

Imprisoned activist Jeremy Hammond called to testify before US grand jury, most likely against Julian Assange

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Imprisoned information activist Jeremy Hammond—who is serving a 10-year prison sentence for hacking the private intelligence firm Stratfor in 2011—has been called before a secret federal grand jury, most likely in an effort to force him to testify against WikiLeaks founder and publisher Julian Assange.

In a statement released Tuesday, the Jeremy Hammond Support Committee said: “It’s with great sadness and anger we announce that Jeremy Hammond is being brought to the Eastern District of Virginia in an effort to compel him to testify before a grand jury. Given the secrecy of grand jury proceedings, we don’t know the nature or scope of the grand jury’s investigation. However, our assumption is that this is the same grand jury that Chelsea Manning is currently being incarcerated for refusing to testify before.”

Hammond was removed from the Federal Corrections Institution in Memphis, Tennessee late last week. On August 31, the support committee reported via Twitter that Hammond had been relocated to the Federal Transfer Center in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. At that time, it was not clear why he had been moved.

On Tuesday morning, the group reported that Hammond had been sent to the William G. Truesdale Detention Center, the same location where Chelsea Manning is currently in jail for refusing to testify before the grand jury. Manning was sent to prison by US District Judge Claude Hilton six months ago on civil contempt charges. At the time, Manning said she “will accept whatever you bring upon me.”

At around noon on Tuesday, the support committee tweeted: “Thank you all for the overwhelming support already shown to Jeremy. Just as Jeremy had no intention of cooperating with the government during his

original trial, he has no intention of testifying before this or any other grand jury he may be called in front of.”

Clearly attempting to break Hammond, a 34-year-old “hacktivist” affiliated with the protest group Anonymous and an anarchist from Chicago, the federal government is seeking to exploit the fact that he was scheduled for a possible early release based on his enrollment in a prison Residential Drug Abuse Program (RDAP) in the Federal Corrections Institution in Memphis. Because of his relocation and removal from the RDAP, Hammond faces the potential loss of his eligibility for release in December and will likely be forced to serve another two years behind bars.

Hammond was originally arrested in Chicago in March 2012 by the FBI and charged with conspiracy to commit hacking, to which he originally pleaded not guilty. Ten weeks later, Hammond changed his plea to guilty after prosecutors threatened him with a 30-year sentence.

In December 2011, Hammond and a group of collaborators hacked the Austin, Texas-based intelligence firm Strategic Forecasting (Stratfor) and turned millions of email exchanges over to media outlets and WikiLeaks. The 5.5 million email messages were published by WikiLeaks as the “Global Intelligence Files.” The messages revealed corporate collaboration in government surveillance of domestic political activity, such as spying on the Occupy Wall Street protestors among other things.

As a high school student at Glendale Heights, Hammond campaigned against the Iraq war and organized a student walkout. He founded the website “HackThisSite” at age 18 and later engaged in

“electronic civil disobedience.” At the time of his sentencing, Hammond said “people have a right to know what governments and corporations are doing behind closed doors.”

Drawing further conclusions about the draconian Eastern District of Virginia proceedings, Hammond’s supporters wrote on Tuesday: “The US government’s blatant abuse of the grand jury process in this case continues a clear pattern of targeting, isolating, and punishing outspoken truth-tellers and activists. ... We must come together as one, united in our support for truth and transparency, and for those who have paid the ultimate price to bring it to us.”

Julian Assange is currently serving a 50-week sentence in London’s notorious Belmarsh prison on a bogus bail violation, while the US and UK governments attempt to figure out how to extradite him to America. He faces 18 charges, including 17 under the Espionage Act, which can include a death sentence or a life prison term of 175 years. Assange has been subjected to vilification and a massive international conspiracy by the American ruling class and its international allies because WikiLeaks published damning exposures of the war crimes of US imperialism in the Middle East and elsewhere around the world.

With demands growing internationally for the freedom of Julian Assange from Belmarsh—as shown by the demonstration and mini-concert organized by musician Roger Waters and investigative journalist John Pilger in London on September 2—the response of the US state is to double down on plans to have the WikiLeaks editor rendered into CIA custody.

Every effort must be waged by workers, youth and students to defend Julian Assange and whistleblowers Chelsea Manning and Jeremy Hammond, who are the victims of state persecution.



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