

Consortium News website taken down by a malware attack after streaming program defending Julian Assange

Kevin Reed
20 July 2019

Consortium News—a news website devoted to investigative journalism founded by the late Robert Parry and which has steadfastly defended WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange—was the target of a malware attack last Monday that took down the site for more than five hours.

That the site was rendered inoperable was initially reported in a *Consortium News* Twitter post, “Our website is completely down. Our media host said we have been attacked by malware. They actually tried to blame ‘the Russians’! Every article published since 2011 now gets a 404 Not Found. They are working on it. Problem started slowly on Friday first day of CN Live!”

A report published after the site was restored explained that the malicious attack shut down *Consortium News* “days after the premiere episode of the outlet’s live-streamed show, CN Live!” and “followed on the heels of the suspension of pro-Assange account Unity4J from Twitter.”

On July 11, the Unity4J account—a Twitter feed dedicated to circulating information and advocacy for Julian Assange, who remains incarcerated at London’s Belmarsh Prison while awaiting extradition to the US—was arbitrarily suspended by Twitter. After one week of being taken down, the account was abruptly restored on Thursday with no explanation provided by Twitter for their act of censorship.

The *Consortium News* report identified the attack on their website with the Twitter censorship because they had conducted Unity4J online vigils over the previous months. *Consortium News* and other independent news outlets denounced the Unity4J ban along with the rock musician Roger Waters who called Julian Assange a

“great hero of freedom of the press” and attacked Twitter as “Big Brother” and “an arm of the Thought Police” and “an arm of the forces of oppression.”

ConsortiumNews.com was founded in 1995 by Robert Parry, a former journalist for the Associated Press who became distressed by “the propaganda that had come to pervade American journalism.” Parry was a reporter who helped expose the Iran-Contra scandal to the public in the mid-1980s and subsequently—after the founding of *Consortium News*—wrote to expose the war crimes and lies of successive US administrations both Democratic and Republican.

The timing of the attack on the *Consortium News* website shows—whoever was behind the malware assault—that the forces of reaction are seeking to silence anyone who wishes to tell the truth about the ongoing criminal persecution of both Julian Assange and whistleblower Chelsea Manning. Manning is currently locked up in a federal prison in Virginia and being fined \$1,000 per day for refusing to testify before a grand jury empaneled for the purpose of bringing further frame-up charges against Assange.

Significantly, the inaugural episode of *Consortium News*’ CN Live! video broadcast included a 26-minute segment on Julian Assange that was mostly an interview with the UN special rapporteur on torture, Nils Melzer. Melzer spoke about the inhumane conditions of imprisonment facing Assange and explained in detail the political reasons why the WikiLeaks publisher has been tortured and denied his legal rights.

In his interview, Melzer denounced the US, British, Swedish and Ecuadorian governments for their “mistreatment and misuse of judicial powers against a

single individual” as well as the so-called human rights advocates who have refused to come to Assange’s defense.

Melzer said, “This is the first time in twenty years that I see democratic states ganging up and isolating a single individual and systematically violating his fair trial guarantees, his human rights in every aspect and even ill-treatment mobbing that amounts to psychological torture cumulatively. That’s very serious.”

When asked by CN Live! Editor Joe Lauria if Assange has any chance of a fair trial in the US, Melzer replied, “The public prejudice against Assange is monumental in the United States. He is being perceived as public enemy number one. He has been described as a public enemy by the current Secretary of State and former CIA director. Other public figures have called for his assassination.”

“So, you have this environment and you send him to a court where to my knowledge no national security defendant has ever been acquitted—I think it’s the same court and the same judge who has been responsible for the trial against Chelsea Manning where she has been sentenced to thirty-five years originally, which is a draconian punishment ... where are the investigations and prosecutions of all the other crimes and activities that have been exposed by this whistle-blower and by WikiLeaks? If you don’t prosecute the war crimes, then clearly you don’t have equality before the law, clearly there is no chance of having a fair trial, clearly then prosecution becomes persecution.”

Consortium News also reported that the Twitter accounts and websites of activists associated with Unity4J had also been suspended and hacked around the same time. The report said, “Aaron Kesel, who also writes as an independent journalist, said in an interview that they were locked out of their accounts within minutes of publishing an article covering the Catalanian public’s celebration of Assange’s birthday. Activist Post, the site on which the article was published, was likewise reportedly hacked in recent weeks.”

There is no doubt that international public access to this kind of independent reporting is of great concern to the military-intelligence state behind the persecution of Assange and Manning. It is the exposure of these important facts that is behind the ongoing online

censorship of socialist and oppositional websites that has been identified by the *World Socialist Web Site* going back to the spring and summer of 2017.

The coordinated attacks on defenders of free speech and those fighting for the freedom of Assange and Manning is a sign that the apparatus of the state repression fears that mass support is building against this unprecedented international conspiracy against the truth. At the same time, it is a warning that the drive to silence and punish them for exposing the crimes of US imperialism is being extended to others in an effort to browbeat anyone who dares take up the fight for his defense and freedom.

The international working class will not be intimidated by these tactics. The demand for the freedom of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning must be expanded on a world scale and taken up in every country, workplace, neighborhood and school. As has been shown by striking workers, peasants and students in Ecuador, the fight for the rights of Julian Assange is key to the struggle of the working class for socialism and against the entire capitalist system.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact