Free Julian Assange! No extradition to the U.S.!

Wednesday 17 April 2019, by SOLENBERGER Peter (Date first published: 17 April 2019).

On April 11 Wikileaks founder Julian Assange was arrested at the Ecuadoran embassy in London. The pretext for the arrest was that Assange had skipped bail in 2012 on a British arrest warrant related to Swedish sexual assault charges from 2010. The real reason was that the U.S. government wanted to punish Assange for leaking secret documents and had persuaded the post-"red tide" Ecuadoran government to withdraw its grant of asylum to Assange.

The U.S. government immediately filed an extradition request based on the charge that Assange had conspired with Chelsea Manning to steal a government password. Manning has been jailed since March 8 for refusing to testify against Assange before a grand jury. She was imprisoned from 2010 to 2017 for alleged espionage, the charge the U.S. government would like to pursue against Assange, once they have him in their clutches.

A U.S. Army intelligence analyst in Iraq in 2009, Manning (then Bradley) became disillusioned with the so-called "war on terror" pursued by the Bush and Obama administrations. She provided Wikileaks with 750,000 classified or sensitive military and diplomatic documents on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The documents confirmed the cruelty and futility of U.S. military operations. Assange and Manning worked together on the document transfer.

The Obama administration prosecuted Manning and many other whistleblowers. But perhaps ashamed of himself for persecuting such an honorable and sympathetic person, Obama on his way out of office commuted Manning's sentence to time served and had her released. The military and security apparatus weren't happy about this. They wanted Manning in prison to discourage future leaks.

The *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and other liberal media breathed a sigh of relief that the extradition charge against Assange was "just" conspiring with Manning to steal a government password. They were happy to throw a troublesome source and competitor under the bus, if they could escape.

That's quite shortsighted, as Glenn Greenwald and Micah Lee point out in a fine article in *The Intercept* "The U.S. Government's Indictment of Julian Assange Poses Grave Threats to Press Freedom".

The role of the U.S. and British governments is obvious. They want to be able to pursue their imperial policies of militarism and war without public oversight, so they want to prevent leaks of damaging information. The roles of the Swedish and Ecuadoran governments are more complicated.

In August 2010 two women went to the Swedish police with accusations that Assange had raped them. The women were sympathetic to Wikileaks and had no apparent reason to set him up. Assange claimed that the sex was consensual. The Swedish prosecutor investigating the case decided to drop the rape charges and pursue the investigation as molestation. The Director of Public Prosecution

overruled her and reinstated the investigation of all the charges. Assange left Sweden for Britain shortly thereafter, claiming he had approval from the Swedish authorities. A Swedish court issued a European Arrest Warrant for him in November 2010.

Assange fought extradition to Sweden and sought asylum in the Ecuadoran embassy when he lost. The “pink tide” government of Rafael Correa granted his request. Assange said that he was prepared to answer the Swedish prosecutors’ questions but not in Sweden, where he feared extradition to the U.S. Swedish authorities finally interviewed Assange in the Ecuadoran embassy in November 1916 and rescinded the arrest warrant in May 2017, seeing no way to bring the case to trial. They reserved the right to reinstate the charges in the future.

The Ecuadoran government granted asylum to Assange because it had moved to the left as part of the Latin American “pink tide,” together with Bolivia and Venezuela and, more distantly, Argentina, Brazil and others. The government withdrew its asylum because the country moved to the right with the retreat of the pink tide. Ecuadoran President Lenín Moreno, in office since May 1917, wants better relations with the US. Also, he is angry with Assange and Wikileaks for publishing the “INA Papers,” which include details of the illicit use of off-shore bank accounts by Moreno and members of his family.

The accusations by the two Swedish women seem convincing enough so that Assange should stand trial for them in Sweden, not the U.S. or Britain. Too many arrogant and powerful men get away with sexual assault and rape. But the intervention of the U.S. and British governments makes that impossible. Assange will be tried not for what he may have done wrong, but for what he did right, leaking state secrets that shouldn’t be secret.

Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25) has an online petition Don’t extradite Assange! which supporters of free speech and press and opponents of militarism and war should sign.

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April 17, 2019

P.S.

- https://solidarity-us.org/free_julian_assange/