

Mother of Julian Assange, WikiLeaks founder, speaks with the WSWWS

Richard Phillips
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Christine Assange, the mother of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, spoke with the World Socialist Web Site last week during US President Barack Obama's visit to Australia. Early this month, Britain's High Court dismissed an appeal by Julian Assange against his extradition to Sweden on frame-up charges of rape and sexual assault.

The case against Assange is part of an internationally-orchestrated campaign led by the Obama administration and aimed at destroying WikiLeaks. Sections of the US media and leading political figures have called for Assange to be assassinated and WikiLeaks declared a terrorist organisation because the web site has exposed the criminal character of the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and other conspiracies by the US and its allies.

Assange, who is an Australian citizen, has warned that if sent to Sweden, he will be extradited to America and brought before a US Grand Jury on bogus espionage charges that could result in a death sentence. (See: "Oppose the extradition of Julian Assange").

Last year Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard denounced Assange, declaring that posting US diplomatic cables on WikiLeaks was "grossly irresponsible" and "illegal." Attorney-General Robert McClelland pledged to "support any law enforcement action that may be taken" against Assange and hinting his passport could be cancelled. Gillard and McClelland in effect pronounced Assange guilty before being even charged or tried.

Christine Assange spoke with the WSWWS about the ongoing persecution of her son, the serious dangers he now faces and the Labor government's complicity in the campaign against WikiLeaks and Assange's democratic rights.

Richard Phillips: Can you comment on the recent British High Court decision upholding Julian's extradition to Sweden?

Christine Assange: Julian has made an appeal application to the British High Court for his case against extradition to be heard in the Supreme Court. The High Court will make its decision on December 5 but it will be heard by the same two people who disallowed his previous appeal, and they'll decide on "public interest" grounds whether he can appeal to the Supreme Court.

I believe that there are extreme "public interest" grounds, given that the case has been hijacked by political interests. There's freedom of speech issues and secondly, the European Arrest Warrant system has been long criticised for its injustices. Various legal safeguards were taken off the European Arrest Warrant after 9/11 for the US to pursue terrorists but it is now being used across the board. Apparently three people a day are being extradited from the UK using this system for all sorts of minor offences. This system plays right into the US attempts to get Julian onto their soil.

RP: What are the dangers if he is extradited?

CA: If Julian goes to Sweden, he'll be immediately placed in prison. There's no bail for foreigners so he could be in jail indefinitely before he's even charged. He will be held incommunicado, not be allowed to see his family and kept in solitary confinement in Gothenburg prison. Fair Trials

International has criticised the European arrest warrant system as unjust.

Sweden also has a huge arms contract with the US over Iraq, absolutely huge, and it has never refused to not extradite anyone to the US. The US and Sweden have a separate bilateral treaty that allows them to get around the normal safeguards—it's a tick box straight to the US. There's also the danger that he could be illegally rendered to a third country, like Egypt, where torture is legal and out of the way of the Western media.

If he goes via the bilateral treaty it'll be straight to the US where a Grand Jury is currently being convened. The Grand Jury will be in Virginia and will no doubt be drawn from families of military intelligence personnel and US contractors. American-style justice in this case allows for prosecutors to give evidence but the defence lawyers are not allowed to give evidence.

[US soldier] Bradley Manning is being pressured so that out of desperation and pain, he'll fabricate claims of involvement with Julian. This, of course, is not true and is why WikiLeaks has an anonymous drop box so that everybody is protected.

Manning has been very courageous but he's been held in terrible conditions—eight months in solitary confinement, 23 hours a day in a tiny cell and only allowed an hour exercise, walking in circles with four guards present. He wasn't even allowed to have his glasses or to write anything and only had very, very restricted visitation.

His pre-trial conditions have been criticised by leading human rights lawyers. The US State Department is violating the 8th amendment of the US constitution on cruel and unusual punishments. The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Juan Mendez has also stated that the US Department of Defense had blocked requests for an unmonitored meeting with Manning.

Although the prison psychologist said that Manning was not at risk of harming himself he was put under suicide watch so that they could intensify their pressure. He was woken every five minutes, stripped naked at night and put into a very rough smock, which chafed his skin, and each morning had to present naked in front of everybody else, which is very humiliating. Daniel Ellsberg, the Pentagon Papers whistleblower, has stated that these are classic CIA methods and called "no touch" torture.

Republican congressman Darren Issa declared earlier this year that if Obama couldn't get Julian Assange on espionage or terrorist charges then the US had to get him under criminal charges, "Otherwise the world is laughing at this paper tiger we've become." This means that the US campaign against Julian is not because of any illegality by WikiLeaks but because America is seen as having less power in the world.

Julian has not been found guilty of any criminal act in the US or Australia. In fact, David Irvine, the ASIO [Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation] boss, was asked two months ago by Andrew Greene from ABC News 24 how he'd characterise WikiLeaks. Irvine replied that it was, "a modern phenomenon which we are going to have to learn to live with, in some form or another." This hardly sounds like a hi-tech terrorist formation but the Gillard government is not listening to this,

it's only listening to the outbursts of disgruntled US politicians.

RP: Can you comment further on the Labor government's response?

CA: The government may be sued at some point over how it's prejudiced Julian's right to a fair trial by falsely stating that he had committed a criminal act, then hinting that they'd take away his passport, or that they'd try and get him on treason. They were prepared to do anything the US wanted.

If anything happens to my son, Julia Gillard will have blood on her hands because she will have been complicit in a situation that prevented a fair trial. She should have kept her mouth shut until she'd found out the true legal position. Even when the AFP [Australian Federal Police] said that there'd been no criminal activity, Gillard wouldn't apologise or try to fix up the damage she'd done.

RP: And your appeals to the Labor government have fallen on deaf ears.

CA: Yes. I wrote a factually detailed eight-page letter to Kevin Rudd, which set out all the legal and human rights abuses in the case and all the awards that Julian had won, including the 2010 Sam Adams Award from ex-US military and intelligence personnel over the Iraq video.

I sent Rudd all the details because I thought, "Maybe they don't know what's really going on." I received a standard reply and so I emailed my letter to every senator and parliamentarian asking them to put aside their party political differences because it was not a left or right issue but a democracy issue, one of human rights and free speech.

A meeting of Canberra MPs was held on March 2. I organised three lawyers—Jennifer Robinson, Julian's then UK lawyer, Greg Barnes, from the Australian Lawyers Alliance, and Peter Kemp, a Supreme Court solicitor—and ex-Australian diplomat Tony Kevin, who all presented evidence. It was decided that the cross-bench group would meet on a regular basis. But I heard nothing more so I emailed all senators and parliamentarians with the minutes of the meeting.

I asked them to act on the recommendations of the lawyers and ex-diplomat who had concluded that Julian's case was politically motivated, that his legal and human rights were continuously being breached, including Article 6 of the European Commission on Human Rights, and that his life was "in clear and present danger." My letter called for a written, humanitarian guarantee that Australia would not extradite Julian and strongly urging the UK and Sweden to do the same.

RP: And what was the response?

CA: Nothing. The Greens took it to parliament about three weeks ago and Senator Scott Ludlam moved a very modest resolution calling for Julian to be protected from the temporary surrender clauses in the US-Sweden Bilateral Treaty. Not one Labor or Liberal parliamentarian backed it.

At least a dozen left-wing Labor Party MPs had previously been very vocal about Julian's case, and some Liberal MPs had written to me voicing their concern. But as the Obama visit came closer there was more and more silence from these people.

RP: Were you surprised by this silence?

CA: No. Gillard was involved in the first political coup of an elected Australian prime minister and she has a lot to owe to Obama for that.

As the WikiLeaks US embassy cables on Australia revealed, [Labor government minister] Mark Arbib was in bed with US intelligence, unbeknown to many members of the Labor Party. He was telling the US embassy that Gillard was more "pragmatic"—which I took to mean, let's not let a little bit of morality get in the way of her being PM. The US embassy was concerned that Kevin Rudd wanted to go off on his own on Australian foreign policy.

The coup occurred within weeks of the WikiLeaks release of the Afghan war logs. Was this a coincidence? I don't think so.

Australia has now joined all the other third-world dictatorships where the US has installed puppet regimes. There's been much talk in the past that our government has long been a puppet of the US but now we

actually have the proof, via the WikiLeaks cables. Gillard is a puppet and she's been installed to do their bidding.

If anyone has doubts about this, they should think about her disgraceful, nauseating speech to the US Congress when she said, all a trembling, "When I was a little girl I believed America could do anything" and then "You have a friend down under Mr President." I thought if it got any more intimate they'd have to put an x-rating across it.

RP: Last February Julian told a "Dateline" television interview that it was not just Arbib or Gillard but the entire party.

CA: Yes, that's right. They should have got rid of Arbib but he was promoted and so was Bill Shorten for their complicity in making her prime minister.

People should think about what actually happened. This was a political coup orchestrated by the US and it shows we don't have control of our government. This was confirmed again at last night's parliamentary dinner for Obama, with Gillard's idolising looks at the US president and [Liberal leader] Tony Abbott's "You're the president of the world" comments.

RP: The *New York Times* and the British *Guardian* initially published some of the cables but are now part of the campaign against Julian and WikiLeaks. Can you comment on the role being played by the media?

CA: The media focuses too much on sensation and personality and not enough on content. And the Australian media completely underestimate the Australian people who, because of WikiLeaks, are hungry for honest political information and exposures. The media underestimates the thirst for the real stories—the real news behind the news.

I don't know a lot about the media but I know that some journalists would like to do more but they're being told from higher up to cool it. As you know, all the editors of Australian newspapers got together and issued a statement telling the government to support WikiLeaks so I suppose it's a mixed bag.

RP: But they've been silent since.

CA: And that needs looking into. There should be a royal commission that allows journalists to speak freely and safely and to say who is running the show. I know individual journalists that want to do more but can't. I've given interviews to journalists and they've come back to me and said, "I really wanted to run this article but I've been told I can't."

RP: You've commented elsewhere that you're on a steep learning curve.

CA: Yes, I can remember people telling me how much of a grip the US had on the world and I didn't believe them. I thought it might be good to have an alliance to back up Australia in case of Islamic terrorism or something like that. But I now believe that the US government is one of the number one terrorist organisations in the world. I've reached that conclusion through my own research—12-months of intense investigation, reading the WikiLeaks cables, and examining the facts—and it is a non-party political conclusion because I'm not affiliated with any party.

The US acts like a rogue state. It preaches democracy and human rights but doesn't live by it and surreptitiously denies those same rights to all those countries it's involved in. This doesn't mean I've given up hope on the American people but they have to fight against what's happening, they have to defend the democratic rights that were laid down by the founding fathers. If they did, they could be a beacon around the world, although I'm not sure though whether big business is going to allow that.

I was an ordinary person when I got involved in this campaign but people have to realise that this case is pivotal for democracy in this country, and around the world, because we all share the internet. The technology of the internet has brought free information to the people of the world. We now have a voice—we don't have to go through the mainstream media—and we can talk to each other across borders, across ages and occupations, and can share information for the benefit of the planet. This is a very important issue, not just for me personally because

Julian is my son, but for the future of democracy.



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