition

of Assange, an Australian citizen.

So the defence of Manning and Assange is at the forefront of the struggle against the mounting danger of US-led war and the intensifying attacks on the social and political rights of the working class under the capitalist profit system.

That is why the WSWS and Socialist Equality Parties affiliated with the International Committee of the Fourth International have called for the formation of a Global Defense Committee to mobilise the working class on an international scale in order to stop Assange’s extradition to the US and win his and Manning’s unconditional freedom.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>