

## Defend Julian Assange!

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Today marks two years since WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was forced to take refuge in Ecuador's London embassy, having been made the target of a filthy campaign by the Obama administration to have him extradited to the US to face espionage and treason charges punishable by life in prison or even death.

Assange's sole "crime" was to publish secret documents exposing war crimes carried out by the US government in Iraq and Afghanistan and conspiracies hatched by the US State Department in countries around the world.

In a telephone press conference on the eve of the grim anniversary, Assange demanded that US Attorney General Eric Holder drop an ongoing national security investigation against WikiLeaks or resign. He also spoke on the legacy of President Barack Obama, noting that the "former constitutional law professor" will be remembered for "the construction of extrajudicial kill lists of individuals, including of American citizens," and "being the president who conducted more Espionage Act investigations against journalists and their sources than all previous presidents combined going back to 1917 and the original issuance of the Espionage Act."

Since June 19, 2012, Assange has been forced to hole up in the Ecuadorian embassy to stay out of the clutches of British authorities. The UK government denied him safe conduct to Ecuador, which granted him asylum on the grounds that he faces the threat of torture and death if sent to the US.

London is seeking to have Assange arrested and extradited to Sweden on the basis of trumped-up sexual misconduct allegations, a transparent subterfuge to effect his delivery into the hands of the US government.

Ever since Assange entered the embassy building it has been the target of a round-the-clock siege by the British police at a cost of over \$10 million. At one

point, the British government announced that it did not respect the international principle of diplomatic asylum and threatened to have the embassy stormed.

The British parliament amended the country's extradition laws in March of this year, barring the extradition of individuals unless they have been charged with a crime and are slated to go to trial. There have been no such charges leveled against Assange, and Swedish authorities found in 2010 that the allegations made against him by two Swedish women—one of them active with CIA-connected anti-Castro Cuban groups—were insufficient to bring a case.

Nonetheless, the British government is proceeding on the basis of the old law—riding roughshod over Assange's right to asylum—because it is intent on doing Washington's bidding.

The Obama administration has kept open a grand jury empaneled in 2010 to bring secret charges against Assange. Last month, in response to a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit, the FBI and the Justice Department confirmed that they are continuing an active "criminal/national security" investigation against both Assange and WikiLeaks, adding that there had been "developments in the investigation over the last year."

This revelation was offered to block a demand that the US government provide the names of all those it had spied upon in connection with WikiLeaks—the National Security Agency (NSA) reportedly recorded information on everyone who merely accessed the group's web site—and a record of communications with Internet service providers and financial companies that were pressured to cut off WikiLeaks' funding and Internet access.

The FBI statement gave the lie to claims floated in the press last November that the US government had no interest in Assange and that his seeking refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy was a matter of "paranoia" or

“self-aggrandizement”—a patent attempt to lure him into the hands of American authorities.

The witch-hunt against Assange is part of a broader campaign mounted by the US government to silence all those who challenge and expose its crimes both at home and abroad. Private First Class Chelsea (Bradley) Manning is now serving a 35-year sentence at the military prison at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas for leaking hundreds of thousands of classified documents to WikiLeaks.

Edward Snowden, the former NSA contractor who released documents exposing the vast secret and illegal spying apparatus through which the NSA collects, stores and examines the emails, phone calls, texts and other communications of millions of people within the US and around the world, has been reduced to the status of a stateless person, forced to live in exile in Russia. It was revealed earlier this week that when Snowden first arrived in Moscow, Washington sent one of its “extraordinary rendition” aircraft to Europe with the aim of seizing him.

Washington’s determination to silence and punish Assange only intensified after WikiLeaks aided Snowden in escaping arrest by US authorities and reaching Moscow.

Others have also been jailed, including ex-CIA officer John Kiriakou, who was prosecuted for publicly exposing the agency’s use of torture.

It is striking that, under conditions where the criminal policies US imperialism has pursued over the past period are blowing up in Washington’s face in the debacle in Iraq, so many of those who have attempted to expose these policies of aggressive war, torture and police-state spying are now either in prison, enforced exile, or locked in an embassy surrounded by police.

In the meantime, those responsible for war crimes in Iraq and crimes against the American Constitution continue to enjoy full immunity. None of them have been called to account or punished. As for the various outlets of the corporate media that turned themselves into propaganda tools for US imperialism in the Iraq war, they are now covering up for their complicity in that crime and helping to pave the way for even more terrible ones in Iraq and elsewhere.

The methods of the Obama administration denounced by Assange Wednesday have been developed to defend the interests of the financial oligarchy that controls the

US government. Under conditions of a global breakdown of capitalism and an ever widening gulf between itself and the broad masses of working people, this oligarchy cannot tolerate the exposure of state crimes and secrets. It moves inexorably toward dictatorial forms of rule.

The only real constituency for the defense of democratic rights is to be found in the working class. What is required is the independent mobilization of workers, students and youth to defend Assange, Manning, Snowden and others who are victims of state conspiracy and repression. This campaign is inseparable from a struggle against the capitalist system, which is giving rise to both war and police state dictatorship as it seeks to impose the full burden of its crisis on the backs of working people.



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