

Prisoners of the Empire: Free Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning!

written by Greg Butterfield
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Protest at Foreign Ministry in Quito, Ecuador, against arrest of Julian Assange on April 11.

On April 11, British police dragged [WikiLeaks](#) founder Julian Assange out of the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, where he had lived and worked for nearly seven years, after the turncoat government of President Lenín Moreno revoked his political asylum.

A “bail jumping” charge used to arrest Assange was merely a pretext for the U.S.-ordered assault.

“The U.K. has no sovereignty! The U.K. must resist this attempt by the Trump administration!” Assange yelled out as he was removed from the embassy. [Only one TV camera was present](#) for the arrest — from the Russian RT news service. British and U.S. media, many of whom used WikiLeaks revelations when it suited them to do so, stayed conspicuously away.

As soon as Assange was in custody, the U.S. Justice Department unsealed its indictment of Assange and requested his extradition. The Trump administration charged him with helping Army whistleblower Chelsea Manning, who downloaded damning evidence of U.S. war crimes in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantánamo, and made it public through WikiLeaks.

The charges listed in the extradition request carry a maximum prison term of five years. But it is widely believed that once Assange is on U.S. soil, he will be charged with additional crimes under the Espionage Act — which carries punishments up to and including the death penalty. Legally, Britain could not extradite Assange if it knew he might face capital punishment.

[James Goodale](#), an attorney for the New York Times during the 1971 Pentagon Papers case, called the indictment “a snare and a delusion” by the U.S. government

to divert attention from what is really an attack on all journalists.

Meanwhile, Assange is being held in London's maximum security Belmarsh Prison, [known as "Britain's Guantánamo"](#) for its role following the Sept. 11, 2001, attack in New York. The overcrowded prison includes more than 100 people being held "indefinitely," [according to a 2018 commission](#) that investigated conditions inside the facility.

Daily protests are being held outside Belmarsh demanding Assange's release and no extradition to the U.S. Protests have also been held at U.S., British and Ecuadorian sites worldwide.

Exposing imperialist crimes

While the corporate media and Washington officials promote the lie that Assange ["hacked" Pentagon computers](#), the actual indictment only spells out that he helped Manning cover her digital tracks to avoid detection — something covered by the First Amendment right of journalists to protect their sources.

Manning, the heroic trans veteran who spent seven years in military prison under President Obama, was [thrown back in jail](#) in March when she refused to testify before a grand jury that was fishing for material to use against Assange. This was the tipoff that an attack on the WikiLeaks founder was fast approaching.

Manning spent [almost a month in solitary confinement](#) before protests finally won her release into the general population at the Truesdale Detention Center in Virginia on April 4. But she is still jailed and could be held up to 18 months.

For more than a decade, WikiLeaks has been a vital source for exposing U.S. and Western imperialist crimes against the peoples of the world and here at home. To give just one example, a leaked [Pentagon guidebook on "unconventional warfare"](#) published by the site exposed some of the ways U.S.-dominated international bodies

like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are used in these operations.

Just days after his detention, [Assange received](#) the European Parliament group European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) 2019 Award for Journalists, Whistleblowers and Defenders of the Right to Information.

WikiLeaks also published leaked emails from Hillary Clinton's 2016 election campaign that showed how Clinton's team conspired to steal primary election victories from Bernie Sanders. Enraged Democratic Party leaders tried to tie these exposures to the now-debunked "Russiagate" conspiracy theory and the Mueller investigation of President Donald Trump's alleged collaboration with the Russian government.

Since Assange's arrest, Wall Street hacks like Sen. Chuck Schumer of New York [continue pushing the lie](#) that he is a "Russian agent." [Hillary Clinton](#), who as secretary of state oversaw murderous regime change operations from Libya to Honduras, said that Assange must "answer for what he has done."

While campaigning for president, Trump was happy to use WikiLeaks' revelations for his own political gain. But that changed the moment he assumed power and his own regime's crimes might be exposed. Trump's CIA director, [Mike Pompeo](#), declared WikiLeaks an enemy of the U.S. "akin to a hostile foreign intelligence service," and the administration turned up the heat on Ecuador to hand over Assange.

Expressing the united contempt of the Trump regime and the Republican and Democratic establishment, Democratic [Sen. Joe Manchin told CNN](#) that Assange is "our property and we can get the facts and truth from him."

Manchin's arrogant statement revealed more than he intended. He and the capitalist class he represents believe that not only Assange but all workers and oppressed

people are their “property” and that it is their right to withhold the truth about their crimes from the people.



Worldwide solidarity

Assange’s arrest and the threat of extradition have prompted protests and solidarity from progressive and revolutionary organizations worldwide, as well as whistleblowers, independent journalists, artists and political prisoners.

The people of Ecuador were especially outraged by the Moreno government’s capitulation to U.S. imperialism. On April 16-17, protesters fought [running battles with police](#) in the streets of Quito as they denounced the handover of Assange.

[Former President Rafael Correa](#), a close ally of Venezuela and Cuba who granted asylum to Assange, declared Moreno “the greatest traitor in Ecuadorian and Latin American history. Moreno is a corrupt man, but what he has done is a crime that humanity will never forget.”

Alicia Castro, former Argentinian ambassador to Britain, wrote a statement called

[“My Friend Julian Assange.”](#) Castro explained, “Unlike other platforms, WikiLeaks does not reveal information related to a certain political affiliation, but publishes the information it receives, once it is accurately deciphered and checked, and without revealing the source. It has published more than 10 million classified documents revealing the secrets that once belonged to a small elite linked to the military-industrial complex.”

Cuban 5 hero [Gerardo Hernández](#), who spent 16 years in U.S. prisons for defending his socialist homeland from right-wing terrorists, told Trabajadores newspaper: “I think what is happening to Assange is a shame. We live in a world where people spread lies, half-truths, fake news. Assange and his group disclosed factual information that exposed the global interests of the powers that be, and now they are punishing him for it. His crime is finding the truth and revealing it.”

Hernández, now a deputy of the Cuban National Assembly, said his own experience taught him the dangers that Assange faces if he is extradited to the U.S. “We witnessed how they were always trying to distort the truth as a way of demonizing us.”

British singer-songwriter [Roger Waters](#) explained that Washington and London want to hush up “matters of torture or incarceration of innocent people. And also, what they’re doing — Trump and the rest of them, and Theresa May — is to try to frighten would-be Julian Assanges who may provide this incredibly important service for the rest of us in the future.”

It will take a hard fight to stop Julian Assange’s extradition and win freedom for him and Chelsea Manning, just as today the hard fight to liberate Mumia Abu-Jamal and other truth-telling political prisoners continues. It will be crucial to reach out to the workers of this country and confront them with the question: “Do you have the right to know what Trump, Clinton and their ilk do in your name?”

