

The German media and Julian Assange: Silence and slander

By Gregor Link and Johannes Stern
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Over a week after a US federal court threw out a civil case brought by the Democratic National Committee (DNC) against Julian Assange, the German media has been dominated by an embarrassed silence. On July 30, Judge John Koeltl from the US District Court for the Southern District of New York struck a major blow against the Democratic Party and bourgeois media's claim that Assange is a "Russian agent." He explicitly rejected the assertion that the WikiLeaks founder had "conspired with Russia."

When Assange was dragged out of the Ecuadorian embassy in London by British police officers and thrown into the high security Belmarsh Prison, leading newspapers, including the *Bild*, *TAZ*, and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, either denounced Assange or enthused over his arrest. Now, with the false allegations against Assange having been disproved in a court of law, hardly any German-speaking newspaper has found the time to report on this important development.

The only article that appears in a Google search, along with the WSWs reports, is a piece from July 31, just one day after the ruling, published in *Spiegel Online* entitled, "US ruling: WikiLeaks was allowed to publish hacked emails from Democrats." The article makes a mockery of objective reporting. It typifies the bourgeois media's role as a propaganda arm for the intelligence agencies and federal government.

The author of the article, *Spiegel* editor Patrick Beuth, in the face of the ruling sought to sustain the anti-Russia propaganda campaign and the fairytale of Assange and WikiLeaks serving the Putin regime. Near the beginning of the article, he writes that it has "long been beyond doubt that in 2016, Russian intelligence agencies hacked several institutions and employees of the US Democratic Party, and published the emails and documents stolen in the process—first alone, then

through WikiLeaks."

Beuth later claims that in his 81-page ruling, Judge Koeltl made clear "that he is also convinced of the Russians' guilt." Additionally, he asserted that "the question of whether WikiLeaks is a media organisation" had "not played a role" in Koeltl's decision.

These are just two statements that turn reality on its head. In fact, Koeltl found that the DNC's allegation that Assange and WikiLeaks "conspired with the Russian Federation to steal and circulate the DNC's material" does "not correspond to the facts." The court is also "not obliged to accept accusations as fact." Koeltl describes WikiLeaks as an "international news organization" and Assange as a "publisher."

For Beuth, these facts play "no role," because he is pursuing a definite political agenda and has long been agitating against WikiLeaks. In a comment for *Die Zeit*, he provocatively asked in March 2017, "How does one deal with an organisation which on the one hand is extremely popular among whistleblowers and continues to receive sensitive documents, but on the other is led by a madman, who is completely oblivious to criticism, vastly exaggerates his exposures, and is suspected of being a propaganda tool of the Russian government?" Another cynical and stupid comment he wrote on April 17, 2015, was entitled, "WikiLeaks is becoming RidiculeLeaks."

Beuth is by no means an isolated case. A particularly repugnant example of hate propaganda against Assange, which presents itself as journalism, was recently provided by the online edition of *Tagesschau*. In an article from July 24, 2019, entitled, "US 2016 election campaign: What role did Julian Assange play?" the editor Silvia Stöber regurgitated all of the US government and intelligence agencies' most

despicable lies against Assange and WikiLeaks.

Without citing a single independent source, Stöber claims that Assange “has no concern about being close to the Putin regime” and has ties with “the Russian military intelligence service.”

All of this pursues the transparent goals of discrediting Assange as a journalist and branding him as a Russian agent. Stöber is well aware of the type of reactionary campaign she is supporting with her propaganda. “Secretary of State Mike Pompeo described WikiLeaks as a non-state, hostile spy agency. If he is extradited to the US, Assange faces a lengthy prison sentence,” she acknowledges at the end of her article. In fact, based on the accusation of espionage, Assange could face the death penalty.

The only good thing about Stöber’s comment is that it sheds light on the political motives that are driving the campaign against Assange and WikiLeaks. The Western governments and their lackeys in the corporate media despise Assange for the simple reason that he has done what real journalists should do: expose the truth. Together with whistleblower Chelsea Manning, the publisher of WikiLeaks focused principally on exposing the war crimes of US imperialism and the other imperialist powers, while taking a strong stand against the warmongers.

Assange publicly “spoke about his dislike of the Democrat Hillary Clinton,” Stöber complains. “In his eyes” Clinton embodies “an imperialist, war-hungry US foreign policy,” and “during her time as Secretary of State, WikiLeaks published dispatches from US ambassadors, among other things.” Many of the documents published by WikiLeaks damaged “the United States, Germany, or NATO.”

Stöber probably also meant by this that it damaged her own “work.” Stöber is a prime example of one of those well-connected “journalists” who essentially function as an appendage of German foreign and military policy. As a “Georgia expert,” Stöber is in the front line of the anti-Russia campaign. This is proven by an interview she conducted with then Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) about NATO’s military build-up against Russia and the prospects for Georgia’s membership in NATO, which is published on the Foreign Ministry’s official website. In another article, Stöber calls for higher levels of defence spending and advocates “an improvement of

defence capabilities.”

Another reason for the aggressiveness of the media’s propaganda is that the opposition to militarism and support for Assange among the population is so strong. A German language petition “Prevent the extradition of Julian Assange to the United States,” on the change.org platform has already been signed by 330,000 people. And the international campaign led by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Parties around the world to block Assange’s extradition and secure freedom for him and Manning is winning growing support.

Click here to participate in the fight to free Julian Assange!

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>