

Julian Assange and the betrayal of Latin America's "left"

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Lenín Moreno, the president of Ecuador, made it clear on Friday that his government is actively negotiating the handover of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to the British authorities, whose police are waiting outside the Ecuadorian embassy to grab him the moment he sets foot on the London sidewalk.

If he were to fall into the clutches of the British authorities, he would be subjected to lengthy imprisonment pending extradition to the US, where he could face life imprisonment or even the death penalty on espionage and conspiracy charges.

Moreno, who is conducting a European tour seeking to ingratiate himself and his government with the major imperialist powers, went out of his way on Friday to vilify Assange.

"I've never agreed with the activity Mr. Assange performs," Moreno said. "I've never agreed with the intervention in people's emails to obtain information despite how valuable it is to shed light on some undesirable acts by governments and people... There are correct and legal ways to it."

Previously, Moreno called Assange a "hacker," an "inherited problem" and a "stone in our shoe."

There is no evidence whatsoever that Assange or WikiLeaks hacked into anyone's emails or violated any law, for that matter. Assange has carried out invaluable work as a courageous and resourceful journalist, making available to the people of the world information kept secret from them about imperialist war crimes, mass surveillance and anti-democratic machinations and conspiracies carried out by Washington and other governments and transnational corporations.

Assange was granted asylum by the previous Ecuadorian government of President Rafael Correa in 2012 because of the clear evidence that he faced political persecution for exposing these crimes.

Announcing Quito's decision to grant Assange asylum, Ecuador's foreign affairs minister, Ricardo Patino, had declared that Washington's retaliation for Assange's

exposures "could endanger his safety, integrity and even his life." Patino added, "The evidence shows that if Mr. Assange is extradited to the United States, he wouldn't have a fair trial. It is not at all improbable he could be subjected to cruel and degrading treatment and sentenced to life imprisonment or even capital punishment."

What has changed since then? Assange has spent the past six years trapped in the Ecuadorian embassy. The Trump administration has only made US intentions more explicit, with former CIA Director and current Secretary of State Mike Pompeo declaring WikiLeaks a "non-state hostile intelligence service often abetted by state actors like Russia," and proclaiming that its reporting is not protected by the First Amendment to the US Constitution.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions has insisted that bringing Assange to the US in chains to face a rigged prosecution is a "priority" for the US Justice Department.

In his statement on Friday, Ecuadorian President Moreno said: "The only thing we want is a guarantee that his life will not be in danger. We have spoken to, and, of course, we are dealing with this with Mr. Assange's legal team and with the British government."

It would appear that the only condition being laid down by the Ecuadorian government in return for withdrawing Assange's asylum and handing him over to his persecutors is a worthless promise from the British and US authorities that Assange will not be executed. The other threats to Assange cited by the Ecuadorian authorities in 2012, including "cruel and degrading treatment" and "life imprisonment," are apparently now acceptable.

In addition to his talks with the British government, Moreno has visited Spain, signing a security agreement with the right-wing Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) minority government led by Pedro Sánchez, while guaranteeing Spanish capitalists unfettered access to Ecuador's markets, resources and cheap labor.

It was reportedly Spain's protests over Assange's condemnation of Madrid for the arrest of former Catalonian regional President Carles Puigdemont that led the Moreno

government to cut off Assange's access to the Internet and prevent him from receiving phone calls or visitors, reducing him to a state of incommunicado detention with fewer rights than a prisoner.

What is involved here is a sharp turn to the right, not only by the government of Lenín Moreno, but by all of the governments of Latin America's so-called Pink Tide and their pseudo-left satellites.

Moreno is the hand-picked successor to former president Rafael Correa, who proclaimed himself a partisan of the "Bolivarian Revolution" of Venezuela's late Hugo Chávez. While Moreno and Correa have had a bitter falling out, the right-wing policies of rapprochement with imperialism and escalating attacks on the working class were initiated under Correa, whose government was the first to cut off Assange's Internet access in retaliation for WikiLeaks' publication of emails exposing the Democratic Party's rigging of the 2016 primary campaign to assure the victory of Hillary Clinton and defeat of Bernie Sanders.

Meanwhile, other governments identified with the so-called "turn to the left" in Latin America have been thoroughly discredited. Chávez's successor, Nicolás Maduro, has placed the full burden of Venezuela's desperate economic crisis onto the backs of the working class, while assuring the wealth and privileges of the country's oligarchs and military commanders, as well as the debt payments to the international banks.

Nicaragua's Sandinista President Daniel Ortega has unleashed a bloodbath to crush popular protests against austerity measures, resulting in over 400 deaths. And in Brazil, Lula, the former president of the Workers' Party (PT), is in jail, while the PT has been thoroughly discredited by its own antidemocratic measures and attacks on workers' rights, opening the path to the most right-wing government since the military dictatorship and to the openly fascistic candidate Jair Bolsonaro.

The Latin American pseudo-left—dominated by petty-bourgeois nationalism and oriented to the national labor bureaucracies, the pursuit of parliamentary posts and adaptation to identity politics—has largely ignored the attacks on Assange, refusing to lift a finger in his defense and failing to inform Latin American workers of the decisive democratic and social interests that are bound up with his fate.

Typical is the reaction—or, more accurately, lack of reaction—of the main pseudo-left parties in Argentina, the PTS (Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas) and the PO (Partido Obrero), which, whatever their differences, are united in an unprincipled electoral "Front of the Left and the Workers" (FIT).

The last major article on Assange posted on the PTS's

website, *Izquierda Diario*, was on April 3, 2017. It proclaimed in its headline: "With the victory of Lenín Moreno, Julian Assange has avoided his expulsion from the Ecuadorian embassy." Sowing illusions in the right-wing bourgeois politician Moreno and complacency about the dangers posed to Assange, the PTS actually undermined the defense of the WikiLeaks editor.

As for the PO, it has completely ignored the question of Assange, writing nothing about his case for more than five years. This party, oriented toward an alliance with the Peronist union bureaucracy at home and the extreme right-wing forces of Russian Stalinism abroad, exemplifies the reactionary outlook of Latin American petty-bourgeois nationalism, which in the Assange case, as on every other major political question, serves as conduit for imperialist pressure upon the working class.

The task of defending Julian Assange—and more broadly the defense of the social and democratic rights of working people, together with the liberation of Latin America from imperialist oppression, social inequality and poverty—can be achieved only through the political mobilization of the working class independently of all of the supposedly "left" bourgeois parties and the petty-bourgeois pseudo-left groups that support them.

The working class constitutes the only genuine constituency for the defense of democratic rights, which can be secured only as part of the fight to unite workers internationally to put an end to the capitalist system, which threatens humanity with world war and dictatorship.

Latin American workers must join ranks with workers all over the world in coming to the defense of Assange, demanding that the government of Ecuador halt its reactionary bid to rescind his asylum, fighting for his immediate freedom from persecution by US and British authorities and preparing mass protests and strikes against any attempt to arrest or extradite him.



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