

Freedom for Julian Assange!

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Declaring that the conditions facing Julian Assange are “untenable” and “unsustainable,” the government of Ecuador has called for third-party mediation to allow the WikiLeaks founder to end his protracted detention without charges in the country’s embassy in London.

Assange has spent five and a half years as a prisoner in the embassy, confined to a small space without access to sunlight and fresh air, cut off from his family and friends and deprived of seeing his children grow up. There have been reports that his health, not surprisingly, has suffered, leading to heart problems and chronic pneumonia. Ecuador’s foreign minister, Maria Fernanda Espinosa, told reporters in Quito that Assange’s “physical and psychological integrity are at risk.”

It was reported Wednesday by an Ecuadoran daily that Quito had granted Assange a passport and national ID card, prompting speculation that he could be offered citizenship and diplomatic status, allowing him to leave the country. Whether British authorities would respect such legal niceties is far from certain, however, and any measure taken by the Ecuadoran government to end Assange’s *de facto* imprisonment would be meaningless without guaranteeing him safe passage.

The intentions of the Ecuadoran government, moreover, are far from clear. While Ecuador’s President Lenín Moreno took office last May after defeating a more right-wing candidate who called openly for Assange’s expulsion from the embassy, the new government itself has sought a rapprochement with big business, the political right and Washington. Moreno issued a public demand that Assange not interfere in the politics of “nations that are our friends.”

Declared by the United Nations in 2016 to be a victim of “arbitrary detention” in violation of international law, Assange has been publicly charged with no crime outside of violating his conditions of bail in the UK. This occurred in June of 2012, when he sought political

asylum from Ecuador, entering its London embassy to escape the conspiracy of the US, British and Swedish governments to have him extradited to Sweden on fabricated sexual assault accusations and then sent on to the US to be tried for espionage and treason, crimes carrying a potential death penalty.

Swedish authorities last year formally closed their trumped-up investigation, merely confirming that there was never any case to investigate in the first place, only a “dirty tricks” operation aimed at discrediting and paralyzing WikiLeaks and putting Assange behind bars, or worse.

Nonetheless, the statute of limitations on the allegations made against Assange in Sweden does not expire until 2020, and prosecutors have made it plain that they are prepared to renew their vendetta at the drop of a hat, or, more precisely, a call from Washington.

The Conservative government of British Prime Minister Theresa May, meanwhile, made clear that it has no interest in any mediation and is determined to pursue its pound of flesh over Assange’s bail violation. Were he to step one foot outside the embassy walls, he would find himself handcuffed and bundled away by the Metropolitan Police.

A British government spokesperson said on Wednesday, “The Government of Ecuador knows that the way to resolve this issue is for Julian Assange to leave the embassy to face justice,” i.e., a British jail cell and a likely one-way ticket to federal prison in the US.

The US secret grand jury investigating Assange and WikiLeaks was impaneled under the Obama administration and remains in session under Trump.

Despite Trump’s campaign rhetoric about his “love” for WikiLeaks after it released internal emails of the Democratic National Committee exposing its corrupt bid to rig the presidential nomination process to ensure the victory of Hillary Clinton, administration officials

have since made clear that Assange remains Washington's "public enemy number one."

CIA Director Mike Pompeo has described WikiLeaks as "a non-state hostile intelligence service," vowing that his agency is "working to take down that threat to the United States."

Attorney General Jeff Sessions said last April that Assange's arrest remains "a priority," adding, "Whenever a case can be made, we will seek to put some people in jail."

And last May, former FBI director James Comey told a Senate panel that "WikiLeaks is an important focus of our attention," while declining to answer why Assange had yet to be formally charged with a crime. "I don't want to comment on the particular case, because I don't want to confirm whether or not there are charges pending," he said. "He hasn't been apprehended because he's inside the Ecuadorian embassy in London."

The renewed demands for Assange's head came in the wake of WikiLeaks' release of nearly 8,000 web pages detailing an array of classified CIA hacking tools.

The US ruling establishment, its military and intelligence apparatus and its two major parties will not forgive Assange and WikiLeaks for having exposed its criminal activities that have killed and wounded millions in Iraq, Afghanistan and around the world. This began with the release of the "collateral murder" video showing an Apache helicopter's gun-sight view of the 2007 massacre of 12 Iraqi civilians, continuing with the "Afghan war diary" and the "Iraq war logs," exposing multiple war crimes committed by the US military, and the posting of over 250,000 secret US diplomatic cables revealing Washington's counterrevolutionary conspiracies across the planet.

They not only hounded Assange, but sentenced Private Chelsea Manning to 35 years in prison for "aiding the enemy" by providing WikiLeaks with the documents. Manning's sentence was subsequently commuted by Obama and she has been released, but not before being subjected to abuse tantamount to torture in military prison.

Meanwhile, Edward Snowden, the National Security Agency contractor who exposed the NSA's massive spying and collection of data on people in the US and around the globe has been turned into a man without a

country, living in forced exile in Moscow.

Assange's legal team this week reiterated its demand that London abide by the UN ruling declaring him to be unlawfully and arbitrarily detained and calling for him to be freed and compensated. "The UK should not permit itself to be intimidated by the Trump administration's public threats to 'take down' Mr Assange," it said in a statement.

The intimidation, however, comes not merely from the Trump administration and the Republican right. A whole coterie of left liberals and pseudo-left organizations has provided political cover for the state vendetta against Assange, seeking to legitimize the phony sexual misconduct allegations against him, while tying him to claims of Russian "meddling" in the 2016 US election. Through these two *causes célèbres* of the so-called political left in the US, a whole layer of affluent ex-radicals, whose outlook and interests are reflected in publications such as the *Nation*, *Socialist Worker*, *Jacobin* and *International Viewpoint*, have consummated their turn to support for imperialism as well as social and political reaction.

The demand for an end to the state persecution of Julian Assange must be taken up by the international working class. The relentless attack on Assange and WikiLeaks was and remains a spearhead in the drive by the ruling elite and capitalist governments around the world to crack down on freedom of speech and impose strict control and censorship over the Internet.



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