Five years since the arrest of Julian Assange

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8 December 2015

On December 7, 2010 WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was detained in London under a European Arrest Warrant (EAW) issued by Sweden.

His arrest on bogus allegations of sexual assault was the culmination of a concerted witch-hunt involving the UK, Swedish and United States governments.

For the last five years, his prosecutors in Sweden have refused to interview Assange in London over the allegations. Yet a Freedom of Information request revealed that, as of this year, Sweden has granted 44 requests to interview witnesses or people suspected of crimes in the UK since 2010.

Assange is the victim of a transparent frame-up. His sole crime was to bring to global attention the heinous war crimes committed by the US and other imperialist powers in Iraq and Afghanistan—crimes authorised at the highest levels of government.

For three and a half years he has been holed up in a tiny room at the Ecuadorian embassy in London, after being stripped of his basic democratic rights by the Swedish and British legal systems. Assange entered the embassy on June 19, 2012. A month later, he was granted political asylum under the 1951 Refugee Convention, due to the ongoing espionage case against him in the US.

Assange remains in the embassy, under the constant threat of arrest by London's Metropolitan Police if he walks out of the front door. After surrounding the embassy around the clock for 40 months in a £12 million operation, in October the Met announced, in consultation with the Conservative government, that they would stand down the police siege and instead concentrate on "covert" efforts to seize Assange.

An innocent man, Assange is a de facto prisoner occupying a small room with no access to the open air and natural sunlight. He is forced to endure this intolerable situation, with a resulting decline in his health, despite the fact that to this day he has never been charged with a single crime.

Assange first came to worldwide prominence in April 2010, when WikiLeaks released the "Collateral Murder" video showing American soldiers shooting from a helicopter in July 2007, killing and wounding defenceless civilians and children in Iraq.

He was arrested just as WikiLeaks had released the first of some quarter of a million classified US embassy diplomatic cables, exposing further crimes and conspiracies carried out by Washington and the Pentagon. The cables exposed American political conspiracies on every continent, including: Plans for war with China, NATO war-plans against Russia, the Sri Lankan government's collusion with paramilitary death squads, American complicity in Sri Lankan war crimes, the US role in the 2006 Thai coup, US bombings of civilians in Yemen, US spying on United Nations officials and US governmental obstruction in the prosecution of CIA agents guilty of torture.

The US government was determined to stop these devastating exposures at all costs. To this end the operation to frame up Assange, with the expectation that he would be eventually extradited to the US to face imprisonment, was put into place.

Everything that has happened in the past five years has demonstrated why the ruling elite were so determined to silence him. After the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Obama administration oversaw the war in Libya and organised campaigns for regime change in Ukraine and Syria. With its NATO allies, the US is presently intensifying its war drive against Russia and has engaged in a series of provocations against China.

Nothing and nobody is to be allowed to get in the way of the new imperialist carve-up of the world.

In 2013, US National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden's followed Assange's revelations by exposing the existence of a gigantic, systematic spying

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operation against the world's populations by the US in collusion with Britain and other powers. Snowden faced the same treatment as Assange and was forced to claim asylum in Russia, where he remains.

Chelsea Manning, the Army whistleblower who leaked around 700,000 files to WikiLeaks, documenting war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, is now serving a 35-year prison term.

As for the real criminals, whose wars over the last 15 years have resulted in the deaths of over a million people and who are spying on everyone in the world, not a single one has been brought to justice.

Political responsibility for the tragic situation Assange confronts rests with what passes for the "liberal left" in the UK—including the *Guardian*, the newspaper he entrusted with the task of exposing the war crimes of the imperialist powers. Within weeks, the *Guardian* turned on Assange and supported his frame-up.

The trade unions, including the National Union of Journalists, also refused to mount any campaign in his defence.

But a particularly sinister role was played by Britain's pseudo-left groups. For months after he was first arrested, the pseudo-left deliberately worked to isolate Assange—saying virtually nothing about his detention. Finally, in 2012 they came out in support of his extradition to Sweden claiming that the sexual assault allegations had nothing to do with the efforts of the United States, Britain, Sweden and other governments to silence him and destroy WikiLeaks and that, in the words of the Socialist Workers Party, he "must face rape charges."

This demand was made despite the fact that Assange had not been charged with rape or anything else. It was enough for allegations, however flimsy and dubious, to have been made against him for the pseudo-left to abandon him. Anyone who took the elementary position that Assange was innocent until proven guilty, let alone those raised questions as to the political motivations of those involved was denounced as a "rape apologist." Disregarding the mountain of evidence that Assange was being subjected to a naked frame-up, they presumed him "guilty until proven innocent"—not even pausing to challenge the undemocratic and arbitrary European Arrest Warrant system under which his liberty was removed, which they claimed to oppose.

The vilification of Assange by the pseudo-left testifies to the politically reactionary character of the incessant promotion of identity politics by the upper layers of the petty-bourgeoisie on which these groups are based. Branding Assange as a sex criminal was a pledge of political loyalty to the most reactionary social forces with whom they seek to cultivate relations, which they hoped would provide them with an entry point into the upper echelons of bourgeois society.

Workers and young people must demand the freedom of Assange, Snowden and Manning and all others being hounded and persecuted for exposing the crimes of the imperialist powers.

The *World Socialist Web Site* insists that their defence can be carried out only on the basis of a socialist, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist perspective. The only real constituency for the defence of democratic rights is to be found in the working class. This struggle is inseparable from a struggle against the capitalist system, which is turning to dictatorial forms of rule as it seeks to impose the full burden of its crisis on the backs of working people.

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