

Imperialist War Criminals Target Whistleblowers

Free Bradley Manning! Hands Off Julian Assange!

Bradley Manning will have been in military detention for well over two years before court martial proceedings are expected to commence on February 4, 2013. He was a young private in the U.S. Army serving in Iraq. He is accused of using his access to “classified” material to provide government data to WikiLeaks, the website founded by Julian Assange to provide whistleblowers with a way to anonymously make information public. That information has included a mass of material which revealed government and corporate crimes and cover-ups.

One item allegedly leaked by Manning to Wikileaks became widely known as the “Collateral Damage” video. It showed a U.S. Apache helicopter attacking civilians, including two journalists in Iraq – and then attacking other people, including children, who tried to come to their aid. Another was a secret U.S. report describing the corruption and lavish lifestyles of Tunisian dictator Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, with whom the U.S. collaborated. That leaked report added to the already widespread hatred of the regime which was building toward the revolutionary uprising that forced Ben Ali to flee. Items posted on WikiLeaks damaged the image of the United States, exposed the truth of many specific operations and gave a shot in the arm to anti-imperialist movements globally.

Mouthpieces for murderous U.S. imperialism say Bradley Manning attempted to “discredit” the U.S. Army, committed treason and merits punishment by death or life imprisonment. On the contrary, if Manning is responsible for bringing crimes of U.S. imperialism to light, he is a brave and heroic figure and we must unite to fight for his freedom.

TORTUROUS TREATMENT IN MILITARY PRISON

Accused of breaching U.S. national security and



Bradley Manning

designated a “maximum custody detainee,” Manning was originally held for more than a month with no charges. Then he received charges – but after a year many more charges were added on. The most serious one he faces now is “aiding the enemy,” which leads to the death penalty or jail for life.

Manning has been subject to horrific conditions. He was kept in solitary confinement for 11 months and forced to strip naked every night. The U.N. Special Rapporteur on torture, Juan Mendez, wrote in a report that “imposing seriously punitive conditions of detention on someone who has not been found guilty of any crime is a violation of his right to physical and psychological integrity as well as of his presumption of innocence.”¹ Mendez also told *The Guardian* newspaper

that “11 months under conditions of solitary confinement ... constitutes at a minimum cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.”²

Mendez could not reach a more definitive conclusion on whether Manning had been tortured, as it is defined by the U.N., because the Pentagon would not permit Mendez to talk with Manning in private. Disallowing privacy in the investigation is itself a violation of human rights procedures, according to the U.N.

It is President Obama, as well as President Bush and the others before him, who have repeatedly committed real war crimes in practice. As far as the purposeful killing of innocent civilians, such as was exposed in the Collateral Damage video, there has been no attempt to prosecute any of the personnel involved. Rather, the intent is to destroy anyone who attempts to expose the abuses that U.S. forces rain down on the masses in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. On that score, President Obama has been prosecuting more whistleblowers than any previous president.

IMPERIALISM TARGETS JULIAN ASSANGE

More broadly publicized has been the case of Julian Assange, the founder of Wikileaks. In his situation, there is the question of whether or not he is in danger of being persecuted by the U.S. for his role in Wikileaks. There is also the question of his guilt or innocence in regards to allegations of rape and other sexual offences leveled



Wikileaks aided the Tunisian rebellion by its release of secret documents exposing details about the regime. Above is a protest in January 2011, weeks before the president was forced to flee.

against him in 2010 by two women, each of whom had encounters with Assange in Stockholm. The question is about exactly what occurred in each of the two cases where Assange was having a consensual sexual relationship with the women in question. Both women involved claimed to the police that at a point Assange refused to stop when consent was withdrawn. In one case, the woman reported that sex became forced through Assange using his body weight to prevent resistance. We would suggest that our readers read the leaked police report themselves, which relate complex stories of what each of the women allege occurred.³ Both the matter of whether or not he is being persecuted by the U.S. and the matter of whether or not he should be extradited to Sweden for questioning on the rape and other allegations have to be dealt with.

Does the U.S. aim to get Assange? It is worth considering that neither Manning’s lawyers – nor anyone covering the Manning case in a sympathetic way – doubts that the horrible treatment doled out to Manning is not intimately connected to the desire of the U.S. government to get incriminating evidence from him about Assange. On this, in fact the U.N. rapporteur Mendez noted that “the prolonged period of isolated confinement was believed to have been imposed “in an effort to coerce him into ‘cooperation’ with the authorities, allegedly for the purpose of persuading him to implicate others.” So the pressurized treatment of Manning has in

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part reflected the U.S. government's attempt to make him turn state's evidence against Assange. (Manning, in fact, has not entered a plea for himself of any kind, nor offered any indication since imprisoned about any alleged communication with Assange.) *The Guardian* article also pointed out that it was "known that the US department of justice (sic) is conducting a grand jury in Virginia exploring the possibility of bringing charges against Julian Assange."⁴

Currently, Assange is residing in the Ecuadorean consulate in London. Assange and his supporters state this move was necessary because of the danger of being otherwise extradited to the U.S. where he could end up facing execution and be abused and tortured in jail as Manning and so many others have been. Yet there are many voices who have argued that the claim of fear of extradition to the U.S. is bogus, and that the only real question is his evasion of facing questioning in Sweden on the potential rape and sexual misconduct charges.

There are solid reasons to believe that the U.S. wants to get Assange and prosecute him under the Espionage Act of 1917, or any other way they can conjure up, for his role in WikiLeaks. In 2010 the Pentagon labeled Assange a "cyber terrorist."⁵ Fitting in with that label, there is the evidence of the grand jury proceedings already cited above. And, there have been *many* calls by American politicians for Assange to be prosecuted under the Espionage Act of 1917, where conviction can lead to execution.⁶ The decision of the Ecuadorean President, Rafael Correa, to grant political refuge status was motivated largely by the refusal of Great Britain or Sweden to make assurances that Assange would *not* be extradited to the U.S. if his fate was left in their hands.

At the time that Assange sought refuge in Ecuador, Great Britain was in the process of cooperating with the Swedish government's demand that Assange be extradited to Sweden. The degree that Great Britain was eager to cooperate with Sweden in itself was actually unprecedented. Once Assange had been granted refuge by Ecuador, British officials at first threatened, in a written missive to Ecuador, to storm the Ecuadorean embassy in London to get him out. The law the U.K. has informed Ecuador it could use, the Diplomatic and Consular Premises Act 1987, allows the U.K. to revoke the diplomatic status of an embassy on British soil. But it was enacted after a British officer was shot dead by a group of Libyan dissidents in 1984. The BBC's reporter Bridget Kendall, who covered the Assange case, said she could not think of "a precedent in which the Diplomatic and Consular Premises Act 1987 had been used in this way."⁷ The British government has since withdrawn its threat to storm the embassy but says Assange would be arrested if he stepped foot out of the embassy, and in no way would be allowed to go to Ecuador.

Another strong factor in pointing to inter-imperialist

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collaboration to get Assange is the lack of protection offered to Assange by his native country of Australia. As writer Dave Lindorff commented, "Australia and its Prime Minister Gillard have been strangely passive in allowing the US to attack Wikileaks and its founder Julian Assange, an Australian citizen."⁸

Most importantly, as Lindorff's article later points out though, this passivity is just a façade. "My old employer, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, using Australia's freedom of information law, obtained some diplomatic cables showing that the Australian government in Canberra has been working in concert with the Obama administration in the US to facilitate US prosecution of Assange as a spy. The *Morning Herald* also reports that the Australian government has taken steps to prevent further release of its diplomatic correspondence with the US regarding the Assange case."

Indeed, there is very strong evidence that the motive behind Sweden's extraordinarily zealous pursuit of Assange is not really based on their desire to take the women's charges seriously, to investigate thoroughly if sexual crimes were committed. Rather, there are many reasons to believe that Sweden's posture is a ruse to justify getting Assange back to Sweden, after which the Swedish state would in turn cooperate with the U.S. and turn him over.

If the Swedish governmental interest in Assange is only to assess whether he should be charged with rape and/or other acts of sexual misconduct, there can be nothing gained on this matter by sending him to the U.S. Yet, as already indicated, the Swedish government refused to provide a guarantee that Assange would not be extradited to the U.S. As well, they have repeatedly refused to question him in London, while he and his lawyers have repeatedly offered to answer any questions, and which a number of spokespeople who do ardently support the cause of justice for these two women, feel would be a very acceptable step.⁹

Instead, the Swedish prosecutor executed a highly unusual European Arrest Warrant (EAW) simply for the purpose of questioning Assange. Many commentators have opposed this action. For one, former Stockholm Chief District Prosecutor Sven-Erik Alhem stated at a February hearing on the matter: "In my opinion, a

reasonable and professional prosecutor would have sought to interview Mr. Assange in London in order to advance the investigation and in order to find out as soon as possible if there were reasons or not to complete the investigation ... This would be possible if the British authorities agreed and I see no reason why they would not agree to that course of action. This would have been the best and most appropriate solution in order to conduct the interrogation and to obtain Mr. Assange's extremely important evidence."¹⁰

We in the League for the Revolutionary Party are obviously not in a position to determine the veracity of the allegations brought forward by these two women. Some Assange supporters have engaged in what can only be considered character assassination against the complainants. This in itself is outrageous, since there is no way of knowing for sure whether any of the charges are true or not and the method of character assassination to discredit women who make accusations against men regarding sexual violations is tried and true.

The charges of rape and other sexual offences that Assange might be facing can not be substantiated with witnesses or forensic evidence, according to the information that has been available. Thus the just decision of the case would depend on being entrusted to people who could hear both sides; in such a situation finding a jury which lacked biases against the women and lacked biases against Assange would be essential. We cannot put trust in the intentions of the Swedish authorities in the current political situation – and we do not believe that anyone that wants justice for these two women should be fooled into thinking that justice will be served if Assange goes to Sweden in the current climate.

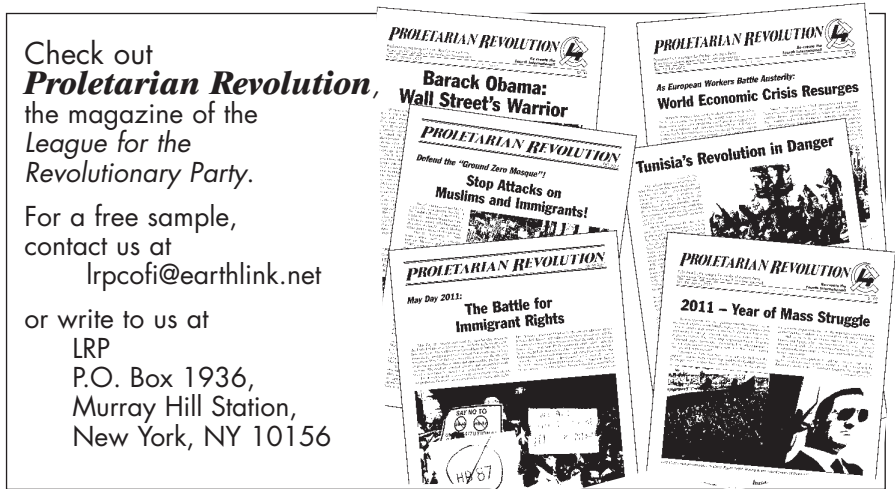
In sum, there is a tremendous amount at stake in defending Assange from the U.S. at this point, not because of any evaluation that Assange personally is a hero or even that he is not in fact a rapist. Nevertheless it is for us a matter of the importance of defending Wikileaks and journalistic freedom and whistleblowers in general. Manning, on the other hand, is already a political prisoner in the U.S. and the stakes in defending him could not be higher. The two cases are strongly tied. We urge our readers and all activists to fight for Bradley Manning's freedom and to defend Julian Assange against any attempts to punish him for his association with Wikileaks.

For more information on Manning's and Assange's cases and defense campaigns, see www.bradleymanning.org, www.standwithbrad.org and freeassange.org. ●

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NOTES

1. For the full Human Rights Council "Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment," which discusses Manning and other victims, see http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Guardian/documents/2012/03/12/A_HRC_19_61_Add.4_EFSONly-2.pdf
2. See Ed Pilkington, "Bradley Manning's treatment was cruel and inhuman, UN torture chief rules," March 12, 2012 at www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/mar/12/bradley-manning-cruel-inhuman-treatment-un/print.
3. Nick Davies, "10 days in Sweden: the full allegations against Julian Assange," December 7, 2010 at www.guardian.co.uk/media/2010/dec/17/julian-assange-sweden for the police report
4. On secret U.S. plans to indict Assange also see the Center for Constitutional Rights statement at <http://ccrjustice.org/newsroom/press-releases/ccr-condemns-reported-sealed-indictment-against-wikileaks-founder-julian-assange>.
5. See Jason Charles, "Pentagon Labels Journalist Julian Assange a 'Cyber Terrorist' Forces Interpol Warrant," Dec. 1, 2010 at <http://truthalliance.net/Archive/News/tabid/67/ID/6606/Pentagon-Labels-Journalist-Julian-Assange-a-Cyber-Terrorist-Forces-Interpol-Warrant.aspx>
6. See Wittes, Benjamin, "Espionage Act Amendments, December 6, 2010 at www.lawfareblog.com/2010/12/espionage-act-amendments. Also see Dorling, Philip, "Sen. Dianne Feinstein Calls for Prosecuting Julian Assange," at www.infowars.com/sen-dianne-feinstein-calls-for-prosecuting-julian-assange.
7. See "Julian Assange: 'UK 'threat' to arrest Wikileaks founder,'" August 16, 2012 at www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-19259623.
8. See Dave Lindorff, "Assange Seeks Asylum in Ecuador: Australia Betrays Its Own Citizen Journalist," June 20, 2012 at www.thiscantbehappening.net/node/1204.
9. See for example, the debate between Jaclyn Friedman and Naomi Wolf at www.democracynow.org/2010/12/20/naomi_wolf_vs_jaclyn_friedman_a or the statement of position by Women Against Rape at www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/aug/23/women-against-rape-julian-assange. These are discussions wherein activists who are strong advocates of prosecution for rape explain why they oppose extradition in this concrete case.
10. McElroy, Wendy, "Extradition Gives America Jurisdiction over the Globe," July 27, 2012 at www.fff.org/comment/com1207x.asp.