

Silence follows Trump attorney's statement that Julian Assange did nothing "wrong"

James Cogan
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During a December 30 interview on the US cable television talk show "Fox and Friends," Rudy Giuliani, the right-wing Republican former mayor of New York and now attorney for President Donald Trump, blurted out some basic truths about WikiLeaks and its founder and publisher, Julian Assange.

Giuliani said: "Let's take the Pentagon Papers. The Pentagon Papers were stolen property, weren't they? It was in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. Nobody went to jail at the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*."

Giuliani was referring to the 1971 publication of a mass of leaked documents that exposed decades of lies and crimes committed by successive American governments throughout the Vietnam War. The Nixon administration went to the US Supreme Court to outlaw the publication but the court ruled that the US Constitution's First Amendment, guaranteeing free speech, protected the media outlets.

Once leaked information was provided to a "media publication," Giuliani stated, "they can publish it for the purpose of informing people."

He continued: "You can't put Assange in a different position. He was a guy who communicated. We may not like what he communicated, but he was a media facility. He was putting that information out. Every newspaper and station grabbed it and published it."

Giuliani was discussing, not the 2010 leaks published by WikiLeaks exposing US war crimes and diplomatic intrigues, but the investigation by special counsel Robert Mueller into alleged Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election. Lurid and absurd allegations have been made that WikiLeaks was part of a nefarious conspiracy with Russia to assist the Trump campaign.

In July 2016, WikiLeaks published leaked emails revealing that the Democratic National Committee (DNC) had sought to undermine self-styled "democratic socialist" Bernie Sanders and ensure that Hillary Clinton was nominated as the Democratic Party's presidential candidate.

In October 2016, WikiLeaks published leaked emails from

Clinton's campaign chairman John Podesta, which included transcripts of speeches Clinton had given to corporate audiences during which she pledged support to Wall Street and boasted of her role in organising the murderous US-led war on Libya in 2011.

WikiLeaks has denied that Russia was the source of the leaks and, in November 2016, Assange correctly defended its decision to publish them in the public interest.

Giuliani categorically denied there was ever any relationship or contact between the Trump campaign and WikiLeaks. He stated on "Fox and Friends": "I was with Donald Trump day in and day out throughout the last four months of the campaign. He was as surprised as I was about the WikiLeaks disclosures, sometimes surprised to the extent of 'oh my God, did they really say that?' We were wondering if it was true or not. They never denied it.

"The thing that really got Hillary is not so much that they were revealed, but that they were true... She really did completely screw Bernie Sanders. Every bit of that was absolutely true. Just like the Pentagon Papers put a different view on Vietnam, this put a different view on Hillary Clinton."

He continued: "No press person or person disseminating that, for the purpose of informing, did anything wrong."

Nothing Giuliani said is new or can be honestly disputed. Assange is a journalist and editor. WikiLeaks is a media organisation. When it was entrusted by whistleblowers with leaked information, WikiLeaks published it "for the purpose of informing people." Assange has committed no crime. The attempts under Obama's administration and now Trump's to have him extradited to the US to stand trial on charges of espionage or conspiracy constitute a fundamental attack on freedom of speech and an independent and critical media.

Since 2010, when the American state apparatus launched its vendetta, every genuine defender of democratic rights has been obliged, as a matter of political principle, to stand behind Assange and WikiLeaks, and the fight for his unconditional protection from US-led persecution.

Indeed, from this standpoint, the most noteworthy aspect

of Giuliani's statements is that they were made by a ruthless representative of the American financial and corporate elite, and on Fox News, the station that in 2010 broadcast calls for Assange to be assassinated.

Giuliani, a fervent supporter of Trump's fascistic "America First" agenda of war with China and the destruction of workers' rights and civil liberties in the US itself, does not have the slightest concern for freedom of speech or democracy. His only motive in telling the truth about Assange and WikiLeaks is to rebut the claims circulating around the Mueller investigation and the possible use of accusations of collusion with Russia to impeach the president and replace him with Vice President Mike Pence.

A wing of the American ruling class, represented by the Democratic Party, factions of the Republican Party and sections of the military-intelligence apparatus, are outraged by Trump's seeming lack of concern with confronting Russia. Even before he was inaugurated, that wing of the establishment demanded that Trump escalate a confrontational policy against Moscow, from the standpoint that conflict with China could be best pursued if Beijing were denied any ability to seek assistance from Russia. They believe Pence, a Christian fundamentalist and extreme right-wing ideologue, would be a more malleable figure than the erratic and unstable billionaire real estate speculator.

On a world scale, the allegations of Russian "interference" have been used as the pretext for a massive campaign of censorship, directed by companies such as Google and Facebook against, above all, left-wing, anti-imperialist and anti-war websites and social media postings.

The American state apparatus also has used them to bully the Ecuadorian government, which in 2012 provided Assange with asylum in its London embassy, to turn against the WikiLeaks publisher. In April 2017, Mike Pompeo, then CIA director and now Trump's secretary of state, declared—after WikiLeaks published the explosive "Vault 7" leaks exposing criminal CIA operations—that the media organisation would be treated as a "non-state hostile intelligence service often abetted by state actors such as Russia."

In March 2018, on the dictates of Washington, Ecuador cut off Assange's right to communicate with the outside world and has taken other punitive measures to try and pressure him to leave the embassy and hand himself over to British police to face imprisonment and extradition to the US.

A multitude of media publications, political parties and trade unions—from the *New York Times* and the *Guardian*, to the Australian Labor Party and an array of pseudo-left organisations internationally—refuse to defend Assange and WikiLeaks because they support the plans of US imperialism for confrontation and war with Russia and

China. They are hostile to the democratic rights of the working class because they represent the capitalist elite and upper middle-class layers, whose privileges and positions depend on the historically unprecedented levels of social inequality and the concentration of global wealth in the hands of a parasitic financial oligarchy centred in the US and other imperialist countries.

Predictably, not a word about Giuliani's statements has been said by the political and media establishment in the US, Europe or Australia.

The silence in Australia is of particular significance. Assange is an Australian citizen. In the face of persecution by the governments of other states, he has always been entitled to, but denied, the full diplomatic, legal and political support of the Australian government.

The categorical statement by a figure as repellent as Giuliani, that there are no grounds to prosecute Assange, serves only to expose the perfidy of the current Liberal-National Party Coalition government, the Labor Party, the Greens, as well as the media, the trade unions and civil liberties organisations. Their refusal to defend Assange testifies to the utter rot of democracy in the country.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Australia announced last month that it will organise and seek the broadest support for political demonstrations in Sydney on March 3 and Melbourne on March 10.

The rallies will demand that the Australian government end its collaboration with the US-led persecution of Assange and immediately intervene, using the full scope of its diplomatic and legal powers, to insist that the British government allow the WikiLeaks publisher to leave the Ecuadorian embassy and unconditionally return to Australia, if he chooses to do so. Assange must be given a blanket guarantee that any request by the Trump administration to extradite him from Australia to the US would be rejected out of hand.

In the forthcoming Australian election, the SEP will raise these demands as one of the main policies of its candidates for both upper- and lower-house seats in parliament. It will conduct the widest campaign in the working class and among youth, in Australia and internationally, to compel the Australian government to act to secure the freedom of Julian Assange.



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