

Britain's Socialist Workers Party renews "rape allegations" witch-hunt of Julian Assange

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Just one day after WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was seized by a police snatch squad from the Ecuadorian embassy, the Socialist Workers Party restated its support for efforts to extradite him to Sweden.

Charlie Kimber, the party's national secretary and editor of the *Socialist Worker*, reiterated his party's evasive position—first raised by the SWP in 2012—that Assange must not be extradited to the United States, but sent instead to Sweden based on trumped-up sex allegations.

At 3:05pm on Friday April 12, Kimber wrote that Assange faces "the wrath of the US state" and possible charges which "include treason—that carries a death penalty—or indefinite detention as an 'enemy combatant'." But having acknowledged that Assange is being targeted by the most powerful imperialist country on earth for his work as WikiLeaks publisher, Kimber quickly moves on, arguing:

"But it can't be ignored that he has faced allegations of sexual assault and rape in Sweden. Two women made allegations against him in 2010. Assange has not been charged yet over these, but that is because the Swedish criminal process charges only before trial.

"Contrary to some reports, the allegations were not dismissed but put aside because of his non-availability. Assange first entered the Ecuadorian embassy to avoid extradition to Sweden on these charges... Assange should face trial in Sweden if the woman who made the complaint continues with it."

With these lines the SWP is regurgitating the lies and misinformation of the intelligence agencies and corporate and state media agencies. They have joined in the efforts to railroad Assange and blacken his name, justifying a course of action that would end with Assange facing a show trial in the US.

For the almost seven years Assange had been incarcerated in the Ecuadorian Embassy, the SWP remained silent—a position maintained by the other main pseudo-left organisation in Britain, the Socialist Party (SP).

On April 17, the SP also finally broke its silence. It too (although more evasively) lent tacit support to Assange being sent to Sweden, writing, "WikiLeaks is not a socialist organisation or on the left, nor even a democratic organisation. Assange has entertained some dodgy politicians in his embassy bolt-hole, including former Ukip leader, Nigel Farage. Moreover, allegations of rape by women in Sweden against Assange—the basis of his 2012 arrest warrant—cannot simply be dismissed as 'fabricated'. The rape allegation should be investigated, but without the threat of deportation to the US."

On August 27, 2012, the World Socialist Web Site refuted the claim made by the SWP and SP—that "the allegations of sexual assault" against Assange "have nothing to do with the efforts of the United States, Britain, Sweden and other governments to silence him and destroy WikiLeaks."

The SWP's Tom Walker wrote on August 21, 2012, "Assange and some of his supporters have refused to take the rape allegations

seriously." The WSWS noted Walker's sole transparent effort to conceal the fact that Sweden would only be a staging post for Assange to be extradited to the US to face "a secret 'sealed indictment' in the US, and a grand jury" was to appeal to "the Swedish authorities to guarantee that Assange will not be extradited to the US."

The WSWS article concluded:

"Both [the SWP and SP] have long been in agreement with the extraordinary campaign by the right-wing as well as the nominally liberal press to tar Assange as a sexual criminal but were reluctant to say so publicly. Now the time to procrastinate is over. To do so would risk alienating the upper layers of the petty bourgeoisie to which they are oriented—those who have long promoted the politics of gender and race in opposition to class-based socialism—and who are now being whipped up against Assange."

The WSWS made clear that the insistence on taking the allegations against Assange "seriously" in fact meant "entirely uncritically and, above all, without reference to the context in which they were made."

One of the two women in question was the now publicly identified Anna Ardin, employed by leading Social Democratic party politicians. The other, SW, was introduced to Assange by Ardin.

The WSWS continued: "The reason why there are still no charges placed against Assange is that the claims made by his accusers are not credible. His relations with the two women were consensual... An initial investigation of August 20, 2010 was dropped and an arrest warrant against Assange cancelled the next day by one of Stockholm's chief prosecutors, Eva Finne, who said in a statement to the press: 'I don't think there is reason to suspect that he has committed rape.' The reissue of the warrant took place only after the intervention of Swedish Chief Prosecutor Marianne Ny on September 1, 2010."

The WSWS concluded, "Whatever weasel words are employed by his accusers, the levelling of sex allegations against Assange was clearly politically motivated... Those journalistic hacks who deny the involvement of Washington in these events know they are lying. They do so because of a shared desire to see Assange silenced. Those such as the SWP and SP who insist that the threat of his being shipped off to the US should not impede a supposed struggle against gender-based violence are more shame-faced but contribute to the same outcome."

After this article was published, the SWP, through its student society, made one last public comment on Assange before it again broke silence last week.

Amid calls for high profile defenders of Assange, including George Galloway and the late Labour left leader Tony Benn, to be "no platformed" on university campuses, the Socialist Worker Students Society (SWSS) suggested that "we" should instead demand these "rape apologists... retract their statements." In so doing, the SWSS was both

falsely accusing Assange of rape and slandering all those defending him against a conspiracy hatched by the US, British and Swedish state apparatus.

Contrary to Kimber's assertion that "Assange first entered the Ecuadorian assembly to avoid extradition to Sweden on these charges," Assange never faced any charges. A European Arrest Warrant was issued on the pretext that he must be questioned in Sweden. He sought asylum to prevent being sent to the US by the Swedish authorities.

To this end, Swedish prosecutors refused all invitations from Assange to question him in London regarding the allegations. It was only in November 2016 that Swedish authorities were forced to reconsider. Under conditions where Ardin's allegations were no longer within Sweden's statute of limitations and had been dropped in 2015, the interview with Assange by a team led by Sweden's deputy chief prosecutor Ingrid Isgren at the Ecuadorean embassy on November 14-15 focused on SW's allegations.

Assange's written submission makes devastating reading.

Sweden had "subjected me to six years of unlawful, politicized detention without charge in prison, under house arrest and four and a half years at this embassy. You should have asked me this question six years ago. Your actions in refusing to take my statement for the last six years have been found to be unlawful by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and by the Swedish Court of Appeal. You have been found to have subjected me to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. You have denied me effective legal representation in this process."

Assange explained that during his stay in Sweden in August 2010 he had met SW. "On the evening of 16 August, 2010 she invited me to her home. During the night and in the morning we had consensual sexual intercourse on several occasions.

"I therefore could not believe my eyes when five days later I saw a headline in a Swedish tabloid that I was suspected of a crime and arrested in my absence."

Far from seeking to avoid answering his accusers, he explained, "I immediately made myself available to the Swedish authorities to clarify any questions that might exist, although I had no obligation to do so.

"That same day (21 August 2010), the Chief Prosecutor of Stockholm, Eva Finné, dropped the arrest warrant against me and within days would close the preliminary investigation with the finding that no crime whatsoever had been committed against the woman "SW" (who is the subject of this procedure)... On 23 August 2010, the Chief Prosecutor of Stockholm, Eva Finné stated she "made the assessment that the evidence did not disclose any offence of rape". On 25 August, the Chief Prosecutor found that "The conduct alleged disclosed no crime at all and that file (K246314-10) would be closed".

It was a week later that Assange learned "to my surprise that a different prosecutor by the name of Marianne Ny had reopened the preliminary investigation without any consultation or opportunity for me to be heard—after I had already been cleared and the case had been closed. That prosecutor eventually issued an extradition warrant against me, supposedly to take my statement, even though I left Sweden with her permission and in good faith and had repeatedly tried to see if the prosecutor was ready to accept my statement. I had not and have still not been charged with a crime."

Assange continued to call for Ny to accept his statement, including by his "Willingly attending a questioning on 30 August 2010 in Stockholm, where no questions were asked about the allegation, as I had already been cleared," and despite having stayed in Sweden "for more than five weeks longer than planned, repeatedly asking if or when I could give a statement," before gaining "the prosecutor's consent to leave Sweden before doing so on 27 September 2010 in good faith, understanding that I was not required to provide a further statement for the time being."

He offered to return to Sweden to give a statement in October 2010. The

response from Stockholm was "the prosecutor unnecessarily issuing a European Arrest Warrant," attempting "to extradite me, without charge, from the UK to Sweden, to take my statement."

He further offered "to come to Sweden provided Sweden would give a guarantee that I am not extradited to another state over my publishing work."

Refuting the SWP's suggestion that Sweden should guarantee not to send Assange to the US, he noted, "The state of Sweden has refused to provide me the necessary assurances against extradition or other transport to the United States since 2010 when such was asked by my lawyers and since 2012 when requested to do so by the state of Ecuador. Sweden has also refused to accept that the asylum Ecuador has granted me requires it to protect me from onwards extradition to the United States, despite this being the recognized norm in asylum cases, thus making it impossible for me to go to Sweden without giving up my fundamental right as a political refugee... I explicitly offered to accept extradition to Sweden provided it simply guarantee that it will not transfer me to another state. This was declined."

Regarding the accusations themselves, Assange noted that he travelled to Sweden in 2010 with the US having already launched an investigation against him preparatory to a Grand Jury, meeting "behind closed doors for the past six years under case number 10GJ3793 to explore ways to imprison me and seven others who they have identified as 'founders, owners or managers of WikiLeaks'... According to the respected UK newspaper The Independent, the US and Sweden entered informal talks regarding my extradition from Sweden to the United States in early December 2010."

Assange's contacts in Sweden had arranged for him to stay in two safe houses, including one belonging to Ardin.

Assange met SW on the morning of August 14, when she came to hear a speech he gave. Two days later he went to her home, where they had consensual sex. Assange left after breakfast "on good terms... She accompanied me to the train station on her bicycle and we kissed each other goodbye."

He spoke to her next on Friday 20 August, "when she said she was at a hospital and asked me to come down to meet her to test myself for sexually transmitted diseases." This later escalated to threats to "go to the police to get advice about STDs and that if I didn't come down to the hospital she would go to the police to ask whether I could be forced to get tested... You can imagine my disbelief when I woke the next morning to the news that I had been arrested in my absence for 'rape' and that police were 'hunting' all over Stockholm for me."

In May 2017, Sweden dropped its investigation into Assange and the European Arrest Warrant was discharged. However, Ny warned ominously that the statute of limitations on his case expires in 2020 and "If he, at a later date, makes himself available, I will be able to decide to resume the investigation immediately."

It is entirely in keeping with the pro-imperialist politics of the SWP that they were among the first to endorse plans to do precisely that. Kimber's article appeared amid howls of manufactured outrage by the Labour Party's Blairites against Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott and Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn.

Abbott spoke in parliament last Thursday opposing Assange's extradition to the US, with Corbyn tweeting his support later that day. In response, Labour's Stella Creasy and Jess Phillips initiated a letter that, by Friday evening, had been signed by over 70 MPs and peers demanding that Abbot and Conservative Home Secretary Sajid Javid "champion action that will ensure that Julian Assange can be extradited to Sweden."

Editorials in Saturday's *Guardian*, Sunday's *Observer* and numerous opinion columns took up the demand—seizing on a means to slander Assange as a rapist while possibly providing a way of extraditing him without having to argue that he might face political persecution and

charges that could lead to the death penalty.

Corbyn and Abbott fell swiftly into line, with Corbyn telling *ITV News*, “There can be no hiding place from those kind of accusations,” and Abbott earning praise from her former detractors for stating that the “government should grant such a request” for extradition if made by Sweden.

The WSWS noted, “The Swedish playbook has been made clear. On Saturday, Labour’s Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry told BBC Radio 4 she was ‘disgusted’ US extradition proceedings had been allowed to ‘eclipse’ sexual assault allegations made by the two Swedish women against Assange. ‘I think that what should happen is that he should be extradited to Sweden and then the Americans can make a further application to have him extradited from Sweden,’ she suggested.”

The SWP stands exposed as a co-conspirator in a sordid political manoeuvre that threatens the life of a heroic journalist, publisher and opponent of imperialist war and, with it, essential press freedoms and the democratic rights of the working class.



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