

“The attacks on us are extraordinarily revealing”

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange speaks with WSWS

Richard Phillips
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Julian Assange spoke with the World Socialist Web Site this week about the US-led attacks on WikiLeaks, freedom of the press and other basic democratic rights, and the impending British Supreme Court ruling on his appeal against extradition to Sweden on bogus sexual assault allegations.

The WikiLeaks founder and editor-in-chief has not been charged with a single crime in Sweden, Britain or any other country. Nevertheless, Assange has been held under house arrest for over 450 days, forced to wear an electronic ankle tag, observe a 10 p.m. curfew and report to police on a daily basis.

Richard Phillips: Can you comment on the latest details of the United States grand jury indictment and what happens if you're extradited to Sweden?

Julian Assange: The new evidence that emerged from the Stratfor files—emails from a Texas-based private intelligence agency—show that the US government has obtained a secret grand jury indictment against me. The US ambassador to the United Kingdom, Louis Susman, stated in February 2011 that the US government would wait and see what happened with the current Swedish extradition case as to whether it would pursue extradition itself.

The US ambassador to Australia [Jeffrey L. Bleich], one week prior to Obama's recent visit, also told the Australian media that the Australian government might have to consider its extradition obligations in relation to me, presumably in case I returned to Australia. And while WikiLeaks has many of its people under legal attack, the organisation itself is also under an extra-judicial financial blockade. There are some 40 people who have been swept up in operations by the FBI, Scotland Yard or other police forces.

Regarding the pending Supreme Court decisions in Great Britain over the Swedish extradition case, if we are unsuccessful then I'm expecting to be extradited to Sweden within 10 days and then possibly re-extradited to the United

States. Even if we are successful in the Supreme Court, the situation will be similar because the United States is likely to unseal its espionage charges through the grand jury and apply directly for my extradition from Great Britain.

Of course, none of these things will happen if it's not possible to do so politically. When a legal case reaches a sufficiently high public profile for the government, then it becomes a matter of politics.

RP: Do you have any detailed information on direct collusion between Britain, the US and Sweden over your extradition?

JA: What we can say publicly is that on December 8, 2010, the *Independent* newspaper published a report about informal contacts that were already occurring at that stage between the US and Sweden in relation to my extradition. The Australian embassy in Washington also sent a cable to Canberra round this time, stating that the US intelligence and criminal investigation into WikiLeaks was of “unprecedented scale and nature.” It also said that the criminal prosecution in relation to me was “active and vigorous”. That material was the result of a Freedom of Information request and printed in the *Sydney Morning Herald* a few months ago.

The UK crown prosecution service has also refused a request under the Freedom of Information Act in relation to communications over potential extradition arrangements, stating that it would affect Great Britain's diplomatic relations with other countries. In the middle of last year, the UK's extradition reform panel, which was appointed by the home secretary, met with Eric Holder, the US attorney general, and a number of members of the Defence Department in the United States. In addition, there have been other recent meetings between Carl Bildt, the Swedish minister of foreign affairs [and close friend of Karl Rove], and William Haig, the UK foreign affairs minister.

RP: Can you comment on the role being played by Australia's Gillard government?

JA: The reaction by the Gillard government to WikiLeaks activities, in particular our release of the US diplomatic cables, was publicly the worst of any nation. Gillard falsely stated that our organisation was engaged in illegal activities. This was found to be false by an Australian Federal Police investigation.

Together with the attorney general, she initiated a “whole of government task force” against WikiLeaks, recruiting the Australian Federal Police, the external intelligence agency ASIS, the domestic intelligence agency ASIO, the defence department and the attorney general’s department. Publicly, Gillard has not issued a single statement of support and we are not aware of any private support.

RP: The corporate media claims that the financial blockade of WikiLeaks by PayPal, Mastercard, Visa and others has shattered the organisation. What’s your response?

JA: We have two active court cases against the blockade and a third complaint to the European Commission, which is overdue in making a preliminary finding. Although the blockade has severed 95 percent of WikiLeaks’s income, the organisation is still extremely popular around the world and we are able to continue regardless.

RP: Will WikiLeaks be publishing information about the preparations for war against Iran and Syria?

JA: Yes. We’ve been publishing information this past week and that process will be ongoing. We published a very interesting report about special forces operations in Syria last December.

RP: Have you read the *World Socialist Web Site* and what do you think of it? What must WSWS readers explain to others about the political significance of the attacks on you and WikiLeaks?

JA: I’ve read the *World Socialist Web Site* for many years. I admire the simple layout and the articles, which are usually accurate, provided one does not step onto socialist sectarian issues. I would call on readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* to take the following steps: firstly, to join Friends of WikiLeaks at wlfriends.org; secondly, to read the facts at Justice4assange.com instead of the spin; to follow the WikiLeaks twitter feed; correct smears whenever you see them; and help spread the values and ideals of WikiLeaks in your workplace and to family and friends.

WikiLeaks is an organisation that fights to achieve just reform and to spread certain values. If we are successful in promoting justice and having others take up our values then we will be successful, regardless of the assaults on the organisation.

RP: How do you regard the assault on you and WikiLeaks from the standpoint of truthful journalism and its future?

JA: The attacks on us are extraordinarily revealing. Yes, we have published a lot of important information about the

activities of the US government and other countries over the years, but the counter-reaction—the assault on us—reveals much about how governments and contemporary politics work.

The US government is trying to erect a new interpretation of what it means to be a journalist. It wants any communications with a source to be viewed legally as a conspiracy. In other words, it wants journalists to be completely passive receptacles for others. But this is simply not how national security journalism has been traditionally done. If they succeed, it will be the end of national security journalism in the West as we know it.

These attacks on us have also been picked up by other countries and used to legitimise their own crackdowns. For example, two Swedish journalists are currently being jailed in Ethiopia. They were investigating a Swedish oil company by the name of Lundin—Swedish foreign minister Carl Bildt had previously been a director of the company—but have been sentenced to 11 years jail in Ethiopia on terrorism charges. The Ethiopian prime minister says that it is perfectly acceptable to treat journalists this way and has pointed to my circumstances as justification.

The issues facing WikiLeaks are entirely political and therefore a matter of public concern. My message to people everywhere is: do not wait until WikiLeaks is bankrupted or its members extradited to the United States before acting. It will be too late then. If people act strongly now, then the organisation will succeed. WikiLeaks has a lot of support and we’re battle hardened now. We’re not going down without a fight and if everyone pulls together then we will win.



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