

The sentencing of Julian Assange: A legal travesty

Andre Damon
2 May 2019

Julian Assange, the WikiLeaks publisher and journalist, was sentenced to almost a year in prison by a UK judge Wednesday in what can only be called a show trial.

The sentence, handed out to cries of “shame” by protestors, is aimed at keeping Assange imprisoned, unable to receive visitors or hold private conversations, as the White House moves to extradite him for exposing US war crimes.

In the tradition of British class justice, the judge not only passed a prejudiced and excessive sentence, but insulted Assange. She told the journalist, effectively detained at the Ecuadorean embassy in London for seven years, that he was guilty of “exploiting your privileged position to flout the law and advertise internationally your disdain for the law of this country.”

The sentencing came just one day before the beginning of Assange’s extradition hearing. The very fact that the United States, a country that practices torture, capital punishment, and operates outside the framework of international law, is seeking to extradite Assange constitutes *prima facie* evidence that his reasons for seeking asylum were entirely justified.

The judge made no serious effort to refute the arguments of Assange’s defense, documented in a nine-page note of mitigation, that surrendering to British authorities would open him to the type of illegal persecution that led the government of Ecuador to grant him asylum.

Assange sought and received political asylum because of his “fear that he would be surrendered to the USA by Sweden, and be subjected to treatment there, including persecution and indefinite solitary confinement, relating to his involvement in WikiLeaks’ publication of sensitive US military and diplomatic

materials (such as the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture had concluded happened to Chelsea Manning).”

Ecuador granted the persecuted journalist asylum, “based upon its assessment of a well-founded risk of him being refoiled [extradited] by Sweden to the USA and there being subjected to persecution, inhuman treatment and physical harm.”

Ecuador’s decision took into consideration the fact that “Sweden also had, at the material time, a long and unfortunate history of illicit co-operation with the USA in the mistreatment of detainees and their rendition.”

The document referenced a pair of rulings by the UN’s Committee Against Torture, describing Sweden’s “total surrender of power” to US authorities carrying out illegal rendition and torture. These judgements found, in the words of Assange’s lawyers, that “Sweden had passively allowed US military personnel to mistreat detainees on Swedish soil (including stripping, blindfolding, hooding, manacling, forcible sedation by forced anal suppository, handcuffing into specially designed stress position harnesses etc.) and in delivering them to torture in third states.”

Despite the lying arguments made by the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* that Assange is facing extradition for a minor computer hacking charge and faces no danger to his life, the Justice Department has made clear that it is investigating him for “obtaining and disseminating secret information,” a charge that could lead to prosecution under the Espionage Act and be punishable by death.

The legal proceeding against Assange is not, in fact, an extradition, but a rendition, reminiscent of the treatment of “terrorism suspects” who were snatched on the streets of Europe or the Middle East, bound and

shackled with bags over their heads, and flown to America's torture "black sites" or Guantanamo Bay.

It has been three weeks since Assange was dragged from the Ecuadorian Embassy on April 11 and hauled off to Belmarsh Prison, called the UK's Guantanamo, where he has been held in isolation, denied his right to meet with lawyers and family members, and subjected to what his father called "touchless torture."

And it has been nearly eight weeks since the jailing of Chelsea Manning, the courageous whistleblower who helped expose US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, for refusing to testify against Assange. Manning has been held in solitary confinement for much of her imprisonment and, according to her lawyer, denied appropriate medical care.

The persecution of Assange and Manning comes as the United States is intensifying its efforts at regime change in Venezuela, while escalating its conflict with Russia and China. By jailing the founder of WikiLeaks, which documented and exposed US war crimes, the United States is seeking to silence opposition to its unpopular and criminal wars.

Assange's persecution takes place under conditions of growing class conflict and social opposition. The ruling class is well aware that its policies of war and social counter-revolution are encountering mass resistance, which will increase. By making an example of Assange, it is seeking to silence all news outlets that oppose the dictates of the financial oligarchy.

The attitude of political organizations and tendencies to the persecution of Assange defines their character. Those who have actively or tacitly supported this pseudo-legal abomination have upon them a black mark that can never be washed clean.

This includes the Trump administration, which is demanding the extradition of Assange; the Democratic Party, which has campaigned against Assange as part of its anti-Russia campaign; the media, which has vilified him and spread lies and slander; and the middle-class pseudo-left organizations that lent credence to the trumped-up rape allegations used as the pretext for his persecution. All oppose Assange because they support American imperialism.

The social force that must come to the defense of Assange and Manning is the international working class. Unlike the affluent and complacent functionaries that staff the mainstream media outlets, the Democratic

Party and its pseudo-left appendages, the working class has a vital stake in the defense of democratic rights.

On May 4, the International Committee of the Fourth International will hold its fifth annual International Online May Day Rally. The rally will bring together workers from throughout the world to discuss a common strategy for the building of an international socialist movement.

The defense of Julian Assange, which is the spearhead of the defense of democratic rights all over the world, will be a major theme of this event. We urge everyone who wants to take a stand against the persecution of Assange to register and participate.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact