

New provocation against WikiLeaks

Patrick Martin
23 August 2010

The *World Socialist Web Site* denounces the ongoing campaign by the US government and its military and intelligence agencies against WikiLeaks and its founder Julian Assange. The rape charges against Assange, announced Friday by Swedish prosecutors and then withdrawn Saturday, bear all the hallmarks of a US-inspired provocation against the Internet-based organization in retaliation for its exposure of US war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The Obama administration has evidently exerted enormous pressure on the Swedish government to fabricate the charges against Assange. Not since the Nixon administration compiled its “enemies list” has an American government proceeded so brazenly to “target its political opponents with dirty tricks.”

The exact circumstances surrounding the charges are murky. The news was first made public by a Swedish tabloid and then confirmed to the Associated Press by a spokeswoman for the prosecutor’s office in Stockholm, who said that Assange had been indicted “in absentia” and an arrest warrant issued.

Less than 24 hours later, the chief prosecutor of the Swedish Prosecution Authority, Eva Finne, declared that there were no grounds to suspect Assange of rape and that the warrant had been cancelled. There were unconfirmed reports, however, that a second charge of “sexual molestation” was still being investigated. According to press accounts in Sweden, two women who were in contact with police did not make an official complaint, and police and prosecutors took the initiative to bring the charges.

Both Assange and WikiLeaks have denounced the warrant as a politically motivated attack. The official blog at WikiLeaks.org said the group was “deeply concerned about the seriousness of these allegations.” It continued, “We the people behind Wikileaks think highly of Julian and he has our full support.”

Assange called the charges against him “completely

baseless.” He told the Swedish newspaper *Aftonbladet* that he did not know who was “hiding behind” the claims of rape, but that he had been warned previously that the Pentagon “could use dirty tricks” against himself and WikiLeaks.

The attack on WikiLeaks and Assange comes only a few days after the group said it was preparing to release another 15,000 documents of the US war in Afghanistan, in addition to the 76,000 internal military reports released last month. The documents expose what is well known in Afghanistan but kept secret from the American people by the Obama administration and the corporate-controlled media: the systematic, illegal killing of hundreds of Afghan civilians by US military units, particularly the now-notorious Task Force 373, a death squad formed to target suspected insurgents for assassination.

The US government is officially denying that it has anything to do with the attempted prosecution in Sweden, or with legal action against WikiLeaks by any other country. According to the *New York Times*, “Spokesmen for the Justice, State and Defense Departments all denied on Saturday having any such contacts with foreign governments about WikiLeaks or Mr. Assange.”

This is contradicted by a report on the investigative web site *TheDailyBeast.com* that the Obama administration is “pressing Britain, Germany, Australia and other allied Western governments to consider opening criminal investigations” into Assange and to limit his ability to travel freely.

The involvement of the Swedish government shows the complicity of the European ruling classes in the ongoing bloodbath in Afghanistan, which props up a puppet regime of war profiteers and narco-traffickers in Kabul.

There are three likely goals in this provocation: first, to smear Assange personally and his colleagues by

association, using the unsubstantiated charges of rape and molestation. In that context, the role of Australia is of particular significance, and not merely because Assange was born there and holds an Australian passport. The Australian government has direct experience in the use of phony rape charges against individuals regarded as political obstacles. It used just such a charge in its long-running campaign against Julian Moti, the former attorney general of the Solomon Islands who is opposed to the Australian military takeover of that island chain.

Second, the smear campaign could undermine Assange's standing in Sweden in particular, where he has recently agreed to write a regular newspaper column for *Aftonbladet* in order to bring his activities under the protection of Sweden's relatively liberal press laws. Sweden's Pirate Party, a group focused on supporting Internet freedom, announced August 17 that it would host several new servers for WikiLeaks, providing it additional bandwidth free of charge. "We desire to contribute to any effort that increases transparency and accountability of power in the world," the party said.

Third, the intention may well have been to force Assange to surface publicly, so that he could be targeted for seizure or physical violence by US government agents. In that context, the Swedish prosecutor's initial demand that Assange "should contact police so that he can be confronted with the suspicions," is particularly ominous. One of the main complaints of the Obama administration and the American media is that Assange is constantly on the move, traveling frequently from country to country, and is just as difficult to track down as his loose, Internet-based organization.

It must not be forgotten that in the first days after WikiLeaks posted the Afghanistan war documents, a Pentagon spokesman warned the group not to continue such leaks of information and made an open threat of unspecified retaliation, saying, "If doing the right thing is not good enough for them, we'll figure out what other alternatives we have to compel them to do the right thing."

The *Wall Street Journal* reported Saturday, in the midst of the media frenzy over the rape charges against Assange, that "the Defense and Justice departments were now exploring legal options for prosecuting Mr.

Assange and others involved on grounds they encouraged the theft of government property"—that is, the secret military reports documenting US war crimes.

The *Journal* cited a letter from Defense Department General Counsel Jeh Charles Johnson to a lawyer for WikiLeaks last week, which stated: "It is the view of the Department of Defense that WikiLeaks obtained this material in circumstances that constitute a violation of United States law, and that as long as WikiLeaks holds this material, the violation of the law is ongoing."

This effectively declares WikiLeaks to be an "ongoing" criminal enterprise, a designation that, combined with the sweeping powers assumed by the US executive branch under its self-declared "war on terror," could be used as a pretext for virtually any kind of action, including state violence or "extraordinary rendition"—the kidnapping of Assange and his dispatch to a secret CIA prison or even the Guantanamo Bay detention center.

Patrick Martin



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact