Canada’s state broadcaster CBC peddles lies and slanders about jailed journalist Julian Assange

J.D. Palmer
24 January 2022

The World Socialist Web Site *received the following guest contribution from J.D. Palmer, a freelance journalist and fiction writer from Montreal. Palmer recently submitted a formal complaint to Canada’s state broadcaster, CBC, over its coverage of last month’s UK court ruling against the acclaimed journalist Julian Assange, which cleared the way for his extradition to the US to face trumped-up espionage charges. Yesterday, Britain’s High Court ruled that Assange’s legal team has the right, albeit only on very narrow legal grounds, to appeal the decision ordering his extradition at the country’s Supreme Court.*

***

Following the calamitous ruling on December 10, 2021 by a British court to extradite Julian Assange to face espionage charges in the US, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) aired two reports, densely packed with hideous deceptions that lend support to Washington’s efforts to persecute and silence the award-winning journalist.

I filed a complaint with the CBC Ombudsman on December 18, wondering how Canada’s public broadcaster could possibly justify its malevolent reportage.

Having laid bare the US empire as a never-ceasing conveyor belt of war crimes, Assange exposed Washington’s lies of “nation building” in Afghanistan and Iraq as a vast “money laundering” operation.

And yet, as his legal case progressed, it was clear that the Wikileaks founder’s heroism was resulting in his slow murder via multi-state judicial corruption. In response to this remarkable case, in one of many examples of journalistic malfeasance, Chris Brown, in his report for the CBC’s flagship news program “The National,” falsely asserts that Assange “leaked” the cables that contained the infamous Collateral Murder video. Brown, a long-time CBC correspondent, can presumably distinguish between publishing and leaking. Determined to confuse the viewer, Brown fails to mention the role of whistleblower Chelsea Manning (Assange’s source) and through conflation taints the journalistic credentials of the man who exposed torture at Guantanamo.

Brown knows quite well that publishing leaks is the backbone of national security journalism with the quotidian apparatus of “legacy” newspapers like the *New York Times*, providing potential whistleblowers with technical instructions on their websites for evading detection. That’s why, as CBC fails to inform the viewer, the Obama administration chose not to prosecute Assange (a decision later reversed by Trump’s Department of Justice or DOJ). Due to what it deemed the “ *New York Times* problem,” such a precedent, Obama’s DOJ concluded, could be used against fellow elites.

Now in the hands of Biden’s DOJ, this clear case of selective prosecution by the US and its colluding vassal state, the UK, has been denounced by legal experts, a swath of trade unions and activists. And while one can reliably count on Canada’s public broadcaster to ignore grassroots campaigns, what’s remarkable is that the CBC’s reporting on this historic case sinks below even the corporate media’s degraded standards.

Both CBC reports dodged press freedom groups, humanitarian organizations, politicians and the sorts of celebrity activists that would normally be made the unabashed focal point of any press coverage of a humanitarian cause. Brown’s segment, as well as Tessa Arcilla’s segment for the CBC morning news, made reference only to Assange’s partner, Stella Moris, and “supporters,” aiming to paint protestors as merely fringe and familial.

When I contacted Moris about my intention to file a complaint with the CBC’s Ombudsman, she wondered why CBC had not, at the very least, “... provided equal length to the defence arguments or arguments from press freedom groups and Amnesty [International]?”

By December 10, Nils Melzer, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, was just one of many impartial legal and humanitarian experts seeking the attention of any media organization that would listen. Melzer, along with a medical team, had adjudicated Assange as a victim of torture, after finding him in a degraded and frail state in Belmarsh Prison, “Britain’s Guantanamo Bay.”

While other networks provided at least some time for humanitarian lawyers, such as Reporters Without Borders’ Rebecca Vincent, to refute the US’s case, no legitimate expert found their way onto the screens of CBC’s viewers. Instead, viewers were presented with camouflaged shills.

Only a week prior, the CBC, already swimming in ethics-based scandals, was identified as a major culprit in a study by *Ricochet Media* documenting the habitual passing off of lobbyists as neutral experts. And yet, unrepentantly, both segments on December 10, drew on dubious legal opinions, obscuring the partisan pedigrees of their commentators. Outrageously, the ghoulish Nick Vamos, whose last British government post was as the Washington liaison to the DOJ, and who has now become a “private prosecutor” (according to his employer’s website) is wearing only his solicitor’s cap, as “Partner,” when he cavalierly dismisses objections to extradition as unfounded.

Had the CBC’s meat puppets read scripts written by MI6 or the CIA, it’s hard to imagine their stories would have been markedly different. Leveraging a courtier class standard of what a “real

© World Socialist Web Site

journalist" is, CBC, like the rest of the media, falls over itself to do the security state's bidding in narrowing the definition. The Assange case is a trial balloon, with press freedoms for non-elites in the crosshairs, to ensure that state violence can proceed with impunity.

While CBC's upper management vociferously decries "misinformation" in self-congratulatory, tone-deaf blogs, presenting itself as brave gate-keepers "battling the growing scourge of disinformation," their history of covering the Assange case provides a window into just how depraved its journalistic culture has become.

Blighting what an international panel of jurists at the UN adjudicated as Assange's "arbitrary detention" in the Ecuadorian embassy, CBC Radio, from 2018 to 2019, aired a series of smear pieces in the guise of lifestyle segments, comedy and news. Often aimed at the Wikileaks founder's alleged hygiene failures, these dehumanizing broadcasts trotted out sketch comedians, UK diplomats and other Assange enemies (such as discredited filmmaker Alex Gibney, and co-fabricator of the debunked Manafort-Assange conspiracy theory, Dan Collyns) as neutral experts. In one sickening case, CBC (in a painfully long segment) offered up a "master butler" to smugly chasten Assange, "If that's the type of service you want, you need to go to a hotel."

None of CBC's hacks seemed to care that they might be willing pawns in a disinformation campaign launched by vicious technocrats, something proven years later when senior members of the UK government were revealed to have conspired to violate Assange's asylum rights. Or when Intelligence firm, UC Global illegally spied on him for the US government. Three years later, in front of the court, Arcilla, pointing keenly to yellow ribbons, said, "The U.S. side has provided assurances that he will not be subject to the strict measures that the lawyers of Julian Assange had been worried about...". Arcilla averted the obvious rejoinders, leaving the viewer with the impression that these so-called "assurances" had gone unrefuted.

Not only did Assange's lawyers reject these so-called assurances, human rights and press freedom groups declared them unenforceable and "not worth the paper they're printed on." In the court case CBC was ostensibly covering, Assange's legal team submitted evidence of the US's history of violating such agreements.

Judge Baraitser in a January 4, 2021, decision denied the US's request for extradition, naming the conditions he would face as inhumane and likely to trigger suicide. But it was the narrow conditions of her ruling that opened a legal aperture to extradition in the subsequent appeal. Baraitser, who had glaring conflicts of interest rejected what was an irrefutable fact, that the prosecution in question was political, by definition, which should have automatically quashed the extradition.

Not only did the CBC subvert what should have been the plinth of their story (the courts' whittling away at the rule of law) but additionally they ignored the fact that one of the US's key witnesses, who was previously convicted on various counts of sexual abuse of minors and financial fraud, had recanted his testimony not long after it secured him immunity from prosecution for fraud. Commensurately CBC's dispatches found no use for dramatic revelations by *Yahoo! News*, only weeks earlier, that a CIA plot to murder or kidnap Assange made it abundantly clear that extradition would put his life in the hands of his would-be assassins.

Arcilla, adding tinder to her immolation of journalistic standards, repeated, without a counterpoint, the thoroughly debunked canard that Assange had "put people in danger." In reality, Wikileaks had achieved the opposite by providing evidence to vindicate the wrongly convicted and by bringing international pressure against the war machine.

Not to be outdone, Brown introduces a "competing narrative," with Assange as a "Russian agent," disrupting Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign by "leaking" Democratic National Committee (DNC) emails that revealed chicanery in the 2016 Democratic primaries. Still appearing befuddled by the words of his own trade, Brown neglects to inform CBC's viewers that the current indictment, which refers only to documents published in 2010, makes no mention of the DNC emails leaked six years later. Yet the esteemed correspondent makes sure to leave the viewer with the opposite impression.

At first, absent Assange owning a time machine, Brown's ahistorical version of the case is baffling. However, his stratagem comes into focus when reviewing the former Moscow correspondent's larger body of work. Smearing the entire Russian Canadian Congress as Putin lackeys in a piece from January 2019, Brown whipped up anti-Russia hysteria, stating, "One of the Kremlin's most prominent propagandists is making an incredible claim that Ottawa is being manipulated from the inside by Nazi-loving Ukrainian nationalists."

Responding to a complaint, Jack Nagler, the CBC's Ombudsman, grudgingly admits the 2019 segment's central claim (now apparently cut from the online version) that a Russian documentary reported that Ukrainian nationalists have seized control of the Canadian government is "literally" untrue. But Nagler brushes aside the problem as a mere case of incautious "wordsmithery" in what must be assumed are CBC's figurative standards for their repeatedly touted "fact-checking" excellence.

Along with nebulous historical connections, Russophobia and grotesque distortions, a key semantic tool deployed by CBC on December 10 was the insidious and hypocritical leveraging of "balance." With Arcilla framing the Assange case as "National Security versus press freedom," and an issue of "where does one draw that boundary," she offers tacit approval for the idea that press freedom and political speech standards should be defined through deference to the war criminals in the national security state.

Absent any whiff of a moral ballast, the CBC fails to grasp the irony of imprisoning a journalist for publishing evidence of war crimes and not the criminals who committed them. As the US led global shop of horrors comes nearer to its goal of criminalizing substantive journalism, the CBC and its gutless class of information dilettantes can rest safely knowing they pose no threat.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site