

Carlos Ghosn, Julian Assange and the class justice of the New York Times

By James Cogan
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On January 8, the *New York Times* ran an editorial all but endorsing last month's move by former Nissan executive and multi-millionaire Carlos Ghosn to evade prosecution on charges of tax evasion and money laundering by absconding on bail and seeking refuge in Lebanon.

The *Times* openly conveyed its sympathy for the executive, who is now the subject of an Interpol alert for his arrest and extradition back to Japan to stand trial.

The headline of the editorial was “Carlos Ghosn, Victim or Villain?” It asserted: “Unresolved in all this is whether Mr. Ghosn is guilty of the crimes he was accused of in Japan and deserves to spend time in prison, or whether the Japanese legal system, with its 99 percent conviction rate and the inordinate pressure it puts on suspects to confess—in Mr. Ghosn's case this included questioning him for hours without a lawyer by his side, all but cutting off any contacts with his wife and holding him for weeks in jail—meets international standards of justice.”

The *Times* cited Ghosn's allegation that his prosecution is a “conspiracy” by Nissan and the Japanese government to “bring down” the corporate powerbroker, because he was allegedly pushing for the effective takeover of the Japanese-based auto conglomerate by its French-based partner Renault. Ghosn, it favorably observed, was a “master” of “high-stakes multinational industry, brutal corporate intrigue, extravagant compensation packages and complex international deals, both above and below the board.”

The Nissan executive, the *Times* conceded, “functioned at the margins of the law.” It nevertheless concluded that, as the “Japanese legal system is also on trial,” it “may be better for this saga to play out in the court of public opinion.”

Ghosn, the *Times* leaves no doubt, should be left alone and never be prosecuted. This echoed the line of an

earlier editorial in *Street Journal*, which declared that it is “hard to blame him for fleeing Japan after his ill-treatment.”

The contrast with the *New York Times*' attitude and editorial commentary regarding the now nine-year case of WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange could not be more striking.

In 2010, Assange took responsibility to ensure that leaks made by former American soldier Chelsea Manning saw the light of day. WikiLeaks published the “Collateral Murder” video and coordinated the publication of the Iraq War Logs, the Afghan War Diary and the CableGate documents, which exposed, for judgement by the public opinion of the international working class, the extent of the war crimes committed in Iraq and Afghanistan and the anti-democratic reality of US foreign policy.

The *Times* is prepared to take seriously Ghosn's claim that he is the victim of a high-level conspiracy. In 2010, it gave no credence to the insistence by Julian Assange that an extradition warrant issued against him by Sweden, to answer “questions” over sexual assault allegations, was part of a conspiracy by the American government to slander his name, silence WikiLeaks and facilitate his rendition on to the US to face espionage charges.

The *Times* is sympathetic with Ghosn reneging on his bail terms in order to escape Japan and prosecution. In June 2012, when Julian Assange sought political asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy in London to avoid extradition, the *Times* was among the publications that portrayed his actions as an attempt to “evade justice” for sex offences.

The *Times* is more than prepared to condemn the Japanese legal system and imply Ghosn would be either pressured by mistreatment to plead guilty or face little more than a show trial with a pre-determined outcome.

But what of the WikiLeaks publisher and the mistreatment he has endured during a nine-year US-led

vendetta?

Assange was declared guilty of espionage and “high-tech terrorism” in 2010 by the Obama administration. British courts disregarded the lack of any evidence to support the Swedish allegations and endorsed his extradition. While under the protection of political asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy, he was denied access to medical care and arbitrarily detained inside the small building by the British government, on behalf of its American ally.

As is now known, Assange’s every word—including with his legal representatives—was being recorded by the security company ostensibly protecting the embassy and reported to the very American agencies seeking his prosecution. He was repeatedly vilified in the *Times* and the international media as everything from a rapist, to unhygienic and a narcissist, to a Russian agent—due to WikiLeaks’ entirely justified publication of leaks in 2016 that shed light on the right-wing, militarist presidential campaign of Hillary Clinton.

There is absolutely no possibility that Assange would receive a fair trial in the United States. The *New York Times* nevertheless welcomed his eviction from the Ecuadorian embassy in April 2019—itsself the direct result of underhanded US pressure and payoffs—and the announcement by the Trump administration that it was seeking his extradition from the United Kingdom on the “indisputable crime” of conspiring with Manning to “steal” the leaked information.

The Department of Justice subsequently added 17 counts of espionage for publishing the leaks—charges that could no less be levelled against the publishers and editors of the *Times* and dozens of other newspapers.

Since publishing a few carefully worded comments on the danger to freedom of speech posed by the charges against Assange, the *Times* editorial column has maintained a virtual silence on the outrageous treatment to which he is being subjected.

The *Times* has not condemned Assange’s imprisonment and what UN official Nils Melzer has labelled his “psychological torture” in the maximum security Belmarsh Prison in London. While it has taken the time to call for Japan’s pursuit of Ghosn to be abandoned, the *Times*, along with the rest of the American corporate media, is refusing to wage a campaign to demand that the Trump administration drop the espionage charges against Assange and allow the restoration of his personal freedom.

On display in the *New York Times*’ positions—toward

Ghosn on the one hand, and Assange on the other—is the class-based “justice” defended by a mouthpiece of the ruling elite.

Assange openly set out to try and alert and educate ordinary people. He established WikiLeaks to be a means for whistleblowers to expose war crimes, diplomatic intrigues, corporate conspiracies and intelligence-police spying and violations of democratic rights.

Even though the *Times* published the Manning leaks in 2010 to boost its circulation and profits, it did not hesitate to join with the American government in its relentless campaign to destroy Assange and WikiLeaks and terrorize into silence all would-be future whistleblowers and genuine journalists. His pursuit of transparency and holding power to account went too far, triggering revolutionary upheavals in Tunisia and Egypt against US-backed regimes. The “newspaper of record” is complicit in the attempt to criminalize reporting the truth and exposing the crimes of the ruling class.

Ghosn, in contrast, served the ruling elite. He developed means, both “above and below the board,” to brutally restructure loss-making corporations, sack thousands of workers and slash wages and conditions, and revive profits and deliver billions of dollars in “shareholder return.” He impressed the rich and their media sycophants with obscene displays of personal wealth, such as staging a lavish wedding at the Palace of Versailles at which his guests dressed as 18th century French aristocrats.

As far as the *Times* is concerned, such a figure should no more be pursued as a criminal than the corporate executives whose illegal financial operations generated immense profits but led to the 2008 economic meltdown, or the politicians who used lies about “weapons of mass destruction” to invade and devastate Iraq in pursuit of domination over the oil-rich Middle East.

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