

Comic Jon Stewart attacks WikiLeaks' Julian Assange

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Comic Jon Stewart, host of *The Daily Show*, the satirical US news program and talk show, went out of his way November 30 to attack WikiLeaks' co-founder Julian Assange and the exposure of American government conspiracies around the world.

In the eight-and-a-half-minute segment, Stewart downplayed the explosive WikiLeaks material, cynically made fun of Assange's name—of all things—and generally made light of revelations that have produced a major crisis for US imperialist diplomacy.

Assange is presently the subject of an intense international campaign of persecution spearheaded by US authorities. He faces phony sexual assault charges in Sweden and calls from the American ultra-right for his assassination.

That Stewart chooses this moment to broadcast a demeaning and dismissive routine at Assange's expense is an act, if nothing else, of extraordinary cowardice. By his comments, Stewart solidarized himself with the US and other powerful states and the global media in their campaign to demonize and, if possible, eliminate, one troublesome individual.

Stewart has had his good days in the past, attacking Bush administration officials and Wall Street's media mouthpieces. He may still have some ahead of him, but his general trajectory is increasingly toward the establishment.

Stewart and his Comedy Central colleague, Stephen Colbert, maintain a following among young people in particular. In the giant vacuum that is American political life, their brand of disrespect and ridicule gains a relatively easy hearing. The departure of George W. Bush from the White House and the arrival of Barack Obama have helped bring out the relative poverty of their humor and overall outlook, as so much of their

criticism of the Bush administration was of a superficial, "cultural" character.

Stewart's large "Rally for Sanity" October 30 in Washington was dominated by political and social complacency and empty calls for moderation, very much in tune with the White House and the Democratic Party's 2010 election campaign. Stewart, in his address to the rally, faulted ultra-right and liberal commentators alike for the present tense political atmosphere, suggesting that while their over-the-top rhetoric "did not cause our problems ... its existence has made solving them that much harder... If we amplify everything, we hear nothing."

The *Daily Show* host's malicious comments about Assange ran along the same lines. He began November 30: "The release of many embarrassing and possibly damaging diplomatic cables has introduced the world to a new super-villain, WikiLeaks' founder Julian Assange." On the one hand, Stewart sought to make fun of those outraged at Assange, but only from the point of view of underscoring the supposedly unrevealing and unsurprising character of the WikiLeaks revelations. Moreover, the monologue on Assange was interspersed with crude comments, which had nothing to do with the subject at hand, satirically or otherwise, but had the aim of lowering the tone as much as possible.

The *Daily Show* segment on WikiLeaks made reference to some of the cables' content, but generally to their most obvious and harmlessly embarrassing elements, i.e., the publication of US diplomats' opinions about various world leaders.

In one of the brief video sequences, a CBS newsman noted that an Italian official had described the WikiLeaks exposures as "a diplomatic 9/11." Stewart followed up indignantly, "Then he's a ----- idiot. ... I'll

give you, it's diplomatic mischief night maybe, but most of the ---- in there is nonpolitical chitchat and things we already knew."

Stewart went on: "Transparency is a good thing, government wrongdoing should be ferreted out. Although, just because something is secret doesn't necessarily mean it's nefarious." In sum, "an interesting yet less explosive and less than searing indictment."

After a few comments on video from Assange, about the latter's personal satisfaction in "crushing bastards," Stewart addressed the WikiLeaks founder directly: "I think you are underestimating how cynical Americans are about our government already. We've engineered coups in Chile, Iran, Guatemala etc. ... We sell weapons to our enemy's enemy who somehow always then becomes our enemy and forces us to defend ourselves from our own weapons. That happens a lot. ...

"It takes a lot to unimpress us. You should really read up about the ---- we already know about us. So unless in these WikiLeaks we're going to find out that the aliens from Area 51 killed Kennedy? Stop with the drama."

Truly remarkable! The chronically self-satisfied Stewart—who earns how many hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars a year for acting as one of American society's official court jesters?—lecturing an individual who has put his neck on the line in the interest of exposing imperialism's crimes to stop dramatizing himself!

The remainder of the segment was devoted to a would-be comic debate between Stewart and one of his mock correspondents, Aasif Mandvi, in which the latter took the position, presumably linked to Assange and WikiLeaks, that "everyone has the right to know everything about everyone" and cited positively the invasive airport scanning as an example of that.

Delivered the soft lob from Mandvi about the scanning, Stewart replied: "That's not transparency. Transparency is about being open to the public on important issues and processes so that the public can make informed decisions."

Mandvi later asserted pompously that the WikiLeaks' revelation was "basically our generation's Pentagon Papers." Stewart responded, "The Pentagon Papers exposed blatant lies about how the government got us into the Vietnam War, how they continued to mislead

us about the war's progress, even the most cynical reading of these documents, I don't think rises to that indictable level."

Mandvi dismissed this airily with, "It's not meant to, it's about the beautiful anarchy of information. It shows that what the government says in private is not necessarily what it says in public." This of course permitted Stewart to return to one of his favorite and most cynical themes: "But who doesn't know that? That seems like a relatively banal point to be made."

The exposed cables have shed light, in fact, on filthy US operations around the globe, from warmongering against China, coordinating lies with the dictator of Yemen, covering up Saudi support for terrorism, participating in war crimes in Sri Lanka, to weighing the usefulness of a coup in Pakistan, and much more.

In their scope and weight, the WikiLeaks are more damning than the Pentagon Papers. WikiLeaks has helped bring to public attention the way in which catastrophic events, such as wars and coups, are prepared and organized by the imperialist powers. This is what has outraged the various regimes and has set in motion the campaign to close down WikiLeaks and destroy Assange.

Through his unserious and dishonest attempt to discredit Assange and WikiLeaks, Stewart has only disgraced himself. Anyone who looks to the Daily Show as a politically oppositional beacon is looking in the wrong direction.



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