

New conflict of interest evidence against UK judge in charge of Assange extradition process

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Information has come to light demonstrating that the chief magistrate overseeing the extradition proceedings against Julian Assange received financial benefits from organizations with close ties to the UK Foreign Office prior to her appointment.

According to a report on Friday in the South African-based *Daily Maverick*, Lady Emma Arbuthnot attended, along with her husband Lord Arbuthnot of Edrom, all-expenses-paid secretive gatherings of the organizations Tertulias and Tatlidil in 2014 that included numerous UK foreign policy officials. Lady Arbuthnot was appointed chief magistrate in Westminster in October 2016.

Although as of November 2019 Arbuthnot is no longer formally presiding over the Assange extradition proceedings, she has refused to recuse herself and remains in a supervisory role overseeing the trial with her subordinate District Judge Vanessa Baraitser on the bench. According to the UK court rules, the chief magistrate is “responsible for ... supporting and guiding district judge colleagues.”

The *Daily Maverick* report states: “Tertulias, an annual forum held for political and corporate leaders in the UK and Spain, is regarded by the UK Foreign Office as one of its ‘partnerships’.” In attendance at the Tertulias conference in Bilbao, Spain in October 2014 was Conservative Party member Liz Truss, who is now UK Trade Secretary. The report says, “Liz Truss, then Justice Secretary, ‘advised’ the Queen to appoint Lady Arbuthnot in October 2016.”

The expenses of Lady Arbuthnot at the Bilbao conference were covered by the Tertulias organization, since her husband, “a former Conservative defense minister with extensive links to the British military and intelligence community exposed by WikiLeaks,” was the chairman of the organization.

Lady Arbuthnot was also present with her husband at the British-Turkish Tatlidil Forum in Istanbul in November 2014. *Daily Maverick* describes Tatlidil (Turkish for “sweet talk”) as “a forum established by the UK and Turkish governments for ‘high level’ individuals involved in politics and business.” Those present included Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

The report states that the UK delegation to the Tatlidil forum in Istanbul, “was led by Prince Andrew, who also hosted the Tatlidil in Edinburgh the previous year. Then foreign minister Tobias Ellwood spoke at the forum while former foreign secretary Jack Straw, who is a co-chair of Tatlidil, presided over one of the discussions. Erdoğan spoke at the meeting and reportedly called for the removal of Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad.”

The report also states that it is possible that Lady Arbuthnot “may not have attended the discussions since there was a separate ‘spouses/partners programme’ involving local visits.” James and Emma Arbuthnot’s expenses of £2,426 for the trip were paid for by the organization.

Daily Maverick goes on to explain that the business offices of these two organizations, despite no obvious connection between them other than their connection to the UK Foreign Office, are located at the same address.

The report says that “both Tertulias and Tatlidil had been managed by the same person living at the addresses given by parliamentarians. She told Declassified that Tertulias is ‘independent’ but ‘works closely’ with the Foreign Office. When asked about the organisation’s funders or any personnel involved, including its current parliamentary chair, information was refused.”

These revelations provide further evidence that the

long series of legal attacks on Julian Assange leading up to the present effort to extradite him to the US have been part of a coordinated international campaign by the UK and US military-intelligence establishment against the WikiLeaks founder and journalist in violation of his basic democratic rights.

The very same people from the UK Foreign Office with whom Chief Magistrate Arbuthnot had been hobnobbing before her appointment have made the most vociferous denunciations of Assange, calling him “a miserable little worm.” They refused to recognize his right to asylum in Ecuador, leaving him trapped inside the Ecuadorian Embassy in London for seven years before British police dragged him out and arrested him last April.

Arbuthnot repeatedly expressed animosity toward the WikiLeaks journalist in court and twisted the law to justify his continued persecution. This began with her first ruling in February 2018 against a motion by Assange’s defense team that his British arrest warrant be lifted on the grounds that the concocted Swedish allegations against him, on which the warrant was based, had been dropped.

Arbuthnot also defied the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention’s determination that Assange’s forced stay inside the Ecuadorian embassy was “arbitrary detention.” She ruled: “I give little weight to the views of the Working Group. I do not find that Mr. Assange’s stay in the Embassy is inappropriate, unjust, unpredictable, unreasonable, unnecessary or disproportionate.”

Last year, when the fact that her husband was a leading figure of British foreign policy was originally brought to light as a violation of the “Guide to Judicial Conduct” in England and Wales, Arbuthnot ignored calls for her recusal. Yet the activities of Lord Arbuthnot and his associates at the defense contractor Thales and British intelligence were the subject of thousands of WikiLeaks exposures, making the conflict of interest that much more obvious.

The role of the Arbuthnots in the persecution and imprisonment of Assange, and his extradition trial that is set to begin on Monday, is a critical indicator of the high-level conspiracy by powerful individuals in the British government, in cooperation with Washington DC, to punish and destroy the WikiLeaks founder.

The exposures published by WikiLeaks have dealt a

devastating blow to the capitalist ruling elite by bringing the truth about imperialist and corporate crimes to the people of the world. The fight for the freedom of Julian Assange, who is guilty of nothing other than being a courageous journalist, must be taken up in every workplace, neighborhood and school.

The author also recommends:

Judge Emma Arbuthnot refuses to recuse herself in show trial of Julian Assange

[11 July 2019]

Assange judge blocks extradition to Azerbaijan of ‘McMafia’ wife

[2 October 2019]



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