

Stop the persecution of Julian Assange!

Bill Van Auken
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More than five years after first being detained under a European Arrest Warrant (EAW) issued by Sweden in relation to fabricated allegations of sexual misconduct, and after more than three and a half years holed up in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has been vindicated by a United Nations human right panel. This body has ruled that his persecution by the Swedish and British governments amounts to “arbitrary detention” and constitutes a violation of international law.

Assange’s sole “crime” is making public secret documents detailing the real and murderous war crimes carried out by the US government in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the conspiracies hatched by the US State Department and the CIA in countries around the world.

For exposing its criminal operations, Washington is determined to silence and punish Assange, using the lies concocted by Swedish prosecutors and the complicity of the British government to achieve its aims.

The Swedish Foreign Ministry Thursday acknowledged that the UN’s Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UNWGAD) will today issue its findings that Assange has been “deprived of his liberty in an arbitrary manner for an unacceptable length of time.”

The UN panel could only have reached such a decision based on overwhelming evidence that the charges against Assange constitute a legal frame-up mounted for political purposes.

Even before the findings of the UN working group were made known, Assange issued a statement from the Ecuadorian embassy accepting the decision as the culmination of his final legal appeal. He declared that, were the panel to rule against him, he would leave the embassy on Friday “to accept arrest by British police.” He went on to insist that if it found that the Swedish

and British governments were acting in violation of international law, “I expect the immediate return of my passport and the termination of further attempts to arrest me.”

Neither London nor Stockholm, however, have shown any similar inclination to allow international law and the human rights treaties to which both are signatories to guide their actions.

A spokesman for the government of Prime Minister David Cameron issued a cynical statement insisting that Julian Assange “has never been arbitrarily detained by the UK but is, in fact, voluntarily avoiding lawful arrest by choosing to remain in the Ecuadorian embassy.” Only last October did British police end a round-the-clock siege of the embassy, announcing that they were pursuing “covert” methods in seeking Assange’s capture. At one point, the British government indicated that it would ignore international law protecting embassies and send security forces to storm the building.

As for the Swedish government, the foreign ministry in Stockholm issued a brief note asserting that the UN’s ruling “differs from that of the Swedish authorities” and would not alter its legal vendetta against the WikiLeaks founder.

The British and the US governments have regularly invoked the findings of the UN panel on arbitrary detentions when they could be used to lend a “human rights” pretext to imperialist operations against countries like China, Russia, Iran, Syria, Venezuela and Cuba. That the actions taken by London and Washington themselves should be subject to international law, however, is rejected out of hand.

What they find impermissible is the exposure of their crimes, which have killed and wounded millions, while turning many millions more into homeless refugees. This is why they have not only hounded Assange, but placed Private Chelsea (formerly Bradley) Manning in

prison for 35 years.

Manning was convicted by a drumhead military tribunal in 2013 on charges of “aiding the enemy” for providing WikiLeaks with hundreds of thousands of classified documents, including the “collateral murder” video showing an Apache helicopter’s gun sight view of the 2007 massacre of 12 Iraqi civilians. Also leaked were the “Afghan war diary” and the “Iraq war logs,” exposing multiple war crimes committed by the US military, and over 250,000 secret US diplomatic cables revealing Washington’s counterrevolutionary intrigues around the globe.

Meanwhile, Edward Snowden, the former National Security Agency contractor who exposed the NSA’s wholesale collection of every form of data on the planet, from US and non-US citizens alike, in open violation of the US Bill of Rights and international law, has been turned into a man without a country, living in forced exile in Moscow.

There are a number of other such cases, including that of ex-CIA officer John Kiriakou, the only person punished in connection with the CIA’s torture of detainees—sent to prison for publicly exposing it. The Obama administration has prosecuted more individuals under the Espionage Act for leaking secret information to the media than all other US presidents combined.

Assange can expect even worse if he falls into the clutches of the British police and the Swedish authorities, who are acting as the agents of the US military and intelligence apparatus. He has been the subject of a secret grand jury investigation for over five years and is undoubtedly charged in a sealed indictment with espionage and other crimes against the state that could bring him life in prison or even the death penalty. Meanwhile, leading political figures in the US have openly called for his assassination.

Assange, Manning, Snowden and others have faced relentless persecution for daring to lift the lid on the secret operations of the US government.

This witch-hunt is driven by the deepest needs of the American state, which functions as the instrument of a financial oligarchy. It defends this ruling layer’s vast wealth and monopoly on political power against the masses of working people in the US and around the world, while seeking to offset the economic decline of American capitalism by waging ever-more dangerous wars of aggression. Given the criminal character of

these operations, a regime of secrecy and increasingly dictatorial methods is indispensable.

The only genuine constituency for the defense of democratic rights is the working class. Working people must come to the defense of Assange, Snowden, Manning and other victims of state conspiracies and repression.

Any attempt to arrest or extradite Assange must be answered with mass demonstrations and work actions in the UK, the US and all over the world.

This campaign in defense of Assange and the other victims of state repression can go forward only as part of the struggle of the international working class against the capitalist system, whose historic crisis threatens humanity with both world war and police state dictatorship.



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