

Stop the extraordinary rendition of Julian Assange!

Eric London
15 April 2019

The attempt by the British, Ecuadorian and US governments to force the removal of journalist and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to the United States is an antidemocratic conspiracy and a brazen violation of international law.

While the US government presents the process against Assange as an extradition, the difference between an extradition and an extraordinary rendition—in which a state carries out an extrajudicial abduction for the purpose of arbitrary detention, torture, and summary punishment—is being effectively obliterated.

The US government is, in effect, applying a similar method to Assange as it used against those it has subjected to extraordinary rendition during the “war on terror.” Since 2001, the CIA has abducted hundreds of people, bound them up, flown them across the world to secret CIA “black site” dungeons and subjected them to harsh interrogation and torture. Once the government gets its hands on Assange, it is questionable whether he will ever be seen again.

The process has been accompanied by a campaign of media vilification that seems to have no restraint. Its aim is to transform Assange into a monster so that he can be deprived of his rights.

What the endless media reports ignore is that Assange has exposed imperialist crimes in wars that killed millions of civilians and thousands of US soldiers. He has brought to light horrific crimes that the government and corporate media conspired to keep secret.

While watching the news personalities slander the persecuted journalist and late-night show hosts subject him to degraded and scatological mockery, one wishes to stick a bar of soap in each of their mouths.

The US, British and Ecuadorian government claim that Assange’s extradition is proper because the US is

indicting the whistleblower only on a single charge of attempting to help Chelsea Manning bypass a password. But in the aftermath of Assange’s arrest, the corporate press and politicians have contradicted the official explanation, letting slip the real reason the US wants custody over Assange.

The *Washington Post’s* editorial board wrote: “Mr. Assange’s transfer to US custody, followed possibly by additional Russia-related charges or his conversion into a cooperating witness, could be the key to learning more about Russian intelligence’s efforts to undermine democracy in the West. Certainly he is long overdue for personal accountability.”

The *New York Times* said, “Once in the United States, moreover, he could become a useful source on how Russia orchestrated its attacks on the Clinton campaign.”

After British police dragged Assange out of the Ecuadorian embassy, Democratic Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer tweeted, “Now that Julian Assange has been arrested, I hope he will soon be held to account for his meddling in our elections on behalf of Putin and the Russian government.” The Democratic chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Eliot Engel tweeted that Assange “time after time compromised the national security of the United States and our allies by publicly releasing classified government documents and confidential materials related to our 2016 presidential election.”

These statements show that the extradition proceedings are being conducted under false pretenses. The single public charge is a cover. The government is planning to interrogate Assange, compel him to provide testimony and further prosecute him for exposing US war crimes. In the words of Democratic Senator Joe Manchin: “He is our property and we can get the facts

and the truth from him.”

Assange has no obligation to provide the government with any testimony because he has the Fifth Amendment right not to testify against himself. The media and politicians’ statements beg the question: How does the government plan to “get the facts” from him? What harsh measures, practiced in the prisons of Abu Gharaib and Bagram Air Force Base, will be brought to bear?

The proceedings in the days since Assange’s arrest show the type of treatment he will receive in any legal proceeding.

The British government, on the invite of Ecuadorian President and imperialist lackey Lenin Moreno, blatantly violated the principle of consular sanctuary by dragging Assange from the Ecuadorian embassy in London. This exposes the statements of the US and British governments admonishing the Saudi government for murdering *Washington Post* journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi embassy in Istanbul, Turkey last year as thoroughly hypocritical.

On Thursday, the British district judge who heard Assange’s bail request mocked him and laughed when Assange’s lawyers requested a fair hearing. “His assertion that he has not had a fair hearing is laughable,” said judge Michael Snow. “And his behavior is that of a narcissist who cannot get beyond his own selfish interests.” Assange has been sent to Belmarsh, a maximum security prison for terrorists and other high-risk detainees, where half of all prisoners are allowed to leave their cells for only two hours a week.

There is no question that Assange will be denied the right to a fair trial in the US, where the entire political and media establishment has already pronounced his guilt. In whatever “trial” takes place, Assange’s lawyers will be regularly denied the right to review evidence against their client on the grounds that it is “classified” for “national security” purposes.

The conspiracy against Assange confirms the absence of any constituency for the defense of democratic rights in the ruling class.

To the leaders of the democratic revolutions of the 18th century, the practices now called extraordinary rendition recalled the dark and crowded dungeons of Charles II and Louis XIV, filled with political prisoners. The bourgeois revolutions in France and the United States abolished arbitrary detention and torture

as the hated method of political reaction, upholding the right of due process, habeas corpus, and freedom from cruel and unusual punishment. Under international law today, extraordinary rendition is a crime against humanity according to the Nuremberg principles.

If the ruling class can conduct this operation against Assange without any opposition from the political or media establishment, then any crime is possible. All the while, “left” figures like Jeremy Corbyn go along with the lie, absolving themselves of any responsibility.

As for the British government, its brutal handling of Assange contrasts with its response to Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, who fought an extradition request after Spanish judge Baltasar Garzon attempted to prosecute Pinochet in Spain for mass murder. In 2000, the Labour government of then-Prime Minister Tony Blair refused to extradite Pinochet and ordered his release from house arrest at his mansion in Surrey.

“The attempted trial of an accused in the condition diagnosed in Senator Pinochet on the charges which have been made against him in this case could not be a fair trial in any country and would violate Article Six of the European Convention on Human Rights,” the Home Office wrote at the time.

While the dictator Pinochet murdered and tortured thousands of workers and socialists after taking power in the September 11, 1973 coup, Julian Assange published evidence of US war crimes. He is hated by the international ruling class because he has done significant damage to the interests of imperialism.

The seven years since Assange was forced to seek refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy have seen the reemergence of the class struggle on an international scale. It is this powerful social force—the working class—that must be mobilized to defend democratic rights and secure the liberation of class-war prisoners like Chelsea Manning, Edward Snowden and Julian Assange.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact