

The prosecution of Glenn Greenwald and the global war on free speech

James Cogan
23 January 2020

The “criminal conspiracy” charges levelled by the Brazilian government against *Intercept Brasil* publisher and renowned investigative journalist Glenn Greenwald is the latest in a series of state attacks internationally on the hard-won historical right to freedom of speech. The arrest of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has opened the floodgates for a global war on independent and critical journalism and the imposition of sweeping censorship.

The allegations made in Brazil against Greenwald are essentially identical to the first charge issued in April 2019 by the US Department of Justice to file for the extradition of Assange from the United Kingdom to stand trial in the United States. Both men have been accused of “assisting” whistleblowers to access information that, once published, exposed criminality and corruption at the highest levels of the state apparatus.

In Greenwald’s case, a prosecution is being prepared on the pretext that he “conspired” with people to “hack” messaging accounts and obtain information that proved top officials had used a corruption investigation to undermine the political opponents of fascistic demagogue Jair Bolsonaro. In the lead-up to the 2018 presidential election, which was won by Bolsonaro, former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was convicted of corruption and imprisoned and his Workers Party mired in scandal.

In the case of Julian Assange, the WikiLeaks founder has been charged with “conspiring” with courageous American whistleblower Chelsea Manning in 2009-2010 to access troves of classified documents that exposed US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan and the sordid intrigues carried out around the world to prop up pro-US regimes and assert American strategic and corporate interests. A further 17 counts of espionage were then added to the charge list, threatening him with a life sentence of 175 years if he is extradited and condemned by a show trial in the US.

Greenwald has not yet been arrested, but it is almost certain that US intelligence agencies are involved in the legal moves to prosecute him. He would have been on their hit list of priority media targets since he played a key role in

2013 in publishing the leaks made by National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden. The Snowden leaks exposed the staggering degree to which the NSA spies on the communications of virtually every American citizen and much of the world’s population.

Julian Assange sought to protect himself from the revenge of the US state by gaining political asylum in 2012 in the tiny Ecuadorian embassy in London, until he was evicted and arrested last April. Just prior to Assange’s eviction, Chelsea Manning was sent back to prison for refusing to appear before a grand jury and retract her categorical testimony during her trial that she acted alone—without any assistance from Assange and WikiLeaks—to access the information she leaked.

The imprisonment of Manning and arrest of Assange were quickly followed by the Macron government initiating moves to prosecute eight journalists over the exposure of France’s complicity in Saudi Arabia’s illegal war in Yemen. In June 2019, unprecedented police raids on journalists’ homes and media offices took place in Australia. Three journalists are threatened with prosecution over the publication of leaks exposing war crimes committed by Australian troops in Afghanistan and plans to legalise mass surveillance.

Glenn Greenwald had not visited the US since 2013 due to his legitimate concern that he would be arrested. With Bolsonaro now in power, the hands of the CIA, NSA and FBI can well and truly reach into Brazil, where Greenwald has residency rights through his partner.

The WSWWS warned in 2010 that if Julian Assange was not defended—after his detention in Britain over blatantly fabricated allegations that he had committed sexual offences in Sweden—it would open the way for a full-scale assault to terrorise and silence genuine journalism. Then Vice-President Joe Biden in Barack Obama’s Democratic Party administration had labelled Assange a “high-tech terrorist.” The Labor government in Australia, where Assange holds citizenship, had denounced WikiLeaks’ publications as “illegal activity.”

Within a matter of months, however, the vast majority of the ex-left and ex-liberal political and media fraternity lined up with the US state and its allies against Assange. Publications such as the *New York Times* and the *Guardian*—which had worked with WikiLeaks to publish the Manning leaks because they were going to be published anyway—devoted their resources to slandering Assange as a “suspected” rapist and self-serving narcissist, undeserving of any popular sympathy and support. The unions and fake-left organisations internationally actively opposed any campaign in his defence, refusing to discuss his case and boycotting all actions taken to demand his freedom.

The political reasons this turn against WikiLeaks took place must never be forgotten. It occurred in the wake of massive social upheavals, which were in part triggered by information contained in the Manning leaks, which brought down US-backed regimes. *Foreign Policy* magazine nervously asked in January 2011 if Tunisia was the first “WikiLeaks Revolution.” Just weeks later, the seemingly all-powerful dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak was overthrown by a mass movement of the Egyptian working class.

The establishment “left” parties, unions and media are tied by a thousand threads to the financial and corporate oligarchy and benefit from the ruthless exploitation of the vast majority of the world’s population. The way in which the truth had motivated ordinary people to rise up in open rebellion against entrenched elites was viewed in these circles with horror. A mass upheaval demanding an end to social inequality and political injustice in the United States, for example, would threaten the wealth and power of the capitalist class and privileged upper-middle class, of which they are part and which they serve.

The instinctive response of the establishment organisations and media was to join with the state apparatus in seeking to prevent or censor future exposures. As *New York Times* editor Bill Keller bluntly wrote in November 2010 in response to WikiLeaks: “When we find ourselves in possession of government secrets, we think long and hard about whether to disclose them... Freedom of the press includes *freedom not to publish, and that is a freedom we exercise with some regularity.*” [Emphasis added].

The hatred of the ex-liberal publications for Assange reached visceral levels in 2016 when WikiLeaks published leaked emails that shed further light on the militarist, big business and authoritarian agenda of Hillary Clinton and the Democratic Party—their preference in the US presidential election. The *Times* and the *Guardian* spearheaded the campaign to promote the lie that Assange had “conspired” with Russian intelligence to hack the emails, and to smear him as a “tool” of Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump.

In July 2019, a US court dismissed the allegations that

WikiLeaks had worked with Russian agencies as “entirely divorced from the facts” and defended WikiLeaks’ right to publish the leaks as “plainly of the type entitled to the strongest protection that the First Amendment offers.”

The *Times* and *Guardian*, however, have never retracted their false accusations and slanders. To this day, the *Times* and the Democratic Party machine publicly advocate that Assange be criminally prosecuted over their incessant claims that Russian “interference” cost Clinton the 2016 election. In April 2019, the *Times* published comments that described the first conspiracy charge against Assange as an “indisputable crime.”

Given its record, the *New York Times* plumbed the depths of hypocrisy in its editorial on January 22 on the charging of Glenn Greenwald. It asserted that Greenwald’s publication of leaks in Brazil “did what a free press is supposed to do: they revealed a painful truth about those in power.” The editorial concluded: “Attacking the bearers of that message is a serious disservice and a dangerous threat to the rule of law.”

The reality is that the *Times*, along with numerous ex-left and ex-liberal organisations and publications, has proven through its complicity in the persecution of Assange and WikiLeaks that its class allegiances lie with the corporate oligarchy and the capitalist state.

A genuine defence of persecuted journalists and whistleblowers will be taken forward only by the working class, whose right to know the truth they have courageously served.

Julian Assange is imprisoned in Britain and his extradition trial begins on February 24 in London. Chelsea Manning is in a cell in the United States, Edward Snowden is in forced exile in Russia and now Glenn Greenwald is under threat in Brazil. All those who defend the fundamental democratic rights at stake in their cases have the responsibility to fight for the greatest possible independent mobilisation of workers and young people to demand their immediate and unconditional freedom.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact