US steps up campaign against Julian Assange

Barry Grey
22 April 2017

The *World Socialist Web Site* condemns the reported plans of the US Justice Department to charge WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange with espionage and issue an arrest warrant against him.

On Thursday, CNN reported, citing unnamed US officials, that the Trump Justice Department has prepared charges against Assange based on supposed "proof" that WikiLeaks actively assisted former NSA contractor Edward Snowden in releasing classified documents exposing the agency's vast and illegal spying operations.

At a press conference on Thursday, Attorney General Jeff Sessions indirectly gave credence to the report, saying, "We've already begun stepping up our efforts [against leakers] and whenever a case can be made, we will seek to put some people in jail."

There is enormous urgency to the development of the broadest possible campaign in defense of Assange. There is a real possibility that the issuing of an arrest warrant will be the prelude to the storming of the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where Assange has been forced to take refuge for the past five years, or a CIA-directed operation to kidnap or assassinate him.

The sole "crime" of Assange has been to publish information about the criminal activities of the US government in Iraq, Afghanistan and around the world, as well as antidemocratic actions by the American political establishment within the United States itself—in other words, to carry out the mission of serious and principled journalism.

For this, the United States and allied governments around the world, with the full backing of the corporate-controlled media, have hounded and threatened him, forcing him to hole up in the Ecuadorian embassy under threat of immediate arrest if he steps foot outside the building. US politicians and intelligence figures have called for his assassination. The Obama administration and the British government sought to use bogus sex allegations filed in Sweden to dislodge Assange so that he could be extradited to the US to face life in prison or execution.

In February of 2016, a United Nations human rights panel ruled that Assange's persecution amounts to "arbitrary detention" and is a violation of international law. The US, Britain and Sweden have simply ignored the ruling.

During and after the 2016 US election campaign, Assange was branded a Russian agent as part of the campaign, spearheaded by the Democratic Party in alliance with the CIA, to whip up an anti-Russian war fever and attack Trump from the right as being "too soft" on Russian President Putin and the Kremlin. The Obama administration, the Clinton campaign and the intelligence agencies claimed, without any substantiation, that Moscow had hacked Clinton campaign emails and turned them over to WikiLeaks.

Both WikiLeaks and the Kremlin denied that the Russian government was the source of the emails, whose devastating content—showing the systematic efforts of the Democratic Party establishment to sabotage the primary campaign of Bernie Sanders as well as Clinton's groveling and lavishly paid speeches to Wall Street banks—was ignored by the media, which overwhelmingly backed the Clinton campaign.

Now, under Trump, the vendetta against Assange is being intensified and openly transformed into a direct attack on the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of speech and the press. Last week, CIA Director Mike Pompeo gave an extraordinary speech at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington in which he labeled WikiLeaks "a non-state hostile intelligence service often abetted by state actors like Russia."

Pompeo, who last November argued that Snowden should be put to death, declared that Assange "has no First Amendment freedoms." He said news

© World Socialist Web Site

organizations that reveal government secrets and crimes are “enemies” of the United States, and individuals who leak secret information about US crimes are guilty of “treason.”

This is a formula for the suppression of all news outlets, journalists and organizations that refuse to join the corporate media in serving as sounding boards for government propaganda and lies. In his speech, Pompeo went out of his way to praise “legitimate news organizations such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*,” which do the bidding of the CIA, calling them “truth-tellers extraordinaire.”

Pompeo in effect declared opposition to the ruling class’s program of war and austerity and the control of the financial oligarchy over the entire political system to be treasonous and illegal. It is the CIA that will determine what speech is legal and what speech is criminal.

The CIA director’s remarks and the preparations to seek the arrest of Assange are bound up with the frenzied push by the Trump administration, with the full support of the Democratic Party and the media, to escalate the current wars and launch new ones, whether against North Korea, Iran or even Russia or China.

These moves also follow WikiLeaks’ release last month of a massive trove of CIA documents on the agency’s programs of surveillance, hacking and cyberwarfare directed against the people of the United States and the world. The documents reveal, among other things, the CIA’s programs to seize control of Apple iPhones, Android operating system devices and devices running Microsoft Windows and turn them into devices for monitoring the words and actions of their users. WikiLeaks has promised to release another and even more massive dump of CIA documents in the near future.

Pompeo heads an agency that has no peer when it comes to criminality, illegality and murder. It has overseen assassinations and coups, trained and armed fascist death squads, propped up and installed dictators, and run a program of torture of detainees in secret “black sites” around the world. The number of people killed by the CIA and its allies over the course of the agency’s 69-year history is in the tens of millions. It has long been known as “Murder Inc.” for good reason.

The claim of the government and the corporate press that Assange must be silenced to “protect the American people” from terrorists is a contemptible lie. It is well known that the CIA has armed and funded a host of Al Qaeda-linked Islamist terror organizations in the pursuit of its neocolonial intrigues and wars for regime-change from Afghanistan to Libya and Syria and beyond.

Pompeo’s hysterical tirade has made clear that the attack on Assange and other whistleblowers such as Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning is an attack on the democratic rights of the entire population. It is the domestic component of the ever more reckless foreign policy of militarism and war. Pompeo and the politicians of both big-business parties are well aware that there is deep popular opposition to war as well as widespread support, particularly among young people, for Assange and others who dare to expose US secrets.

The aim is to make an example of Assange so as to intimidate political opposition and set a precedent for ever more open dictatorial forms of rule.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site