

German newspapers publish appeal opposing censorship of WikiLeaks

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A number of German newspapers, including the national daily *Frankfurter Rundschau*, have published a joint appeal rejecting any censorship or persecution of the WikiLeaks web site by either governments or commercial interests, or both.

The appeal, published last Thursday, is supported by three other Berlin-based daily newspapers: *Tageszeitung*, *Berliner Zeitung* and *Tagesspiegel*. Additional signatories are the widely read news and culture web site, Perlentaucher, the weekly news and culture paper, *Der Freitag*, and the European Center For Constitutional and Human Rights.

The joint appeal begins by citing the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19, which proclaims: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”.

The German media statement declares that the WikiLeaks web site, and the Internet as a whole, is a medium that enjoys precisely the same right to disseminate information as any other form of journalism.

The appeal goes on to declare that while the publication of documents by WikiLeaks can be criticised, “we are against any form of censorship by government or private agencies. If Internet companies can use their market power to prevent a news organization from publishing, this would mean democracy is defeated through economic means. These attacks show a disturbing idea of democracy, where freedom of information exists only for as long as it hurts no one”.

In another significant passage, the statement declares that genuinely independent journalism has an important

role to play in uncovering the secret machinations of the state. The appeal states: “The criminalization and prosecution of WikiLeaks goes beyond this individual case. There are calls for preventing the publication of confidential information in such quantities. Indeed, the volume of documents revealed to the public [by WikiLeaks] provide a much deeper insight into state action than former publications in top media. Journalism has not only the right, but the duty, to control the state and to elucidate the mechanisms of governance. It creates transparency. Without transparency, there is no democracy. The state is not an end in itself, and must withstand a confrontation with its own secrets”.

The main demand raised in the appeal is a call “for the persecution of WikiLeaks to stop, as this is in contravention of international law”. The statement concludes with an appeal for support.

Since the appeal’s publication, over 13,300 individuals have signed on to express their support, many providing short texts expressing their anger over the attempts to persecute WikiLeaks and its founder Julian Assange.

HM, for example, writes that he finds it “incredible what is taking place in front of our eyes and what the US is presuming to do. J. Assange is arrested as a rapist and given an electronic tether. This is unprecedented. The persecution of WikiLeaks has begun.”

Another supporter of the appeal, IP, declares that since WikiLeaks began its work he sleeps more securely because he knows there is an agency at work revealing the secrets of the state. He is uneasy when state officials can sleep securely knowing they have their secrets safely hidden away.

MC writes that the so-called leading democracies are “showing their true colours, and not just the US. The so-

called role-model democracies EU & Co (Scandinavia, etc.) are showing their real conception of freedom and human rights. How is it possible then to demand that other countries uphold such rights. Hypocrisy and lies, as far as the eye can see!”

The appeal in defense of WikiLeaks is a significant initiative by leading German newspapers and reflects the opposition amongst a layer of journalists to the attempt by the political and media establishment in Germany to justify the censorship of WikiLeaks.

At the same time, it should be noted that the vast majority of the German press, including the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Die Zeit* and many other leading newspapers, have failed to support this appeal defending the elementary right to free speech. It is also noteworthy that *Der Spiegel* magazine—up to now the main conduit in Germany for the WikiLeaks reports—is also not on the list of supporters.

Indeed many established papers in Germany have printed scurrilous commentaries attacking WikiLeaks and its founder Julian Assange in recent days. Typical in this respect is the weekly journal *Die Zeit*, which has longstanding links to German social democracy. Writing in its latest edition, one of the paper’s leading columnists, Josef Joffe, pens a scathing commentary in which he accuses Julian Assange of being a “one-man agency for regime change”. Joffe then goes onto denounce WikiLeaks, which does not merely “aim at more transparency, but seeks to bring about a more just and equitable society”.

Such a political agenda is entirely unacceptable, according to Joffe.



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