Online book launch of *The Most Dangerous Man in the World* defends Assange

Oscar Grenfell
11 July 2020

On Wednesday evening Gleebooks, a leading Sydney bookstore, hosted an online launch of Andrew Fowler's updated biography of Julian Assange entitled *The Most Dangerous Man in the World*.

The event was a welcome breach in the official silence on Assange's plight by the Australian political and media establishment, which is usually punctuated only by the promotion of lies and slanders directed against the WikiLeaks founder.

Veteran journalist Fowler, who has received multiple awards for his investigative journalism, was interviewed by Mary Kostakidis, who hosted the "SBS World News" national television program for more than two decades.

The two journalists were forthright in their defence of Assange, who is incarcerated in Britain's maximum-security Belmarsh Prison and faces extradition to the US, where he would be imprisoned for life for exposing American war crimes.

They did not pull any punches in indicting Australian governments for their role in the persecution of the WikiLeaks founder. Both condemned the failure of many of their colleagues to defend Assange and insisted that the fight for his rights was essential to the defence of press freedom worldwide.

The first edition of Fowler's biography was published in 2011, amid the global political upheavals sparked by WikiLeaks' publication of hundreds of thousands of US diplomatic cables exposing Washington's political interference operations, coup-plotting and connivance in the corruption of its client regimes.

At the time, Assange was being denounced as a "terrorist" by senior US political figures, including current Democratic Party nominee for president, Joe Biden. He was already being ensnared in the British legal system, on the basis of bogus allegations of sexual misconduct in Sweden, ably exposed as a politically-motivated frame-up by Fowler.

The book was based on extensive research, including dozens of interviews with Assange. It took its name from former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger's description of Daniel Ellsberg, the famous Pentagon Papers leaker who exposed the criminality of the Vietnam war in the 1970s, as "the most dangerous man in the world."

While not uncritical of Assange, it was unequivocal in its conclusion that WikiLeaks had "delivered to journalism an old-fashioned idea reborn: real journalism is simply the disclosure of whatever powerful vested interests want kept secret."

Fowler began working on the updated edition, recently published by Melbourne University Press, when Assange was illegally expelled from Ecuador's London embassy and arrested by British police last year. Excerpts published in the media include meticulous accounts of the CIA-directed spying operation that targeted Assange while he was a political refugee in the embassy.

Fowler began on Wednesday by outlining the objective significance of WikiLeaks' publications, including the infamous "Collateral Murder" video showing US soldiers gunning down Iraqi civilians and the US army logs exposing war crimes in that conflict and in Afghanistan. These revelations had "ripped the scab off what the Americans and their allies were doing in the Middle East, the torturing, the killing, the body count of those who died," Fowler said.

He stated that the exposures had "given us a contemporary view of the world. We didn't have to wait for twenty or thirty years to find out the truth of what the foreign policy establishment had been up to.

© World Socialist Web Site

We didn't have to put up with the censorship. It was there, raw data, you make up your mind… It was revolutionary."

The WikiLeaks model created the conditions for the continuous release of hidden information, in real time, something Fowler said was viewed as "extremely dangerous" by governments seeking to conceal the truth and hostile to the organisation's record of source protection.

Speaking of Assange's motivations, Fowler stated: "His commitment to human rights and to exposing unpalatable public truths is what drove him. I think that we as journalists should be more supportive of him than we are now, because of what he taught us."

The author exposed the slanders used to undermine support for Assange. He had never been charged in Sweden on the basis of the sexual misconduct allegations, which Fowler described as "flimsy," and "an attempt to get him" for exposing war crimes.

The claims that Assange was a Russian agent were no less baseless. They were aimed at covering up WikiLeaks' exposure of the Democratic National Committee's (DNC) rigging of its 2016 presidential primaries against Bernie Sanders and in favour of Hillary Clinton. Fowler stated unequivocally that he would have published the DNC emails because they were true and in the public interest, asking: "What journalist in their right mind wouldn't have?"

Turning to the US attempt to extradite Assange, Fowler detailed evidence he has collated showing that illegal surveillance of the WikiLeaks founder, including his privileged discussions with lawyers, had been overseen by the American government. This rendered any US prosecution of Assange unlawful.

The bar for extradition from Britain to the US, however, is "extremely low," Fowler warned. He outlined the bias of the British judiciary, including the close ties between Judge Emma Arbuthnot, who is directing the hearings, and the security establishment.

Kostakidis stated: "You and I and others can see there has been a relentless unfolding of an injustice here. Yet our prime minister [Scott Morrison] says Julian should 'face the music.'" She asked why Fowler thought the government had abandoned Assange, despite the fact that he is an Australian citizen and journalist.

In reply, the author noted that it was not just the current government that had greenlighted the persecution of Assange. In 2010, the Labor government of Julia Gillard had falsely accused him of having "broken the law." Bob Carr, Labor foreign minister from 2012–2013, said that Assange had received "more than enough Australian consular assistance."

This stance, Fowler said, was inextricably tied to Australia's close alliance with the US, including its integration into American military and intelligence networks. The politicians who had taken part in the campaign against the WikiLeaks founder would be responsible for his dispatch to the US, which Fowler said Assange would "not survive."

He said that the government should demand an end to the extradition proceedings, on the grounds that they were a "political prosecution," but pointed to the crucial and increasing support for Assange among the public.

In the question and answer session, a WSWS reporter asked about the silence of current Labor leader Anthony Albanese over Assange's plight. Fowler responded that he did not think anything would change if Labor were in power, "because they stick very closely to the script on national security and intelligence." No less than the Liberals, Labor was hostile to "any criticism of the United States."

Replying to questions about the implications of Assange's case for press freedom, Kostakidis warned that it would establish a precedent for any journalist who fell foul of the US military and intelligence establishment to be extradited to America, regardless of where they are in the world.

Fowler said that "this has a chilling effect on journalists… That's the reason the Assange case is so important for journalists. If you didn't get it before, you must get it now: that you're next." Condemning those journalists who had abetted the attacks on Assange, Fowler stated that the purpose of genuine journalism was to "hold truth to power. Unless you're doing that, why bother being a journalist?"

A video of the full event is available on Consortium News *here.*

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site