

Australian TV program exposes Assange frame-up

Mike Head
28 July 2012

“Four Corners”, an Australian Broadcasting Corporation current affairs program, this week broadcast what amounted to an exposé of the frame-up of WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange on allegations of sexual misconduct in Sweden. Assange remains inside the Ecuadorian embassy in London, seeking political asylum from the threat of being removed to Sweden, which would in turn facilitate extradition to the US.

The program provided a valuable service by simply piecing together what happened in the three crucial weeks after Assange arrived in Sweden in mid-August 2010. Assange was there to address a conference and investigate the possibility of hosting WikiLeaks’ operations in a secure computer facility.

By tracing the chronology, the program also clarified the connection between the Swedish witchhunt and the Grand Jury operation underway in the United States to charge Assange with espionage for WikiLeaks’ exposures of US war crimes (see: “Sex, Lies and Julian Assange”).

The program provided substantial evidence that the allegations against him were false and politically motivated. The unproven accusations were used to blacken his name in Sweden and around the world, and counter the widespread public support that he and WikiLeaks had won for courageously exposing the crimes and machinations of the US and other powers.

Reported by Andrew Fowler, the program recounts that when Assange arrived in Sweden on August 11, he was offered accommodation at the apartment of Anna Ardin. She was meant to be away, but returned on the evening of August 13. That night she had consensual sex with Assange, who continued to stay in the apartment until August 18—five days after the occasion on which the Swedish authorities later alleged Assange had used force against her.

In fact, Ardin several times insisted that Assange stay, rejecting offers from others to have the WikiLeaks’ chief stay with them. On the two nights following the supposed assault, Ardin arranged a crayfish barbecue for Assange and attended a dinner party by his side. During the crayfish party, she had tweeted: “Sitting outdoors at 02:00 and hardly freezing with the world’s coolest, smartest people! It’s amazing!” Later she told a friend she had a “wild weekend” with him.

On August 16, with Ardin’s knowledge, Assange travelled out of town to spend a night with a second young woman, Sofia Wilen. The following day, the two women began exchanging emails. Ultimately, four days later, on August 20, Ardin and Wilen went to a Stockholm police station to see if they could compel Assange to take a sexual health test.

Instead, the police declared that Assange was to be arrested and questioned about possible rape and molestation. Wilen became so

distracted at this that she refused to give any more testimony or sign what had been taken down.

That same night, a prosecutor issued a warrant for Assange’s arrest. The prosecutor’s office did not contact Assange. Instead, within hours, it leaked to the tabloid newspaper *Expressen* the statements made by the two women. The newspaper’s front page read: “Assange hunted for rape in Sweden.”

This was just the first evidence of high-level collusion, involving the police, the prosecutor’s office and the media, to destroy Assange’s reputation.

Within 24 hours of the arrest warrant, there was a further twist. A more senior prosecutor dismissed the rape allegations, leaving only the lesser accusation of molestation. Assange voluntarily went to the police on August 30 and made a statement. During the interview he expressed his fears that whatever he said would end up in the *Expressen*. The interviewing police officer said: “I’m not going to leak anything.” The interview was nevertheless leaked.

Assange was still not charged with any offence—a fact that remains to this day. Instead, he was assured by the prosecutor that he was free to leave the country while an inquiry continued, an assurance that was later dramatically reversed.

The only conclusion one can draw is that Assange was either deliberately set-up, or that the women later came under significant pressure to testify against him. The current allegations by the two women against Assange are unclear. Their lawyer, Claes Borgstrom, refused to disclose any details of their case. When “Four Corners” suggested to him: “It looks as though they are in fact setting him up,” he replied defensively: “I’m quite aware of that.”

Assange left for London on September 27, in preparation for the October 22 release of WikiLeaks’ third major blow to Washington and its allies, the Iraq War Logs. The logs documented thousands of civilian killings and other war crimes, including hundreds of reports of abuse, torture, rape and murder by Iraqi police and soldiers, between 2004 and 2009.

WikiLeaks had already been denounced by the US government for earlier publishing the “Collateral Murder” video, showing the US military’s aerial killing of innocent civilians in Iraq, and the Afghan War Logs, documenting civilian killings and violent assaults by US and allied special forces.

Ominously, 12 days after giving Assange clearance to leave the country, and as he was working on the Iraq War logs release, the Swedish authorities suddenly issued an Interpol Red Notice warrant for his arrest. Assange offered to return within a month. The Swedish authorities said it was too late—the warrant had already been issued.

In the same weeks, the Obama administration instigated a full-scale

investigation against WikiLeaks and launched a financial blockade to starve WikiLeaks of funds.

“Four Corners” replayed a May 2012 clip from the US Ambassador to Australia, Jeffrey Bleich, denying any American interest in Sweden’s bid to extradite Assange. “It’s not something that the US cares about, it’s not interested in it, it hasn’t been involved in it,” Bleich insisted.

But the program added to the mounting evidence of an indictment being prepared against Assange. It showed a copy of a subpoena from a US Grand Jury that is examining possible charges, including “conspiracy to communicate or transmit national defence information.”

The subpoena contained the identifying codes 10 and 3793. Assange’s US lawyer, Michael Ratner, explained: “[T]he Grand Jury’s number is 10, standing for the year it began, GJ which is Grand Jury and then 3793. Three is the Conspiracy Statute in the United States. 793 is the Espionage Statute. So what they’re investigating is 3793: conspiracy to commit espionage.”

That is significant because the conspiracy charge would be designed to link Assange to Bradley Manning, the US army private who has been incarcerated for more than two years, accused of leaking material to WikiLeaks. Any sole prosecution of Assange under the Espionage Act would face legal difficulties, because there is no evidence that WikiLeaks played any part in actually leaking material (see: “US government pursues bogus criminal prosecution of WikiLeaks and Julian Assange”).

Interviewed by “Four Corners” via telephone from the Ecuadorean embassy, Assange revealed several developments that impelled him to seek asylum. “First of all, the Swedish government publicly announced that it would detain me without charge in prison under severe conditions. On the same evening, the UK government security contractors that maintained the electronic manacle around my leg, turned up unannounced at 10.30 p.m. and insisted on fitting another manacle to my leg.

“Then the next day, the Crown Prosecution Service, acting we believe on behalf of the Swedish government, requested that the 14 days that I had to apply to the European Court of Human Rights, be reduced to zero.”

Assange’s Swedish lawyer, Per Samuelson, explained that if extradited to Sweden, Assange would be “kept there in isolation for four days. He can only meet with me and my co-lawyer. On the fourth day he will be brought into a courtroom in handcuffs in front of a custody judge.”

“Four Corners” reviewed Sweden’s record of assisting CIA renditions of two Swedish citizens to Egypt to be tortured during the past decade. Andrew Fowler explained: “A United Nations investigation later found against Sweden. The country was forced to pay compensation.”

On the phone, Assange told “Four Corners”: “If I was suddenly taken to Sweden, I would not be in a position to apply for political asylum in relation to the United States. It would be the end of the road. I would just be taken from one jail to another.”

“Four Corners” replayed Prime Minister Julia Gillard’s prejudicial declaration, just as the frame-up was gathering pace in December 2010, that Assange’s actions in publishing incriminating secret US government documents were “illegal”. The program did not probe the Australian government’s active involvement in the Obama administration’s vendetta against the Australian citizen. Yet, by producing evidence of the Grand Jury, it made a mockery of the

government’s denials of any knowledge of any US plans to prosecute Assange.

When “Four Corners” asked the Australian government several questions about the Assange case, Foreign Minister Bob Carr’s spokesman clung to the government’s line. “The Australian government has no advice that the US government is seeking to prosecute Mr Assange,” he stated. “The Australian government has made clear to the US that it would expect any charges laid against Mr Assange to be carried out in accordance with due process.”

In other words, while maintaining the fraud that it knows nothing, the Gillard government has signalled its readiness to accept meaningless US assurances of “due process” as Assange is railroaded to jail, possibly for life.

The entire political establishment in Australia is complicit in the vendetta against Assange. The Greens are in a de facto coalition with the minority Labor government and are responsible for all its actions. Moreover, while posturing as defenders of Assange and WikiLeaks, the Greens have lent credence to the Swedish rape allegations, insisting that the case ought to proceed.

Interviewed at a rally to defend Assange in Melbourne on July 1, deputy Greens’ leader Adam Bandt stated: “Obviously, there are charges [sic] and claims in Sweden that need to be answered ... That’s our real concern, to make sure that he faces and answers whatever claims have been made against him in Sweden, but that he’s entitled to return to Australia safely and that the Australian government does everything it can to make sure he’s not taken to the United States.”

The pseudo-left Socialist Alternative group has similarly refused to oppose the Swedish frame up, declaring that “the validity of these allegations [is] an issue that we can’t possibly judge.”

In Australia and internationally, the pseudo-lefts’ cowardly refusal to take a position on the allegations that have become the central mechanism of the US vendetta against Assange reflects their preoccupation with feminism and other forms of middle class identity politics. For these layers, the presumption of innocence and other basic legal principles are thrown out the window when it comes to allegations of sexual assault.

Against this line-up, working people and youth must come to the defence of Assange, and basic legal and democratic rights, mobilising against the governments that are intent on preventing any further exposure of their crimes.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact