

Defend Julian Assange against US charges!

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A court document dated August 22 was made public Thursday night which confirms that the US Department of Justice is in possession of sealed criminal charges against WikiLeaks' founder and publisher Julian Assange. As soon as he is forced out of the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he sought political asylum in 2012 and is now being denied any right to communicate with the outside world by the Ecuadorian government, a warrant will be issued for his extradition to the United States.

The court document, which related to a case that had no remote connection to Assange, contained two paragraphs that named him. It stated that the sealing of an indictment was necessary "because... no other procedure is likely to keep confidential the fact that Assange has been charged." It requested that the charges remain sealed "until Assange is arrested in connection with the charges in the criminal complaint and can therefore no longer evade or avoid arrest and extradition in this matter."

The Department of Justice would only tell media that Assange was named in the document "in error." It did not deny that charges against him have been filed and sealed. Sources told the *Washington Post* that they have definitely been laid.

Regardless of how the existence of charges has been revealed, it confirms all the warnings that Assange and his legal and political defenders have made since Swedish prosecutors issued an arrest warrant against him, in November 2010, to purportedly answer "questions" over allegations he had committed sexual offences.

The Swedish allegations were fabricated against Assange under conditions in which WikiLeaks had published explosive leaks that exposed US war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq and imperialist intrigues around the world.

The allegations had two purposes. Firstly, they were intended to malign Assange as an individual and undermine public support for WikiLeaks. Secondly, they were to be used to force him to Sweden from where he would have been extradited on to the US to face espionage charges.

Assange's decision to seek political asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy is the only reason he has avoided a lengthy prison term or potentially even a death sentence.

The court document verifies what has been obvious since Swedish prosecutors finally dropped their groundless case against Assange in May 2017, without ever laying any charges against him. The only other "criminal complaint" against Assange is the British charge that he breached bail conditions when, out of necessity, he sought asylum. The plan of the US state has been to wait until he can be imprisoned by British authorities and then issue its indictment against the journalist and publisher.

The fact that the existence of charges has now been made public may well be an indication that Ecuador has agreed to hand Assange over.

The court document does not reveal the nature of US charges. As well as espionage accusations relating to the 2010 leaks, it is also possible that Assange has been indicted for "conspiracy."

In 2016, WikiLeaks published leaked emails that exposed how the Democratic National Committee sought to undermine the campaign of Bernie Sanders on behalf of Hillary Clinton. The documents also provided evidence of Clinton's sordid relations with Wall Street banks.

As part of the hysterical campaign in the US establishment to blame Clinton's election defeat on Russian "interference," the investigation by special counsel Robert Mueller has implied—without a shred of credible evidence—that WikiLeaks received the leaks from Russian intelligence and published them to assist the election of Donald Trump.

In fact, Assange publicly compared the choice presented to American voters of Trump or Clinton as like choosing between "gonorrhea or syphilis." In a statement issued on the eve of the 2016 election, Assange stressed that having received the Democratic Party leaks—from a source he denied had any Russian connections—WikiLeaks believed it was obligated to publish them.

Assange wrote: "The right to receive and impart true

information is the guiding principle of WikiLeaks—an organization that has a staff and organizational mission far beyond myself. Our organization defends the public's right to be informed."

WikiLeaks, Assange declared, "remains committed to publishing information that informs the public, even if many, especially those in power, would prefer not to see it ... It must publish and be damned."

The relentless persecution of Assange has not only been aimed at preventing WikiLeaks from publishing the truth. It is part of an attempt by the ruling class to intimidate and silence all critical and independent journalists and media organisations, as well as would-be whistleblowers around the world.

The attempt to paint Assange as a criminal has been at the forefront of sweeping censorship and an assault on fundamental democratic rights under way around the world. The lurch towards dictatorial forms of rule is being driven by the terror of the capitalist oligarchs and their governments that a mass movement of the working class is developing internationally against ever widening social inequality and the growing danger that economic and strategic conflicts between the major powers will lead to war.

As Leon Trotsky noted in 1937, "the true criminals hide under the cloak of the accusers."

The US state, however, under both the Obama and Trump administrations, has only been able to conduct and sustain its vendetta against Assange because of the shameless support it has received internationally.

The establishment media, particularly publications such as the *Guardian* and the *New York Times*, has completely aligned with the effort to destroy WikiLeaks and suppress all other independent publications.

Successive Australian Labor and conservative governments have refused to defend Assange—an Australian citizen. The entire official Australian political and media establishment, including the Greens, parliamentary "independents" and the trade unions, has thrown Assange to the wolves. None gave support to the rally organised by the Socialist Equality Party and addressed by filmmaker John Pilger on June 17 this year, which demanded that the government use its legal and diplomatic powers to secure Assange's freedom and right to return to Australia.

In Britain, the role of Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn has been particularly pernicious. Corbyn, who once mouthed support for WikiLeaks, has refused to publicly demand that the Tory government drop the bail

charges against Assange, guarantee he will not be extradited to the US and allow him to leave both the Ecuadorian embassy and the United Kingdom if he chooses.

The Ecuadorian government, under its current president, Lenin Moreno, has turned on Assange in order to ingratiate itself with Washington. In March this year, it cut off his ability to communicate and has taken additional vindictive measures to pressure him to leave the embassy.

Most striking, however, has been the abandonment of Assange by virtually all the middle class pseudo-left organisations in the US, Australia, Britain and around the world. Flowing from their support for gender- and race-based identity politics and for the imperialist intrigues in Ukraine and Syria, which Assange opposed and exposed, they either maintain a complete silence on his persecution or have joined in slandering the WikiLeaks publisher as a "rapist" or "stooge" of Russia or Trump—even as Trump's administration has stepped up the US effort to silence him.

The line-up of forces serves only to underscore that the defence of Assange, WikiLeaks and all democratic rights requires the independent political mobilisation of the international working class against the entire existing political establishment and the capitalist system it serves.

Every effort must be made to alert workers and youth to the immense implications of the persecution of Julian Assange and the necessity for the most wide-ranging campaign to demand his immediate and unconditional freedom.



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