Letter to Guardian demands retraction of false claim that Julian Assange faces “rape charge”

Chris Marsden
30 May 2019

The following is a letter to Britain’s Guardian from SEP National Secretary Chris Marsden demanding that they correct and apologise for lies they published in an editorial on Julian Assange.

To the editor,

The *Guardian’s* Friday May 24 editorial on Julian Assange, published under the heading, “Send him to Sweden”, was a predictable attempt to justify your refusal to defend the WikiLeaks publisher and journalist from efforts by the Trump administration to silence him.

Written following the US government’s levelling of 17 charges against Assange under the Espionage Act, carrying a combined sentence of 170 years, you felt obliged to register what is clearly only pro-forma disagreement.

This is especially necessary for you, given that your newspaper and editorial staff were directly involved in publishing material together with WikiLeaks that potentially places you all in the frontline of measures intended to criminalise journalists and publishers alike.

In addition, as WikiLeaks has made clear, it was *Guardian* journalist David Leigh, brother-in-law of your then editor Alan Rusbridger, who in 2011 revealed a password provided in confidence to them by Assange that led to the publishing of hundreds of thousands of unredacted US diplomatic cables, then being analysed, by over 50 media and human rights organisations internationally.

In your haste to defend yourself without defending Assange, your editorial centred on a call that he be extradited to Sweden instead of to the US. In the process you made the brazen factual error of asserting that the heroic whistleblower Chelsea Manning was on hunger strike and a more politically sinister claim that Assange faces a “rape charge” that “is serious and deserves a proper trial, which will never happen if he is sent to America.”

As a result of readers’ complaints, you were forced to retract these statements and to write a brief correction, reading, “This article was amended on 27 May 2019: to omit a misinterpretation of a remark by Chelsea Manning; and to clarify that the Swedish rape charge process is ongoing.”

This is not a correction at all.

What exactly is a “rape charge process,” which is the formulation you also now use in your editorial? Once again, there have never been any rape charges issued against Assange.

Sweden’s prosecutors are seeking Assange’s detention in the UK and extradition on the pretext of questioning him, for the third time, as part of a “preliminary investigation” into politically motivated allegations. There is a mountain of evidence on this score, but of course none of this has ever been examined by the *Guardian*.

If the *Guardian* was not so keen to blacken Assange’s name, it would never have made the initial error on May 24. The lack of basic journalistic standards is confirmed by the fact that the introduction to the editorial still reads:

“The founder of WikiLeaks faces charges of espionage in the US and rape in Sweden. He should stand trial for rape.”

If Assange were a rich man and WikiLeaks a major corporation, you would and indeed should be sued. As it is, you have a professional and moral obligation to apologise for wilfully lying to your readers and to make

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a proper correction to your amended editorial.

Yours Sincerely,

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