

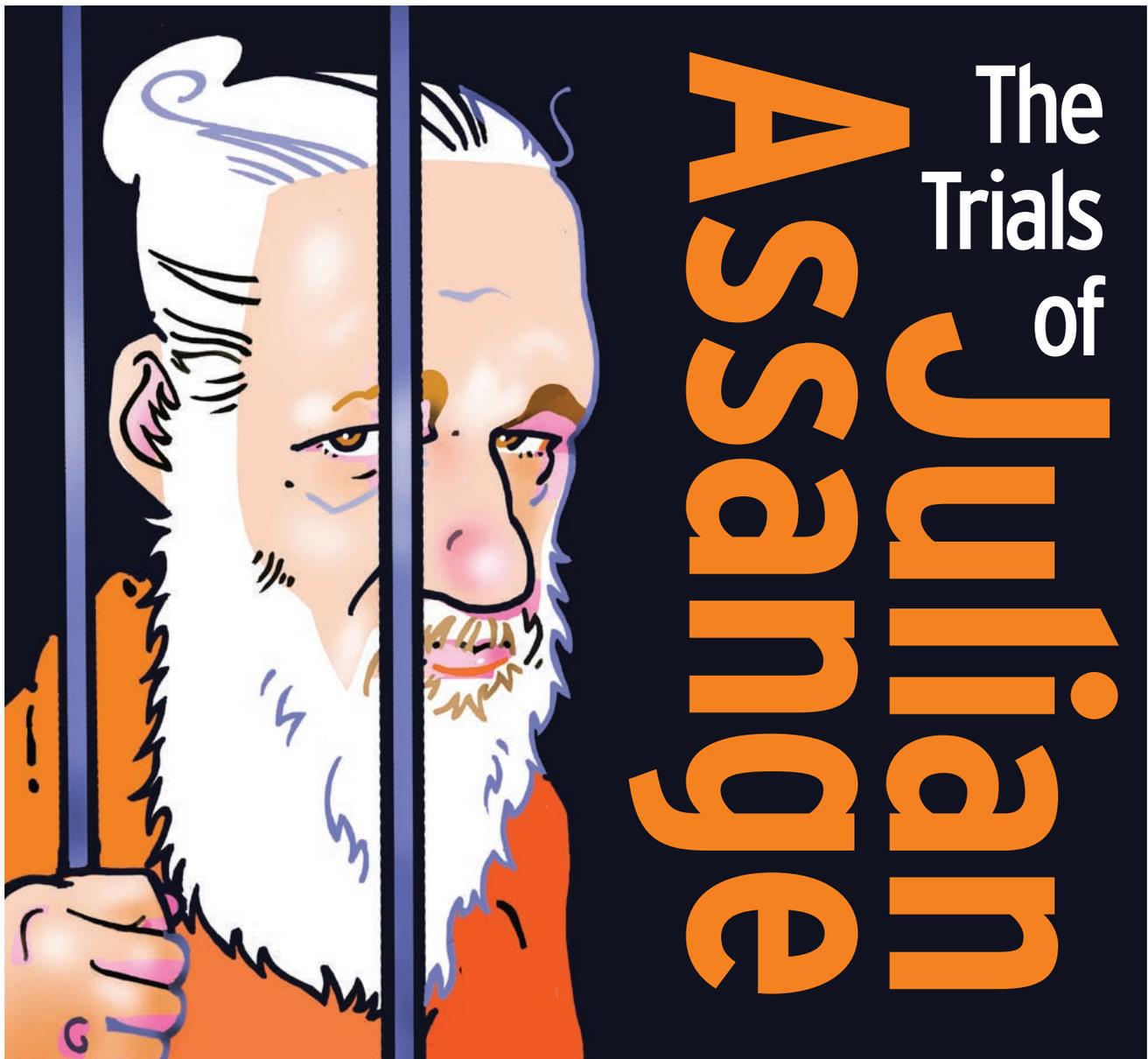
**SPECIAL ISSUE**

ISSUE 183

# ColdType

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MAY 2019



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OFF THE WALL /1 - Occupy LSX, St. Paul's Cathedral, London, 2011.

Photo: Duncan Cumming

# First media hero of the 21st-century

A note from **The Editor**

**F**OR almost seven years, the UK media mocked WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange as he languished in a tiny room at the Ecuadorian embassy in London, after skipping bail to avoid extradition to Sweden on allegations of sexual assault. Protestations that his dash for political asylum was to escape the likelihood of extradition to the US, where he faced life imprisonment for exposing war crimes, were scorned by mainstream newspapers and public broadcasters.

However, their venality was exposed on April 11, when the Ecuadorian government allowed cops into their embassy, where they dragged out the publisher, forced him into a police truck, and took him to a courthouse, where he was speedily convicted of skipping bail.

After being called a ‘narcissist’ by the judge, Assange was packed off to the top-security Belmarsh Prison, described as ‘Britain’s Guantanamo Bay’, where he now awaits sentencing for bail jumping and, more omi-



nously, an extradition demand from the US.

As John Pilger points out on Page 28 of this special issue, the UK media would have been outraged if this chain of events had occurred in Russia. However, Assange’s detention was met with indifference, and a wilful misrepresentation of events leading up to his arrest.

We’d expect nothing less than the vicious gloating from the rightwing *Daily Mail* (above), which regaled its readers with a ludicrous front page detailing how Assange had

been ejected from the embassy because Ecuador was “tired of his ‘discourteous’ behaviour and poor personal hygiene”.

But the actions of the once-liberal Guardian are more shameful. That newspaper has been relentless in its ridicule of the Wikileaks boss, who had been their blue-eyed boy when the newspaper published key parts of the WikiLeaks cache of documents in 2010. Alan Rusbridger, its then-editor, described their publication as “the greatest scoop of the last 30 years”. That ‘scoop’ led directly to Assange’s detention and the US extradition demand, which poses a clear threat to press freedom everywhere.

Julian Assange is guilty only of a courageous act of journalism which – along with Chelsea Manning’s brave whistleblowing – alerted us to the dark evils that lurk behind the curtains of state power. History will certainly judge him, not as a ‘narcissist’ or a scoundrel, but for what he really is – the 21st-century’s first media hero.

*Tony Sutton* - editor@coldtype.net

# How the media uses Assange case to support state attacks on press freedom

By David Edwards & David Cromwell

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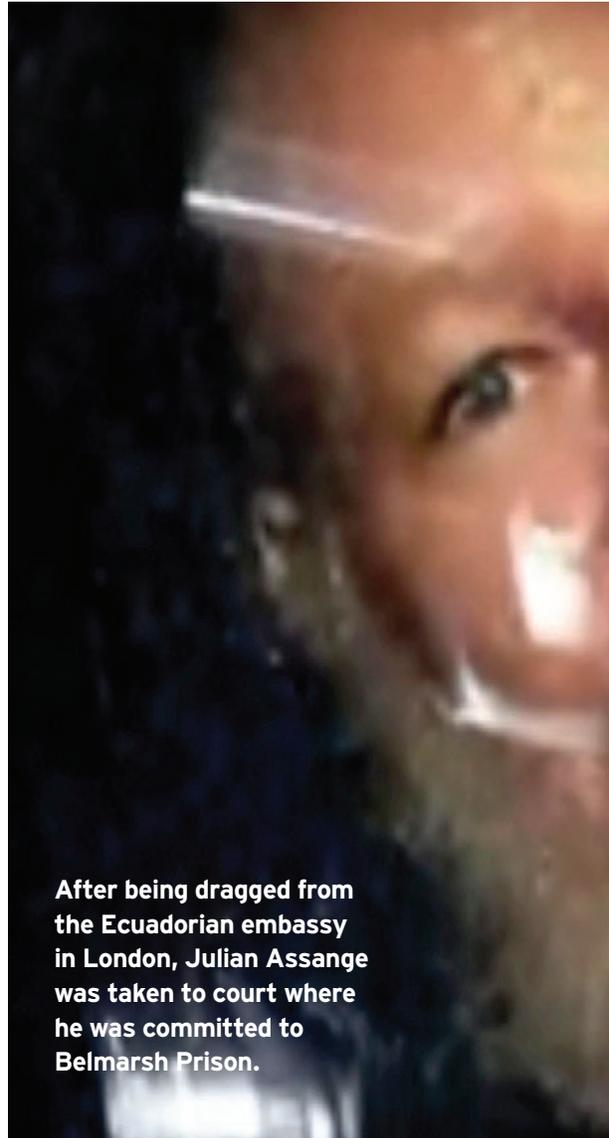
## PART 1

### 'So, now he's our property'

**F** 'journalism' meant what it is supposed to mean – acting as the proverbial 'fourth estate' to challenge power and to keep the public informed – then Julian Assange and WikiLeaks would be universally lauded as paragons. So would Chelsea Manning, the brave former US Army whistleblower who passed on to WikiLeaks more than 700,000 confidential US State Department and Pentagon documents, videos and diplomatic cables about the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The most infamous example was *Collateral Murder*, a video clip filmed from a US helicopter gunship, showing the indiscriminate killing of a dozen or more Iraqi civilians, including two Reuters journalists, in 2007. Shockwaves reverberated around the world, to the deep embarrassment of the US government and military. Today, Manning is incarcerated in a Virginia jail, and Assange is locked up in the high-security HM Prison Belmarsh.

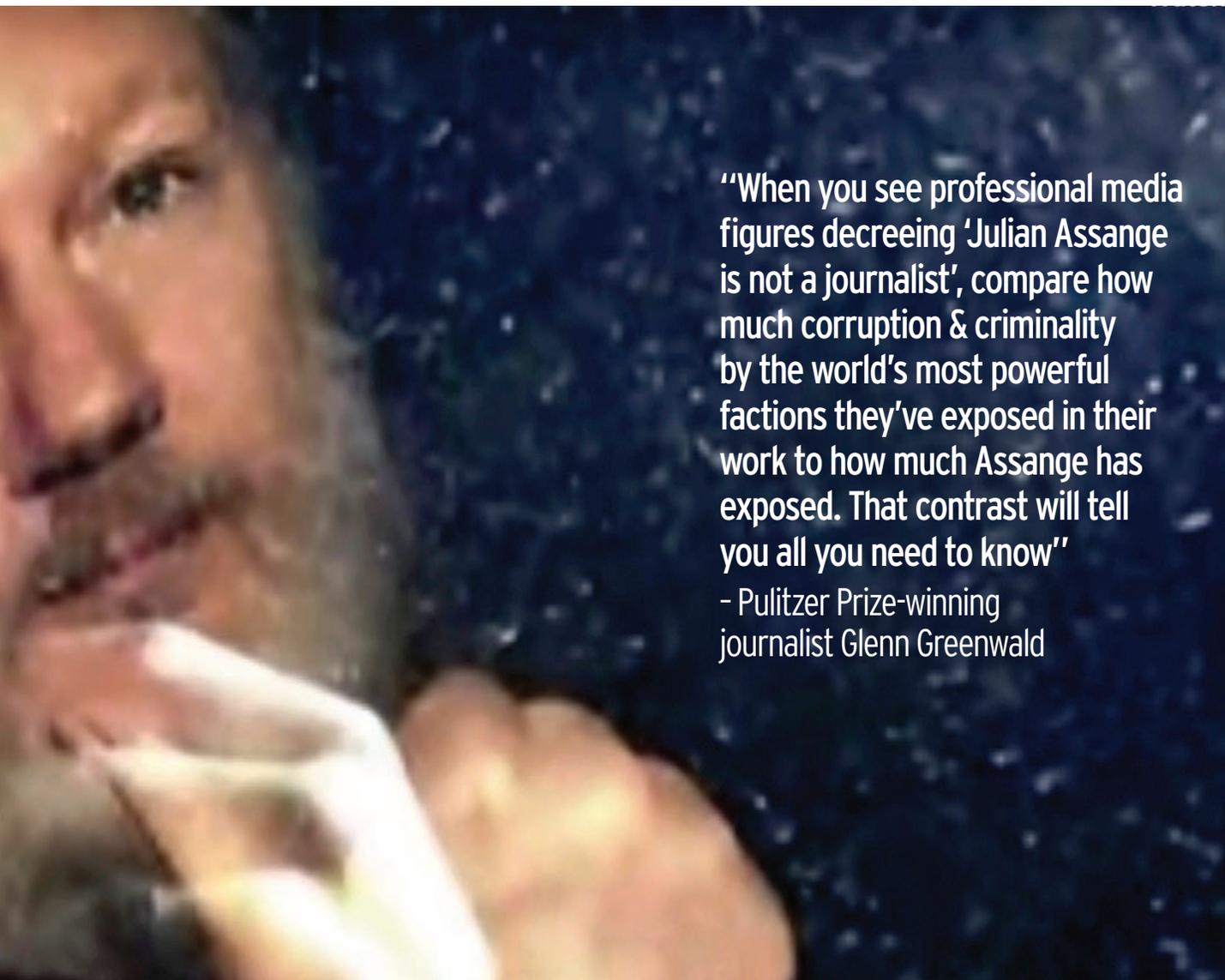
In 2013, Manning was given a 35-year prison sentence for daring to reveal brutal US abuses of power. This was commuted by President Barack Obama in 2017, two days before he left office, and Manning was able to go free. However, in March



After being dragged from the Ecuadorian embassy in London, Julian Assange was taken to court where he was committed to Belmarsh Prison.

she was called to testify against WikiLeaks before a secret grand jury in Virginia. Recognising that this had clearly been set as a trap to incriminate both her and Assange, she refused to answer questions: "I will not participate in a secret process that I morally object to, particularly one that has been used to entrap and persecute activists for protected political speech".

And now Assange, after almost seven years of political



“When you see professional media figures decreeing ‘Julian Assange is not a journalist’, compare how much corruption & criminality by the world’s most powerful factions they’ve exposed in their work to how much Assange has exposed. That contrast will tell you all you need to know”

- Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Glenn Greenwald

asylum in cramped quarters in Ecuador’s embassy in London, and in fading health, has been literally dragged out of what should have been a safe refuge, contrary to international law, and placed at the mercy of UK and US power.

**S**ean Love, a medical doctor who examined Assange while he was in the embassy, was clear that the WikiLeaks co-

founder had suffered badly while in asylum, and would carry that suffering with him for the rest of his life: “Assange does not leave behind the physical and psychological sequelae of his confinement at the embassy. The harms follow him; they are irreparable. The inhumanity of his treatment and the flagrant denials of his universal rights by Ecuador and the UK are unconscionable”.

He also countered the scur-

rilous propaganda that Assange had behaved badly while in the embassy: “Never did I witness Assange having poor hygiene or discourteous behaviour toward embassy staff. His suffering was readily apparent, yet he was always pleasant, professional; admirable characteristics under extreme and punitive circumstances”.

Fidel Narvaez, former consul at the Ecuador embassy from the first day Assange arrived,

on 19 June 2012, until 15 July 2018, said that the claims smearing Assange's behaviour in the embassy were "absolutely false, or distorted, or exaggerated". Narvaez added that: "whenever I was in the room with Julian, there was always an attitude of respect, of mutual respect, always, from all the diplomatic and administrative staff towards Julian and from Julian towards them ... I challenge any member of the embassy staff to cite an occasion when Julian ever – ever! – treated them with a lack of respect".

Narvaez says the atmosphere may well have changed after he left when, he believes, Moreno's regime tried to make life 'unbearable' for Assange in the embassy.

Prime Minister Theresa May boasted of Assange's arrest to Parliament: "This goes to show that in the United Kingdom, no one is above the law".

Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt opined: "Julian Assange is no hero".

US Democratic Senator Joe Manchin celebrated Assange's arrest, arguing that it's "great for the American people": "We're going to extradite him. It will be really good to get him back on United States soil. So now he's our property and we can get the facts and truth from him".

But Rafael Correa, the former president of Ecuador who had granted Assange asylum in 2012, was scathing about the man who had succeeded him in 2017: "The greatest traitor in Ecuadorian and Latin Ameri-

can history, Lenin Moreno, allowed the British police to enter our embassy in London to arrest Assange. Moreno is a corrupt man, but what he has done is a crime that humanity will never forget".

Journalist John Pilger also had strong words: "The action of the British police in literally dragging Julian Assange from the Ecuadorian embassy and the smashing of international law by the Ecuadorian regime in permitting this barbarity are crimes against the most basic natural justice. This is a warning to all journalists".

Former CIA whistleblower Edward Snowden warned: "Assange's critics may cheer, but this is a dark moment for press freedom".

In an interview on *Democracy Now!*, Noam Chomsky called Assange's arrest "scandalous in several respects", and expanded: "One of them is just the effort of governments – and it's not just the US government. The British are cooperating. Ecuador, of course, is now cooperating. Sweden, before, had cooperated. The efforts to silence a journalist who was producing materials that people in power didn't want the rascal multitude to know about [...] that's basically what happened. WikiLeaks was producing things that people ought to know about those in power. People in power don't like that, so therefore we have to silence it. OK? This is the kind of thing, the kind of scandal, that takes

place, unfortunately, over and over".

He added: "The other scandal is just the extraterritorial reach of the United States, which is shocking. I mean, why should the United States – why should any – no other state could possibly do it. But why should the United States have the power to control what others are doing elsewhere in the world? I mean, it's an outlandish situation. It goes on all the time. We never even notice it. At least there's no comment on it."

### Assault on press freedom

Initial news reports had stated that Assange had been arrested merely on alleged breach of bail conditions. A terse update from the London Metropolitan police confirmed the real agenda: namely that the US is seeking his extradition. WikiLeaks expanded: "Assange has been arrested in relation to a US extradition request for 'conspiracy with Chelsea Manning' for publishing Iraq War Logs, Cables, Afghan War Logs, precisely the persecution for which he was granted asylum under the 1951 Refugee Convention in 2012."

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Glenn Greenwald and co-author Micah Lee warned that the US government's indictment of Julian Assange "poses grave threats to press freedom". They explain: "The US government has been determined to indict Julian Assange and WikiLeaks since at least 2010, when the group published hundreds of

thousands of war logs and diplomatic cables revealing numerous war crimes and other acts of corruption by the US, the UK, and other governments around the world. To achieve that goal, the Obama DOJ [Department of Justice] impanelled a grand jury in 2011 and conducted a sweeping investigation into WikiLeaks, Assange, and Manning.

“But in 2013, the Obama DOJ concluded that it could not prosecute Assange in connection with the publication of those documents because there was no way to distinguish what WikiLeaks did from what the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, and numerous media outlets around the world routinely do: namely, work with sources to publish classified documents.”

However, the new indictment under Trump attempts to dissociate Assange and WikiLeaks from journalism. Greenwald and Lee observed that: “The indictment tries to cast itself as charging Assange not with journalistic activities but with criminal hacking. But it is a thinly disguised pretext for prosecuting Assange for publishing the US government’s secret documents while pretending to make it about something else”.

For those scoffing in the corporate media and elsewhere that Assange is “not a journalist”, Greenwald has a pertinent observation: “When you see professional media figures decreeing ‘Julian Assange is not a journalist’, compare how much corruption & criminality by the world’s most powerful



**“Committing crimes overseas gets you to the BBC; revealing them gets you to Belmarsh”**

- Mark Curtis comments on the BBC and Tony Blair

factions they’ve exposed in their work to how much Assange has exposed. That contrast will tell you all you need to know”.

Historian and foreign policy analyst Mark Curtis commented succinctly of the BBC’s continuing love affair with war criminal Tony Blair: “Committing crimes overseas gets you to the BBC; revealing them gets you to Belmarsh”.

**D**aniel Ellsberg, who famously leaked the Pentagon Papers about the Vietnam War, told the Real News Network: “It’s a very serious assault on the First Amendment. A clear attempt to rescind the freedom of the press, essentially. [...] This is the first indictment of a journalist and editor or publisher, Julian Assange. And if it’s successful it will not be the last. This is clearly a part of President Trump’s war on

the press, what he calls the enemy of the state. And if he succeeds in putting Julian Assange in prison, where I think he’ll be for life, if he goes there at all, probably the first charge against him is only a few years. But that’s probably just the first of many’.

Chris Hedges, formerly a reporter with the *New York Times*, gave an ominous warning: “The arrest [on April 11] of Julian Assange eviscerates all pretence of the rule of law and the rights of a free press. The illegalities, embraced by the Ecuadorian, British and US governments, in the seizure of Assange are ominous. They presage a world where the internal workings, abuses, corruption, lies and crimes, especially war crimes, carried out by corporate states and the global ruling elite will be masked from the public. They presage a world where those with the courage and integrity to expose the misuse of power will be hunted down, tortured, subjected to sham trials and given lifetime prison terms in solitary confinement. They presage an Orwellian dystopia where news is replaced with propaganda, trivia and entertainment. The arrest of Assange, I fear, marks the official beginning of the corporate totalitarianism that will define our lives”.

Former UK ambassador Craig Murray made a telling point: “If a Russian opposition politician were dragged out by armed police, and within three hours had been convicted on a political charge by a patently

biased judge with no jury, with a lengthy jail sentence to follow, can you imagine the Western media reaction to that kind of kangaroo court? Yet that is exactly what just happened in London”.

Former *Guardian* journalist Jonathan Cook observed: “For seven years, from the moment Julian Assange first sought refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, they have been telling us we were wrong, that we were paranoid conspiracy theorists. We were told there was no real threat of Assange’s extradition to the United States, that it was all in our fevered imaginations”.

They were wrong. As Assange relayed to the public via his lawyer after his arrest: “I told you so”.

Cook continued: “This was never about Sweden or bail violations, or even about the discredited Russiagate narrative, as anyone who was paying the vaguest attention should have been able to work out. It was about the US Deep State doing everything in its power to crush WikiLeaks and make an example of its founder”.

He added: “Still the media and political class is turning a blind eye. Where is the outrage at the lies we have been served up for these past seven years? Where is the contrition at having been gulled for so long? Where is the fury at the most basic press freedom – the right to publish – being trashed to silence Assange? Where is the willingness finally to speak up in Assange’s defence?”

“It’s not there. There will be no indignation at the BBC, or the *Guardian*, or CNN. Just curious, impassive – even gently mocking – reporting of Assange’s fate”.

We take a look at both BBC News and the *Guardian* later in this article.

## Ecuador bends to Washington

Why did Ecuador rescind Assange’s political asylum? According to Fidel Narvaez, the former Ecuador consul to London, whom we quoted earlier: “[President Lenin] Moreno is using the Assange crisis as a smokescreen to cover up a major corruption scandal that both he and his family are involved in. He claimed that, as a credible pretext to extradite Assange, the government is selling the idea that Assange has hacked President Moreno’s phone, despite Assange’s lack of internet access and with no evidence to substantiate the allegations, and no verification of the claims carried out”.

**T**he anonymous publication of the so-called ‘INA Papers’, implicating Moreno in corruption involving illicit payments to an offshore company, has been cynically exploited by Ecuador as a pretext to expel Assange from the embassy. As journalist Elizabeth Vos observed: “WikiLeaks had reported about the scandal allegedly involving Moreno and his family with INA Investments Corp, though WikiLeaks has

not published any documents related to the case”.

Another salient factor is that, following his electoral victory in 2017, Moreno, who had once been Correa’s vice-president, turned his back on his campaign promises. This is far from unusual in politics, of course. But this was a spectacular turnaround. As independent journalist Joe Emersberger commented: “within three months of taking office, it was obvious that Moreno had been an impostor. He quickly devoted himself to stuffing the pockets and restoring the political dominance of the elites who hated Correa. Moreno has just signed a deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which will further entrench his elite-friendly policies”.

Emersberger added: “Imagine Jeremy Corbyn, the day after he takes office in the UK, announcing that the Conservative Party manifesto is what he had really supported all his life. That would approximate what Moreno pulled off in Ecuador”.

In short, Moreno is keen to bend over backwards to please Washington. Last December, the *New York Times* reported that: “President Lenin Moreno of Ecuador and his aides sought to rid themselves of Mr. Assange in exchange for concessions like debt relief from the United States”.

Ecuador received \$4.2-billion in a US-backed International Monetary Fund bailout on February 4. We are supposed to regard this as mere coincidence.

As recently as December 2018, UN human rights experts had repeated their call for Assange to be allowed to walk free. They noted that he feared arrest by British authorities if he left, followed by extradition to the US. The UK, said the UN experts, should abide by its international obligations and free the WikiLeaks founder. The UK government rejected the call. On Assange's arrest, independent UN human rights experts warned again of the risk of "serious human rights violations" to him. Agnes Callamard, UN Special Rapporteur on extra-judicial executions, tweeted that in "expelling Assange from the Embassy" and allowing his arrest, Ecuador had placed him "one step closer to extradition". She added that the UK had arbitrarily detained him, "possibly endangering his life".

### BBC And Guardian fake news

The BBC was guilty of false framing throughout its coverage of Assange's arrest on April 11. In particular, when Huw Edwards read from the BBC News at Ten script that night: "[Assange] took refuge originally to avoid extradition to Sweden over charges of sexual assault; charges that have since been dropped".

There never were 'charges', as anyone familiar with the facts would be aware. A BBC News website article was later quietly updated, without any apology that we have seen, after we had challenged Nick Sutton, the edi-



**"In expelling Assange from the Embassy and allowing his arrest, Ecuador has placed him one step closer to extradition"**

- Agnes Callamard

tor of the website. As the Defend WikiLeaks website points out: "It is false and defamatory to suggest that Julian Assange is, or has ever been, charged with an offence by the United Kingdom or Sweden".

Adding: "It is false and defamatory to suggest that Julian Assange applied for political asylum over 'sex allegations' or 'extradition to Sweden' or to 'avoid questioning'."

It is a 'key myth', says the Defend WikiLeaks website: "Despite numerous false media reports, Julian's concern was never to avoid extradition to Sweden, but to avoid extradition to the United States – where he would be imprisoned, and, as Ecuador noted in granting asylum, could even face the death penalty. Julian would have accepted extradition to Sweden had the UK provided an assurance against onward

extradition to the US".

Defend WikiLeaks adds: "Despite false media reporting, Julian has also always been willing to present himself to the British police over the bail issue from 2012, again provided that the UK authorities give assurances that he would not be extradited to the US.

"Neither the UK nor Swedish governments have ever provided such assurances against extradition".

Such vital information was glaring by its absence from 'mainstream' reporting; not least in BBC News coverage.

The night of Assange's arrest, BBC Newsnight presenter Katie Razzell began in standard 'impartial' manner in describing his status: "Out of his hiding place and under arrest".

'Hiding place' is BBC newspeak for 'political asylum'. The implication was that Julian Assange had hidden in an attempt to evade justice. This was fake news, repeated on the airwaves and across the BBC website.

One of the most notorious examples of Assange-related fake news was the front-page accusation in the *Guardian* last November that Paul Manafort, Donald Trump's former campaigns manager, had met Assange in the embassy three times. No shred of evidence has ever been produced for this claim, which WikiLeaks and Manafort have both vehemently denied, and the story has been widely regarded as fake from virtually the hour of its publication. Luke Harding,

the lead journalist on the story, and his editors Paul Johnson and Katharine Viner, have never apologised or retracted the story; nor have they responded to the many challenges about it. As we have previously noted, the *Guardian* has a disreputable record in publishing nasty, abusive and derogatory pieces about Assange.

A *Guardian* editorial on the eve of Assange's expulsion at least stated that Assange should not be extradited to the US: "[He] has shone a light on things that should never have been hidden".

However, John Pilger was scathing of the paper he called "Assange's principal media tormentor [and] a collaborator with the secret state", noting that its editorial had "scaled new weasel heights". He continued: "The *Guardian* has exploited the work of Assange and WikiLeaks in what its previous editor called 'the greatest scoop of the last 30 years'. The paper creamed off WikiLeaks' revelations and claimed the accolades and riches that came with them.

"With not a penny going to Julian Assange or to WikiLeaks, a hyped *Guardian* book led to a lucrative Hollywood movie. The book's authors, Luke Harding and David Leigh, turned on their source, abused him and disclosed the secret password Assange had given the paper in confidence, which was designed to protect a digital file containing leaked US embassy cables."

The editorial misled its readers on why Assange had sought

refuge: "When he first entered the Ecuadorian embassy he was trying to avoid extradition to Sweden over allegations of rape and molestation. That was wrong".

As we saw above, this is a grotesque twisting of the facts. Indeed, the *Guardian* editorial was steeped in sophistry: "the Assange case is a morally tangled web. He believes in publishing things that should not always be published – this has long been a difficult divide between the *Guardian* and him".

Pilger demolished the *Guardian's* obfuscation: "These 'things' are the truth about the homicidal way America conducts its colonial wars, the lies of the British Foreign Office in its denial of rights to vulnerable people, such as the Chagos Islanders, the exposé of Hillary Clinton as a backer and beneficiary of jihadism in the Middle East, the detailed description of American ambassadors of how the governments in Syria and Venezuela might be overthrown, and much more. It is all available on the WikiLeaks site".

**O**n April 14, the *Guardian* website even ran an 'exclusive' that was essentially a disgraceful series of dishonest excuses by Ecuador president Lenin Moreno for kicking Julian Assange out of the London embassy. As Jonathan Cook rightly noted via Twitter: "Notice how the *Guardian* is now the go-to place for vassal state

politicians – Ecuador's Moreno, Venezuela's Guaido – to convey propaganda on behalf of the US national security state. And the *Guardian* has the gall to call such stenography an 'exclusive'."

In an interview with Afshin Rattansi on RT's *Going Underground*, Pilger pointed out that Assange and WikiLeaks had angered Washington by exposing US crimes and deceptions to the global public: "what we are in the midst of is the world's greatest superpower struggling to maintain its dominance. Its information dominance, its technological dominance, its cultural dominance. And WikiLeaks has presented an extreme hurdle to this".

He concluded: "We've handed a whole world of abandonment of basic democracy, which is based on dissent, on challenging, on holding power to account, on revelation, on the embarrassment of power. Not trivial embarrassment, the embarrassment of odd celebrity, but real embarrassment. And WikiLeaks provided that public service of journalism".

## PART 2

### 'A definite creep, a probable rapist'

**I**n December 2010, *Guardian* columnist Suzanne Moore commented on Julian Assange in the *Mail on Sunday*: "Indeed it's difficult to get a clear picture of the com-

plaints by two women he had sex with in Sweden in August... The sex appears to have been consensual, though his refusal to use condoms was not. His behaviour looks bad rather than illegal but who really knows? The Swedish prosecutors themselves say they believe these women's stories but don't believe these are crimes".

"Who really knows?" The answer, of course, was and is that, in the absence of a trial, nobody except the people directly involved knows what really happened.

If Moore was somewhat reasonable in 2010, her stance had changed by June 2012, when Assange sought political asylum in Ecuador's London embassy – a time when, still, nobody really knew what had happened. She tweeted: "Seems like Assange's supporters did not expect him to skip bail? Really? Who has this guy not let down?"

She added: "I bet Assange is stuffing himself full of flattened guinea pigs. He really is the most massive turd".

As discussed in Part 1, the nub of this 'mainstream' scorn was the belief that Assange's concerns about extradition were a cowardly excuse for fleeing possible sex crimes – fears of extradition were a nerdish, paranoid fantasy. Moore wrote in 2011: "The extradition hearing last week involved massive showboating on both sides. Assange supporters were gathered outside the courts dressed in orange Guantanamo Bay jumpsuits. Does anyone seriously believe this is what will



**"... a demented looking gnome is pulled out of the Ecuadorian embassy by the secret police of the deep state"**

- Newspaper columnist  
Suzanne Moore

happen to Assange?"

It is a bitter irony, then, that Assange is currently trapped in the high-security Belmarsh Prison, which has been described as 'Britain's Guantanamo Bay'.

The fact that Assange has now been arrested at the request of the US seeking his extradition over allegations that he conspired with Chelsea Manning, means that Assange's claimed motive for seeking political asylum now appears very credible indeed – he was right about US intentions.

**A**ssange can now be depicted as a cowardly fugitive from Swedish justice only by someone finding it outrageous that he should resist extradition by the Trump regime to spend the rest of his life in jail, or worse.

In other words, if corporate journalists are responding to

the facts, rather than power-serving prejudice, recent events should have moderated their stance towards Assange. It is easy to check.

**"Everyone's least favourite squatter"**

Suzanne Moore commented in the *New Statesman* after the arrest: "O frabjous day! We are all bored out of our minds with Brexit when a demented looking gnome is pulled out of the Ecuadorian embassy by the secret police of the deep state. Or 'the met' as normal people call them".

In other words, Assange remains the same wretched, risible figure he was before Moore came to know he had been arrested on charges relating to US extradition. She added bizarrely on Twitter: "Assange supporters. Cunt soup babbling about on press freedom".

In an article for the *Sunday Times* on April 14, James Ball claimed that: "Julian Assange is the architect of his own downfall. Bullish and grandiose yet plagued by paranoia, the WikiLeaks boss is his own worst enemy".

Ball briefly worked for WikiLeaks, with Assange as his boss, between late 2010 and early 2011. His departure from the organisation was acrimonious.

As we mentioned in Part 1, the *Guardian* has a shameful record in its treatment of Assange. Ball was always happy to act as chief attack dog for the paper. A piece in January 2018 was titled, "The only bar-

rier to Julian Assange leaving Ecuador's embassy is pride". Below it were the words, "The WikiLeaks founder is unlikely to face prosecution in the US"; an assertion that has clearly not aged well. Ball even made the poisonous assertion that: "most of those who still support Assange are hard-right nationalists – with many seeing him as a supporter of the style of politics of both Trump and Vladimir Putin".

John Pilger described Ball as a 'despicable journalist'; a 'collaborator' with those in power who have been attacking WikiLeaks and Assange. Ball has repeatedly stated that he opposes Assange's extradition to the US. But for years he depicted him extremely unfavourably, and continues to disparage Assange as "a dangerous and duplicitous asshole" after his arrest.

Writing in the Daily Mirror, 'centrist' Labour MP, Jess Phillips, commented: "Finally Julian Assange, everyone's least favourite squatter, has been kicked out of the Ecuadorian embassy and into custody on charges of skipping bail after accusations of sexual violence in Sweden.

"I am sure we will all miss his speeches from the balcony of the embassy as if he were about to launch into *Don't Cry For Me Argentina*.

"Assange, once beloved for leaking the secrets of global governments, has essentially been reduced to a grumpy, stropy teenager.

"He never left his room,

thought he was the best thing since sliced bread and had his internet taken away when he was naughty".

Phillips offered one serious assertion: "His arrest ended a seven-year stint in the embassy, which he chose. He didn't have to stay there ..."

The obvious fact that the US superpower really was, all the time, out to get him, strongly suggests he did have to stay there and wasn't motivated to avoid facing the far less threatening Swedish accusations.

In 2015, Phillips told the *Guardian*: "The difference between me and some of my colleagues – not all of them – is that I protect myself by shooting things out. So if I see something that I don't like I will say it. I won't sit in some little cabal and whisper about it ... I will go up to Seumas Milne and say: 'Why on earth are you friends with George Galloway? Your personal friendships are fine but if I see you are moving in any way to get Galloway nearer to this party, I'm going to go for you'. I'll just say that to him."

Phillips has certainly gone for Assange.

**O**ther 'mainstream' reaction was a close copy of comments made when Assange first entered the embassy in 2012. Despite reports of an alarming decline in his health after seven years trapped in the embassy, journalists mercilessly mocked Assange's appearance. Ashley Cowburn, political correspondent for the *Independent* tweet-

ed (and then deleted after we noted them) two pictures before and after Assange entered the embassy, commenting: "Political journalists pre- and post-Brexit".

David Aaronovitch of the Times' 101st Chairborne 'Humanitarian Intervention' Division, tweeted with the same compassion that guides his relentless warmongering: "I see Tolstoy has just been arrested in central London".

Jessica Elgot, political editor of the *Guardian*, joined the fun: "Apparently Julian Assange's internet access has been cut off since March so he probably thinks we've left the EU".

Journalist Chris Cook, formerly of BBC's *Newsnight* and the *Financial Times*, referenced an elderly, bearded character from the BBC sitcom, *Only Fools and Horses*: "Justice for Uncle Albert".

ITV Political Editor, Robert Peston, formerly BBC Business Editor, retweeted an image of Christ with his hand raised in blessing paired with a photograph of Assange making a 'victory sign' from inside a prison van. Side-on, Assange's gesture bore a vague resemblance, but Christ was assuredly not signalling 'V' for victory. Like so much 'mainstream' humour, the tweet was embarrassingly unfunny, strangely callous.

The *Daily Express* devoted a whole article to comedy takes of this kind: "HILARIOUS Julian Assange memes have swept Twitter in the wake of the WikiLeaks founder's arrest including one he tried to pass

himself off as Uncle Albert from *Only Fools and Horses* – here are the best ones”.

As noted in Part 1, in the real world beyond the media crèche, a medical doctor who examined Assange in the embassy, commented: “Assange does not leave behind the physical and psychological sequelae of his confinement at the embassy. The harms follow him; they are irreparable”.

The *Scotsman* supplied more evidence that journalists perceive enemies targeted for destruction by the state as the same ‘Bad Guy’ regenerating over and over again, like Doctor Who. Dani Garavelli wrote of Assange’s arrest: “For me, however, the scene brought back memories of Saddam Hussein emerging from his spider hole in Operation Red Dawn ...”

No doubt based on impeccable sources, Garavelli added: “His dishevelment had more to do with his questionable personal hygiene than his living conditions”.

The *Daily Mail* published a deeply totalitarian article titled: “Assange inside his fetid lair: Revealed, the full squalid horror that drove embassy staff to finally kick him out.

“EXCLUSIVE: Photos of Julian Assange’s ‘dirty protests’ have been revealed”.

The ‘Exclusive’ featured pictures of a single unwashed plate, several mugs in a sink and a squeaky-clean toilet.

The BBC’s Jon Sopel North America Correspondent tweeted: “#Ecuador president #LeninMoreno tells me #Julian-



**“Just sayin’ it’s possible to think that Julian Assange is a definite creep, a probable rapist, a conspiracist whackjob”**

- Novara media’s Ash Sarkar

Assange smeared the walls of the embassy with faeces and that is why they revoked his asylum. The #WikiLeaks leader exhausted their tolerance, the president told me @BBCBreaking”

Among others, the claim has also been reported by CNN, the *Washington Post*, the *Atlantic*, Vox, ABC News, Reuters, the Associated Press, *Daily Mail*, Fox News, NBC News, the *Independent*, the *Daily Beast*, the *Wall Street Journal* and *Business Insider*. Reporter Charles Glass described the surveillance he witnessed in the embassy: “He [Assange] made coffee, glancing up at surveillance cameras in the tiny kitchen and every other room in the embassy that recorded his every movement”.

**A**lexander Rubinstein of *Mint Press News* concluded: “As-

sange was under total surveillance while in the embassy. They didn’t release the footage of him smearing his poop on the walls because it simply doesn’t exist. It’s a crock of shit”.

Ostensibly ‘alternative’ *Novara Media*’s Ash Sarkar – who has published numerous opinion pieces in the *Guardian* and *Independent*, and who is a favoured guest on flagship BBC shows like *Daily Politics*, *Question Time*, the *Andrew Marr Show* and *Newsnight* – tweeted: “Just sayin’ it’s possible to think that Julian Assange is a definite creep, a probable rapist, a conspiracist whackjob \*and\* that his arrest has incredibly worrying implications for the treatment of those who blow the whistle on gross abuses of state power”.

Sarkar revealed the depth of her knowledge when she wrote: “His arrest today came \*after\* the investigations into rape and the Swedish arrest warrant were dropped.

“That doesn’t mean he’s innocent of those charges”.

Anyone who knows anything about Assange knows that he has never been charged. But Sarkar’s damning comments on a leading truth-teller facing the wrath of the US state, play extremely well with the ‘mainstream’ gatekeepers selecting BBC guests and *Guardian* contributors. Sarkar deleted the tweet smearing Assange, not because she regretted her appalling comments, but because “ugly stuff defending sexual assault itself has been turning up in my work inbox” from ‘men’.

On April 11, we tweeted: “Whatever you think of [Assange]...’ means, ‘Don’t get me wrong, I’m not one of \*them\*. I’m not rejecting the respectable, mainstream narrative’.”

Synchronistically, one day later, Owen Jones wrote in the *Guardian* under the title: “Whatever you think of Julian Assange, his extradition to the US must be opposed”.

The *Guardian*’s George Monbiot tweeted: “Whether or not you like Assange’s politics (I don’t), or his character (ditto) ...”

At the risk of being annoying, we responded: “George, how much time have you spent with Assange and his unpleasant character?”

We received no reply.

Before the arrest, Channel 4 News Chief Correspondent Alex Thomson commented on WikiLeaks’ complaints about police spying on Assange inside the embassy: “WikiLeaks – it all adds up to WikiLeaks whining about their privacy being invaded. Can’t quite see how this deserves airtime on @Channel4News Am I wrong?”

One day later, when Thomson found himself reporting Assange’s arrest, we asked:

“Was he ‘whining’, Alex?”

Thomson replied:

“Yes – clearly”

In fact, Assange was making a political protest, calling on the UK to resist Trump’s attempt at extradition that might see him spending the rest of his life in jail.

A select few journalists managed to retain their dignity in the face of this callous corpo-

rate herdthink. To his credit, Andrew Buncombe of the *Independent* tweeted: “There’s been an oddly mocking tone to much of the reporting about Assange, whose organisation has revealed more US state crimes than most journalists. Arrest sets an appalling precedent”.

Odd is the word. Buncombe’s tweet brought to mind a comment made by the BBC’s World Affairs Editor, John Cody Fidler-Simpson CBE, about ‘mainstream’ journalism: “There’s something slightly wrong with most of us, don’t you feel? We’re damaged goods, usually with slightly ruffled private lives and unconventional backgrounds. Outsiders, looking in at others from outside”. (“Travels with Auntie”, Lynn Barber interviewing John Simpson, *Observer*, 24 February 2002)

**T**he *Guardian*’s Ewen MacAskill commented: “US did not waste any time putting in extradition request for Assange. Terrible precedent if journalist/publisher ends up in US jail for Iraq war logs and state department cables”.

Remarkably, some supposedly independent, neutral corporate media openly identified with the state. The editorial board of the *Wall Street Journal*: “Julian Assange has done much harm to American interests over the last decade, and on Thursday the WikiLeaks founder moved a large step closer to accountability in a US court”.

Rod Liddle in the *Sunday*

*Times*: “Assange’s publishing of confidential data gravely harmed our interests. In the US he is seen as a terrorist. But a tranche of protesters still believe he is a guardian of truth – and that any wickedness in the world always emanates from the West”.

As Glenn Greenwald commented: “If you’re cheering Assange’s arrest based on a US extradition request, your allies in your celebration are the most extremist elements of the Trump administration, whose primary and explicit goal is to criminalise reporting on classified docs & punish WL for exposing war crimes”.

To add weight to the media campaign, more than 70 MPs and peers wrote to Home Secretary Sajid Javid and the shadow home secretary, Diane Abbott, urging them to focus attention on the Swedish investigations that Assange would face should the case be resumed at the alleged victim’s request. The letter was ‘coordinated’ by ‘centrist’, anti-Corbyn Labour MP Stella Creasy who, appropriately enough, “Generally voted for use of UK military forces in combat operations overseas”. Jonathan Cook commented astutely: “The 70 MPs who signed the letter to Javid hope to kill two birds with one stone.

“First, they are legitimising the discourse of the Trump administration. This is no longer about an illegitimate US extradition request on Assange we should all be loudly protesting. It is a competition between

two legal claims, and a debate about which one should find legal remedy first.

“It weighs a woman’s sexual assault allegation against Assange and WikiLeaks’ exposure of war crimes committed by the US military in Iraq and Afghanistan. It suggests that both are in the same category, that they are similar potential crimes. But there should only be one response to the US extradition claim on Assange. That it is entirely illegitimate. No debate. Anything less, any equivocation is to collude in the Trump administration’s narrative”.

As we have documented, Jeremy Corbyn has been subject to a similarly relentless, cross-

spectrum political and media campaign attacking him for leading Labour towards electoral disaster, for being a serious threat to UK national security, for conspiring with Putin, and above all, of course, for being a menacing antisemite.

And yet the facts speak for themselves: Corbyn has been a tremendous electoral success; the idea that Trump, let alone Corbyn, ‘colluded’ with Putin has proved laughable; and the idea that Corbyn and Labour have an antisemite ‘crisis’ simply defies the known facts of racist prejudice in the leading political parties and wider society.

If the smears are fake, what

is driving them? A clue is provided in a tweet by the Intercept’s Glenn Greenwald: “The only 2 times I can remember establishment liberals like @Hillary Clinton ... uniting with and cheering Trump Admin is when (a) he bombed Syria and (b) they indicted Assange ... That says a lot about their values”.

It does indeed. Beyond the relentless fake news, these same ‘values’ are driving the attempts to destroy both Corbyn and Assange. **CT**

*David Edwards and David Cromwell are co-editors of Medialens – [www.medialens.org](http://www.medialens.org) – the UK media watchdog*



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# The US readies for its first media rendition

By Jonathan Cook

**F**OR seven years, from the moment Julian Assange first sought refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, they have been telling us we were wrong, that we were paranoid conspiracy theorists. We were told there was no real threat of Assange's extradition to the United States, that it was all in our fevered imaginations.

For seven years, we have had to listen to a chorus of journalists, politicians and 'experts' telling us that Assange was nothing more than a fugitive from justice, and that the British and Swedish legal systems could be relied on to handle his case in full accordance with the law. Barely a 'mainstream' voice was raised in his defence in all that time.

From the moment he sought asylum, Assange was cast as an outlaw. His work as the founder of WikiLeaks – a digital platform that for the first time in history gave ordinary people a glimpse into the darkest recesses of the most secure

vaults in the deepest of Deep States – was erased from the record.

Assange was reduced from one of the few towering figures of our time – a man who will have a central place in history books, if we as a species live long enough to write those books – to nothing more than a sex pest, and a scruffy bail-skipper.

**T**he political and media class crafted a narrative of half-truths about the sex charges Assange was under investigation for in Sweden. They overlooked the fact that Assange had been allowed to leave Sweden by the original investigator, who dropped the charges, only for them to be revived by another investigator with a well-documented political agenda.

They failed to mention that Assange was always willing to be questioned by Swedish prosecutors in London, as had occurred in dozens of other

cases involving extradition proceedings to Sweden. It was almost as if Swedish officials did not want to test the evidence they claimed to have in their possession.

The media and political courtiers endlessly emphasised Assange's bail violation in the UK, ignoring the fact that asylum seekers fleeing legal and political persecution don't usually honour bail conditions imposed by the very state authorities from which they are seeking asylum.

The political and media establishment ignored the mounting evidence of a secret grand jury in Virginia formulating charges against Assange, and ridiculed WikiLeaks' concerns that the Swedish case might be cover for a more sinister attempt by the US to extradite Assange and lock him away in a high-security prison, as had happened to whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

They belittled the 2016 verdict of a panel of United Nations legal scholars that the UK was



Stills from the video *Collateral Murder*, leaked by whistleblower Chelsea Manning in 2007 that showed troops in a US gunship celebrating as they killed civilians and journalists in Iraq.

‘arbitrarily detaining’ Assange. The media were more interested in the welfare of his cat.

They ignored the fact that after Ecuador changed presidents – with the new one keen to win favour with Washington – Assange was placed under more and more severe forms of solitary confinement. He was denied access to visitors and

basic means of communications, violating both his asylum status and his human rights, and threatening his mental and physical wellbeing.

Equally, they ignored the fact that Assange had been given diplomatic status by Ecuador, as well as Ecuadorian citizenship. Britain was obligated to allow him to leave the embassy,

using his diplomatic immunity, to travel unhindered to Ecuador. No ‘mainstream’ journalist or politician thought this significant either.

They turned a blind eye to the news that, after refusing to question Assange in the UK, Swedish prosecutors had decided to quietly drop the case against him in 2015. Sweden had kept the decision under wraps for more than two years.

It was a freedom of information request by an ally of Assange, not a media outlet, that unearthed documents showing that Swedish investigators had, in fact, wanted to drop the case against Assange back in 2013. The UK, however, insisted that they carry on with the charade so that Assange could remain locked up. A British official emailed the Swedes: “Don’t you dare get cold feet!!!”

**M**ost of the other documents relating to these conversations were unavailable. They had been destroyed by the UK’s Crown Prosecution Service in violation of protocol. But no one in the political and media establishment cared, of course.

Similarly, they ignored the fact that Assange was forced to hole up for years in the embassy, under the most intense form of house arrest, even though he no longer had a case to answer in Sweden. They told us – apparently in all seriousness – that he had to be arrested for his bail infraction, something that would normally be dealt with by a fine.

And possibly most egregiously of all, most of the media refused to acknowledge that Assange was a journalist and publisher, even though by failing to do so they exposed themselves to the future use of the same draconian sanctions should they or their publications ever need to be silenced. They signed off on the right of the US authorities to seize any foreign journalist, anywhere in the world, and lock him or her out of sight. They opened the door to a new, special form of rendition for journalists.

This was never about Sweden or bail violations, or even about the discredited Russiagate narrative, as anyone who was paying the vaguest attention should have been able to work out. It was about the US Deep State doing everything in its power to crush WikiLeaks and make an example of its founder.

It was about making sure there would never again be a leak like that of *Collateral Murder*, the military video released by WikiLeaks in 2007 that showed US soldiers celebrating as they murdered Iraqi civilians. It was about making sure there would never again be a dump of US diplomatic cables, like those released in 2010 that revealed the secret machinations of the US empire to dominate the planet whatever the cost in human rights violations.

Now the pretence is over. The British police invaded the diplomatic territory of Ecuador – invited in by Ecuador after it tore up Assange’s asylum status – to smuggle him off to jail. Two

## Journalists, politicians and experts knew all along that the US wanted to silence Assange and to crush WikiLeaks. They knew that all along and they didn’t care

vassal states cooperating to do the bidding of the US empire. The arrest was not to help two women in Sweden or to enforce a minor bail infraction.

No, the British authorities were acting on an extradition warrant from the US. And the charges the US authorities have concocted relate to WikiLeaks’ earliest work exposing the US military’s war crimes in Iraq – the stuff that we all once agreed was in the public interest, that British and US media clamoured to publish themselves.

**S**till the media and political class is turning a blind eye. Where is the outrage at the lies we have been served up for these past seven years? Where is the contrition at having been gulled for so long? Where is the fury at the most basic press freedom – the right to publish – being trashed to silence Assange? Where is the willingness finally to speak up in Assange’s defence?

It’s not there. There will be no indignation at the BBC, or the *Guardian*, or CNN. Just curious, impassive – even

gently mocking – reporting of Assange’s fate.

And that is because these journalists, politicians and experts never really believed anything they said. They knew all along that the US wanted to silence Assange and to crush WikiLeaks. They knew that all along and they didn’t care. In fact, they happily conspired in paving the way for today’s kidnapping of Assange.

They did so because they are not there to represent the truth, or to stand up for ordinary people, or to protect a free press, or even to enforce the rule of law. They don’t care about any of that. They are there to protect their careers, and the system that rewards them with money and influence. They don’t want an upstart like Assange kicking over their applecart.

Now they will spin us a whole new set of deceptions and distractions about Assange to keep us anaesthetised, to keep us from being incensed as our rights are whittled away, and to prevent us from realising that Assange’s rights and our own are indivisible. We stand or fall together. **CT**

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**Jonathan Cook** won the *Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism*. His books include *“Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East”* (Pluto Press) and *“Disappearing Palestine: Israel’s Experiments in Human Despair”* (Zed Books). His website is [www.jonathan-cook.net](http://www.jonathan-cook.net)



OFF THE WALL /2 - Wall art by Cart'1 @ the Abode of Chaos, Paris.

Photo: Thierry Ehrmann

# The martyrdom of Julian Assange

By Chris Hedges

22

**T**HE arrest of Julian Assange eviscerates all pretence of the rule of law and the rights of a free press. The illegalities, embraced by the Ecuadorian, British and US governments, in the seizure of Assange are ominous.

They presage a world where the internal workings, abuses, corruption, lies and crimes, especially war crimes, carried out by corporate states and the global ruling elite will be masked from the public.

They presage a world where those with the courage and integrity to expose the misuse of power will be hunted down, tortured, subjected to sham trials and given lifetime prison terms in solitary confinement.

They presage an Orwellian dystopia where news is replaced with propaganda, trivia and entertainment. The arrest of Assange, I fear, marks the official beginning of the corporate totalitarianism that will define our lives.

Under what law did Ecuado-

rian President Lenin Moreno capriciously terminate Julian Assange's rights of asylum as a political refugee?

Under what law did Moreno authorize British police to enter the Ecuadorian Embassy – diplomatically sanctioned sovereign territory – to arrest a naturalized citizen of Ecuador?

Under what law did Prime Minister Theresa May order the British police to grab Assange, who has never committed a crime?

Under what law did President Donald Trump demand the extradition of Assange, who is not a US citizen and whose news organisation is not based in the United States?

I am sure government attorneys are skillfully doing what has become de rigeur for the corporate state, using specious legal arguments to eviscerate enshrined rights by judicial fiat.

This is how we have the right to privacy with no privacy.

This is how we have “free” elections funded by corporate

money, covered by a compliant corporate media and under iron corporate control.

This is how we have a legislative process in which corporate lobbyists write the legislation and corporate-indentured politicians vote it into law.

This is how we have the right to due process with no due process. This is how we have a government – whose fundamental responsibility is to protect citizens – that orders and carries out the assassination of its own citizens such as the radical cleric Anwar al-Awlaki and his 16-year-old son.

This is how we have a press legally permitted to publish classified information and a publisher sitting in jail in Britain awaiting extradition to the United States and a whistleblower, Chelsea Manning, in a jail cell in the United States.

Britain will use as its legal cover for the arrest the extradition request from Washington based on conspiracy charges. This legal argument, in a functioning judiciary, would

be thrown out of court. Unfortunately, we no longer have a functioning judiciary. We will soon know if Britain as well lacks one.

Assange was granted asylum in the embassy in 2012 to avoid extradition to Sweden to answer questions about sexual offense allegations that were eventually dropped. Assange and his lawyers always argued that if he was put in Swedish custody he would be extradited to the United States.

Once he was granted asylum and Ecuadorian citizenship the British government refused to grant Assange safe passage to the London airport, trapping him in the embassy for seven years as his health steadily deteriorated.

The Trump administration will seek to try Assange on charges that he conspired with Manning in 2010 to steal the Iraq and Afghanistan war logs obtained by WikiLeaks. The half million internal documents leaked by Manning from the Pentagon and the State Department, along with the 2007 video of US helicopter pilots nonchalantly gunning down Iraqi civilians, including children, and two Reuters journalists, provided copious evidence of the hypocrisy, indiscriminate violence, and routine use of torture, lies, bribery and crude tactics of intimidation by the US government in its foreign relations and wars in the Middle East.



Chelsea Manning: Jailed because she refused to implicate Assange.

Assange and WikiLeaks allowed us to see the inner workings of empire – the most important role of a press – and for this they became empire’s prey.

US government lawyers will attempt to separate WikiLeaks and Assange from the *New York Times* and Britain’s *Guardian* newspaper, both of which also published the leaked material from Manning, by implicating Assange in the theft of the documents.

**M**anning was repeatedly and often brutally pressured during her detention and trial to implicate Assange in the seizure of the material, something she steadfastly refused to do. She is currently in jail because of her refusal to testify, without her lawyer, in front of the grand jury assembled for the Assange case. President

Barack Obama granted Manning, who was given a 35-year sentence, clemency after she served seven years in a military prison.

Once the documents and videos provided by Manning to Assange and WikiLeaks were published and disseminated by news organisations such as the *New York Times* and the *Guardian*, the press callously, and foolishly, turned on Assange.

News organisations that had run WikiLeaks material over several days soon served as conduits in a black propaganda campaign to discredit Assange and WikiLeaks.

This coordinated smear campaign was detailed in a leaked Pentagon document prepared by the Cyber Counterintelligence Assessments Branch and dated March 8, 2008. The document called on the US to eradicate the ‘feeling of trust’ that is WikiLeaks’ ‘center of gravity’ and destroy Assange’s reputation.

Assange, who with the Manning leaks had exposed the war crimes, lies and criminal manipulations of the George W Bush administration, soon earned the ire of the Democratic Party establishment by publishing 70,000 hacked emails belonging to the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and senior Democratic officials.

The emails were copied from the accounts of John Podesta, Hillary Clinton’s campaign chairman. The Podesta emails

exposed the donation of millions of dollars from Saudi Arabia and Qatar, two of the major funders of Islamic State, to the Clinton Foundation.

It exposed the \$657,000 that Goldman Sachs paid to Hillary Clinton to give talks, a sum so large it can only be considered a bribe.

It exposed Clinton's repeated mendacity. She was caught in the emails, for example, telling the financial elites that she wanted "open trade and open borders" and believed Wall Street executives were best positioned to manage the economy, a statement that contradicted her campaign statements.

It exposed the Clinton campaign's efforts to influence the Republican primaries to ensure that Trump was the Republican nominee.

It exposed Clinton's advance knowledge of questions in a primary debate.

It exposed Clinton as the primary architect of the war in Libya, a war she believed would burnish her credentials as a presidential candidate.

Journalists can argue that this information, like the war logs, should have remained hidden, but they can't then call themselves journalists.

The Democratic leadership, intent on blaming Russia for its election loss, charges that the Podesta emails were obtained by Russian government hackers, although James Comey, the former FBI director, has conceded that the emails were probably delivered to WikiLeaks by

## If Assange is extradited and tried, it will create a legal precedent that will terminate the ability of the press, which Trump repeatedly has called "the enemy of the people", to hold power accountable

an intermediary. Assange has said the emails were not provided by 'state actors.'

WikiLeaks has done more to expose the abuses of power and crimes of the American Empire than any other news organisation.

In addition to the war logs and the Podesta emails, it made public the hacking tools used by the CIA and the National Security Agency and their interference in foreign elections, including in the French elections.

It disclosed the internal conspiracy against British Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn by Labour members of Parliament.

It intervened to save Edward Snowden, who made public the wholesale surveillance of the American public by our intelligence agencies, from extradition to the United States by helping him flee from Hong Kong to Moscow.

**T**he Snowden leaks also revealed that Assange was on a US 'manhunt target list'.

A haggard-looking Assange, as he was dragged out of the embassy by British police, shook his finger and shouted: "The UK must resist this attempt by the Trump administration. ... The UK must resist!"

We all must resist. We must, in every way possible, put pressure on the British government to halt the judicial lynching of Assange.

If Assange is extradited and tried, it will create a legal precedent that will terminate the ability of the press, which Trump repeatedly has called "the enemy of the people", to hold power accountable.

The crimes of war and finance, the persecution of dissidents, minorities and immigrants, the pillaging by corporations of the nation and the ecosystem and the ruthless impoverishment of working men and women to swell the bank accounts of the rich and consolidate the global oligarchs' total grip on power will not only expand, but will no longer be part of public debate.

First Assange.

Then us.

**CT**

*Chris Hedges spent nearly two decades as a foreign correspondent in Central America, the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans. He was part of a New York Times team of reporters awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 2002. He also received the Amnesty International Global Award for Human Rights Journalism in 2002. This essay was first published at [www.truthdig.com](http://www.truthdig.com)*



OFF THE WALL / 3 - Wall art by Mahn Kloix. Rue Pastoret, Marseille.

Photo: Jeanne Menjoulet

# Fatal blow to investigative journalism everywhere

By Caitlin Johnstone

*This is the text of a speech Caitlin Johnstone made for the Socialist Equality Party Australia rally for Julian Assange after his removal from the Ecuadorian embassy in London:*

26

**T**ODAY is the day when the rubber meets the road. Today is the day when the nice guy mask has been ripped from the face of the inverted totalitarian state under whose boot we live.

We were told, concern trolled, that it was all about his cat, his body odour, his love affair for Trump or Putin or the Catalan people, Nazis, rape, transistor radios, and his hatred of truth, justice and the American way.

A thousand different stories about what this was all about, all created to confuse the casual viewer as to what was going on.

In the end, it was about what any clear-eyed rebel could see from day one. It was the reason he was granted asylum in the first place. The powerful people he embarrassed with his leaks

want to punish him. He is being bullied by the powers whose wrongdoings he exposed. And those powerful people want to make an example of him and send a message to all of us.

Now I've heard it said, and I'm sure you've heard this, too, that this sting was timed in part so that it occurred within the time-frame of the caretaker government, given our forthcoming federal election here in Australia on May 18th. They reckon this'll be good for them. They reckon this'll mean that nothing can be done!

Ha, yeah, well I don't think so, mate. I know that I will bailing up every politician I see on every street corner and demanding to know what their position on Julian Assange is.

I know that I will be making this a core election issue from which they cannot sheepishly demur as they have done 'til now.

I know that this will be the election issue that will be the decider on who I vote for, and who I do not. And I know that I am joined by many of my fellow Australians in my outrage.

Australians are pretty easy-going, but only to a point, and that point has been reached.

Australian politicians and the Australian media have been put on notice as of today – we will not lie down quietly and utter that infamous Aussie phrase of the defeated – “Aww, well whatever you reckon's a fair thing ...”

Because this not a fair thing.

We will not let this rest. We will not let a son of ours be made a precedent for the death of the free press everywhere. That will not happen on our watch.

Because that's what's happening. He is the thin edge of the wedge for the death of press freedoms all around the world.

Think about it – this is an Australian, wrenched from the Ecuadorian embassy, being held by the UK, for journalism via WikiLeaks which has no office or affiliation in the US at all.

The long arm of the US empire has shown that it can nab any journalist, anywhere in the world, if it doesn't like what you're revealing, whether you're a citizen of theirs or not.

This is truly a global totalitarian show of might and it must not go unchallenged. We have to win this one.

Without the ability to shine a light on the evil wrongdoings, on the war crimes, of this empire through journalism, we are lost.

Once our ability to bring power to account has been neutered, you can forget about fighting for anything else.

Our environment will continue to be degraded beyond habitability, our rights will continue to be eroded to nothing, the war crimes will get more flagrant and more deadly in the endless stupid wars that will continue to fuel the oil addiction that is poisoning our planet.

The fight for Julian Assange's right to shine a light on war crimes is the nexus point fight for all of us humans as a species.

Without the ability to make the powerful accountable for their crimes, we have lost already. May as well smooth the pillow on a dying world. That much is clear today.

On that point, keep an eye on where the Australian journalists fall on this. There is no doubt that by now it is clear, in their minds at least, how this will be a fatal blow to investigative journalism everywhere and this is a mortal threat to every journalist who has ever sourced evidence to fight wrongdoing at the highest echelons of power. They all understand this now. There is no doubt that by now they are crystal clear on that point.

Watch which side they fall on, because it will be clear that those journalists who fall on the wrong

side of this never intend or intended to do any kind of journalism in their lives.

They don't care because they are not in danger. They are lackeys, bootlickers, mindless repeaters of power, blue-tick propagandists who never ever intend to upset even one of their plutocratic masters.

They don't care because they do what they're told. They don't care because they know that underneath it all, that's not their job, their job is to protect power, not to bring it to account.

They don't care because they are not journalists.

**W**hen history has had time to put things in its proper context and looks back on this day in abject horror, when it is realised that this is the day that nice guy mask was ripped off and the full brute force of the corporatist totalitarian state was seen in the harsh light of truth, you will be remembered as the ones who did not flinch.

You did not freeze. You did not run and hide. You will be remembered as the ones who stared down this horror with the same conviction as Julian Assange.

When you get a chance, do something for me. Take a look at Julian's face as he is being taken to court. I know you were probably as shocked as I was at his physical appearance. We were warned that his detention was taking its toll on his health but it still was really hard to see.

But now the shock has worn off, take a second look. Look in his eyes. You will see, the fire still

burns bright. That is no broken man. They have not broken him, and they have not broken you.

Looking around today I see the same fire in all your eyes. This is our time. This is when we rise. This is when we shout a giant "NO!" to those who have us suffocated into a fatal dream at this crucial moment in human history, a moment where our eyes must be wide open, where we must stare down our plutocratic masters who are driving our species into extinction, and take back the wheel.

So I urge you to pull from your convict roots, your refugee beginnings, or your indigenous stock, from all the many ways that the people of this country largely come from either being imprisoned by, fighting off, or fleeing the very self-same empire that has its talons in Assange today, I urge you to pull from that anger that is wound deep into your DNA.

And say NO, we will not be silenced any more. NO, we will not be enslaved anymore. NO, we are not livestock to be herded into pens convenient to the oligarchs, bleating praise in a chorus for their demented agendas.

We demand our freedom in the same breath that we demand freedom for Julian Assange.

We must rise, now, as one, and defeat this evil once and for all. **CT**

*Caitlin Johnstone is an Australia-based blogger. She has a podcast and a new book *Woke: A Field Guide for Utopia Preppers*. Follow her at [www.caitlinjohnstone.com](http://www.caitlinjohnstone.com)*

# The Assange arrest is a warning from history

by John Pilger

**T**HE glimpse of Julian Assange being dragged from the Ecuadorian embassy in London is an emblem of the times. Might against right. Muscle against the law. Indecency against courage. Six policemen manhandled a sick journalist, his eyes wincing against his first natural light in almost seven years.

That this outrage happened in the heart of London, in the land of Magna Carta, ought to shame and anger all who fear for 'democratic' societies. Assange is a political refugee protected by international law, the recipient of asylum under a strict covenant to which Britain is a signatory. The United Nations made this clear in the legal ruling of its *Working Party on Arbitrary Detention*.

But to hell with that. Let the thugs go in. Directed by the quasi fascists in Trump's Washington, in league with Ecuador's Lenin Moreno, a Latin American Judas and liar seeking to disguise his rancid regime, the British elite abandoned its last imperial myth:

that of fairness and justice.

Imagine Tony Blair dragged from his multi-million pound Georgian home in Connaught Square, London, in handcuffs, for onward dispatch to the dock in The Hague. By the standard of Nuremberg, Blair's 'paramount crime' is the deaths of a million Iraqis. Assange's crime is journalism: holding the rapacious to account, exposing their lies and empowering people all over the world with truth.

**T**he shocking arrest of Assange carries a warning for all who, as Oscar Wilde wrote, "sow the seeds of discontent [without which] there would be no advance towards civilisation". The warning is explicit towards journalists. What happened to the founder and editor of WikiLeaks can happen to you on a newspaper, you in a TV studio, you on radio, you running a podcast.

Assange's principal media tormentor, the *Guardian*, a collaborator with the secret state,

displayed its nervousness on April 9 with an editorial that scaled new weasel heights. The *Guardian* has exploited the work of Assange and WikiLeaks in what its previous editor called "the greatest scoop of the last 30 years". The paper creamed off WikiLeaks' revelations and claimed the accolades and riches that came with them.

With not a penny going to Julian Assange or to WikiLeaks, a hyped *Guardian* book led to a lucrative Hollywood movie. The book's authors, Luke Harding and David Leigh, turned on their source, abused him and disclosed the secret password Assange had given the paper in confidence, which was designed to protect a digital file containing leaked US embassy cables.

With Assange now trapped in the Ecuadorian embassy, Harding joined the police outside and gloated on his blog that "Scotland Yard may get the last laugh". The *Guardian* has since published a series of falsehoods about Assange, not least a dis-

credited claim that a group of Russians and Trump's man, Paul Manafort, had visited Assange in the embassy. The meetings never happened; it was fake.

But the tone has now changed. "The Assange case is a morally tangled web", the paper opined. "He (Assange) believes in publishing things that should not be published .... But he has always shone a light on things that should never have been hidden".

These 'things' are the truth about the homicidal way America conducts its colonial wars, the lies of the British Foreign Office in its denial of rights to vulnerable people, such as the Chagos Islanders, the exposure of Hillary Clinton as a backer and beneficiary of jihadism in the Middle East, the detailed description of American ambassadors of how the governments in Syria and Venezuela might be overthrown, and much more. It all available on the WikiLeaks site.

The *Guardian* is understandably nervous. Secret policemen have already visited the newspaper and demanded and got the ritual destruction of a hard drive. On this, the paper has form. In 1983, a Foreign Office clerk, Sarah Tisdall, leaked British Government documents showing when American cruise nuclear weapons would arrive in Europe. The *Guardian* was showered with praise.

When a court order demanded to know the source, instead of the editor going to prison on a fundamental principle of protecting a source, Tisdall was betrayed, prosecuted and served six months.

If Assange is extradited to America for publishing what the *Guardian* calls truthful "things", what is to stop the current editor, Katherine Viner, following him, or the previous editor, Alan Rusbridger, or



**SCOOP OF THE CENTURY: Julian Assange holds the Guardian of July 26, 2010. The paper, along with other major international publications, gladly used the WikiLeaks leaks to sell their products. The Guardian has since turned its back on Assange.**

the prolific propagandist Luke Harding?

What is to stop the editors of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, who also published morsels of the truth that originated with WikiLeaks, and the editor of *El Pais* in Spain, and *Der Spiegel* in Germany and the *Sydney Morning Herald* in Australia. The list is long.

David McCraw, lead lawyer of the *New York Times*, wrote:

"I think the prosecution [of Assange] would be a very, very bad precedent for publishers ... from everything I know, he's sort of in a classic publisher's position and the law would have a very hard time distinguishing between the *New York Times* and WikiLeaks".

Even if journalists who published WikiLeaks' leaks are not summoned by an American grand jury, the intimidation of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning will be enough. Real journalism is being criminal-

ised by thugs in plain sight. Dissent has become an indulgence.

In Australia, the current America-besotted government is prosecuting two whistle-blowers who revealed that Canberra's spooks bugged the cabinet meetings of the new government of East Timor for the express purpose of cheating the tiny,

impoverished nation out of its proper share of the oil and gas resources in the Timor Sea. Their trial will be held in secret. The Australian prime minister, Scott Morrison, is infamous for his part in setting up concentration camps for refugees on the Pacific islands of Nauru and Manus, where children self harm and suicide. In 2014, Morrison proposed mass detention camps for 30,000 people.

Real journalism is the enemy

of these disgraces. A decade ago, the Ministry of Defence in London produced a secret document which described the “principal threats” to public order as threefold: terrorists, Russian spies and investigative journalists. The latter was designated the major threat.

The document was duly leaked to WikiLeaks, which published it. “We had no choice”, Assange told me. “It’s very simple. People have a right to know and a right to question and challenge power. That’s true democracy”.

**W**hat if Assange and Manning and others in their wake – if there are others – are silenced and “the right to know and question and challenge” is

**“It’s very simple. People have a right to know and a right to question and challenge power. That’s true democracy”**

– Julian Assange

taken away?

In the 1970s, I met Leni Reifentstahl, close friend of Adolf Hitler, whose films helped cast the Nazi spell over Germany. She told me that the message in her films, the propaganda, was dependent not on “orders from above” but on what she called the “submissive void” of the public.

“Did this submissive void

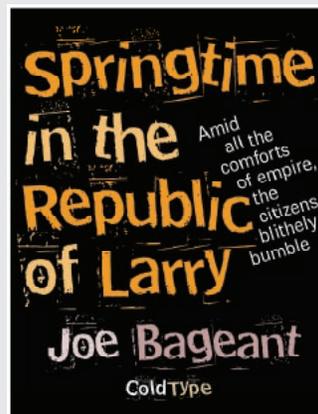
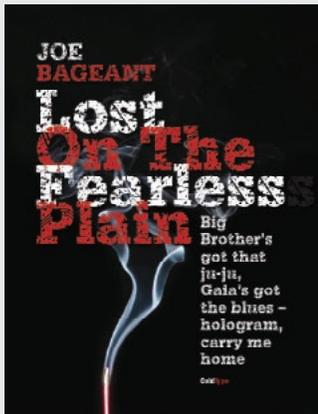
include the liberal, educated bourgeoisie?” I asked her.

“Of course”, she said, “especially the intelligentsia .... When people no longer ask serious questions, they are submissive and malleable. Anything can happen”.

And did.

The rest, she might have added, is history. **CT**

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OFF THE WALL /4 - Stencil in Leipzig, Germany.

Photo by Herder3, via Wikimedia

# The media's role in persecuting Assange

By Andre Damon

**T**HE arrest of WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange has been met with universal approval from the US print and broadcast media.

The *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, the three major US newspapers, have all enthusiastically endorsed Assange's arrest and extradition to the United States, for charges related to his publication of documents implicating the US government in war crimes and the mass murder of innocent people.

These newspapers' enthusiastic approval for the effective rendition of a journalist, with the threat of torture, indefinite imprisonment and possible execution, sums up their attitude to the freedoms of speech and the press embodied in the First Amendment: they oppose it.

They are not an independent media, but propaganda mills like those that exist in any dictatorship.

Jeff Bezos' *Washington Post*

was the least guarded, declaring Assange is "long overdue for personal accountability", and revelling at his potential "conversion into a cooperating witness". In reference to a country like the United States, which does not recognise basic international human rights agreements, extracting "cooperation" from a witness is a euphemism for torture.

But such cold, calculated editorials constitute, if this is possible, the less degraded portion of the media response to Assange's imprisonment, which has been treated by print newspapers, the broadcast news, and, perhaps worst of all, the late night talk shows, as the occasion to heap crude insults upon a persecuted journalist who cannot defend himself.

In the "news" section of the newspapers, the line between reporting, opinion, gossip, slander and libel was totally obliterated.

"Even Mr. Assange's friends have described him as ... a narcissist with an outsize view of

his importance and little interest in mundane matters like personal hygiene", wrote veteran *New York Times* Pentagon stenographers Scott Shane and Steven Erlanger in a front page news article, without bothering to explain who these "friends" are, or why they describe Assange in the same language as Mike Pompeo.

To the sound of canned laughter, *Daily Show* host Trevor Noah proclaimed that Assange has "finally been arrested" for letting his cat "shit all over the embassy". Tonight Show Host Jimmy Fallon joked that Assange, whose solitary confinement has broken his health, resembled Dumbledore, an aged character from JK Rowling's *Harry Potter* series.

The list goes on. Seth Meyers, host of NBC's *Late Night*, laughed that Assange was "dragged out of the Ecuadorian embassy looking like Santa Claus with a manifesto". *Saturday Night Live* parodied Assange's imprisonment, with a bearded Michael Keaton, as

Assange, declaring himself to be the “terror of the embassy cleaning staff”.

This disgusting and shameful gloating resembles nothing so much as a pillory or lynching, where the dregs of society are invited to hurl insults and garbage at a powerless victim. But unlike in Dickens’ London, these social dregs find themselves not at the bottom, but at the top of society: they are multimillionaires staffing the media, the entertainment industry, and the big business parties.

Of course, there is a political reason and logic to this outpouring of vitriol. The aim is to manufacture public opinion: to make the heroic journalist an unperson, stripped of all rights – an outcast – in order to justify the US state’s persecution.

But this political necessity cannot explain the degrading depths to which the media has gone to dehumanise Assange, repeating, in banner headlines, scurrilous rumours about his personal behaviour as if it were undisputed truth. The people who write such things are not merely doing the dirty work of the ruling class for pay. They hate Assange, because they see in him a challenge to the natural order of things, in which the media publish what the government says, and the people believe what the media publishes.

This sentiment was best summed up by the satirical news site the *Onion* in a quote it attributed to the *Washington Post*, “We denounce Julian Assange in the strongest pos-

sible terms for his negligence in publicly demonstrating the kinds of work journalists could actually be doing to investigate government malfeasance and hold the powerful accountable”.

But the hatred goes deeper. Anyone who carefully reads the opinion sections of the major newspapers, cannot but come away with the conclusion that they intentionally hire not just people with exceptionally right-wing views, who are open to suggestion from the powers that be, but people, to put it bluntly, who are emotionally unstable.

It is the combination of all of these attributes that produces an article like that published by Kathleen Parker of the *Washington Post*, entitled “Julian Assange isn’t a journalist or a Daniel Ellsberg. He’s just a ‘cypherpunk’”.

Ms. Parker, a regular panelist on NBC’s *Meet the Press*, writes, “WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange smelled like an overladen fishing vessel adrift in the searing sun”.

The WikiLeaks founder is a ‘solid jerk’, with ‘no conscience’. While Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the Pentagon Papers, insists that there is not a sliver of daylight between his activities and those of Assange, Parker insists that Ellsberg’s actions were “a historic act of bravery”, while those of Assange are “more like faeces-smearing by a fishy-smelling ‘cypherpunk’”.

When the political wind changes, Assange’s name will

carry the same connotations as other political prisoners and martyrs for civil rights, from Galileo to Martin Luther King.

Those that insulted him and aided the state in his persecution will try to eat their words. But history will remember their actions, which will blacken their names forever.

The persecution of Assange has elicited another response from the population more broadly, whose confidence in the official media has plummeted since the start of the ‘war on terror’ whose crimes Assange helped expose.

One compendium by the *Washington Post* of the responses to the late-night talkshows to Assange’s arrest had an 80 percent disapproval rating, with the comments full of sympathy for Assange and hatred of the court jesters laughing at his expense.

“Exposing and publishing the crimes the elites, governments and politicians commit and paying for it with your freedom is a laughing matter in American mainstream media”, wrote one commenter, adding, “Disgusting.” Another commented, “Almost as if they’re laughing at us”.

As the working class enters into a global wave of strikes and struggles, the political winds will change, and soon. Those who helped persecute a defenceless journalist will have to answer for their actions. **CT**

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**Andre Damon** wrote this article for the *World Socialist Web Site* – [www.wsws.org](http://www.wsws.org)

# When dissidents become enemies of the state

By John W. Whitehead

*"In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act."*

– George Orwell

**W**HEN exposing a crime is treated as committing a crime, you are being ruled by criminals.

In the current US governmental climate, where laws that run counter to the dictates of the Constitution are made in secret, passed without debate, and upheld by secret courts that operate behind closed doors, obeying one's conscience and speaking truth to the power of the police state can render you an 'enemy of the state'.

That list of so-called 'enemies of the state' is growing. WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange is merely the latest victim of the police state's assault on dissidents and whistleblowers.

On April 11, 2019, police arrested Assange for daring to access and disclose military documents that portray the US government and its endless wars abroad as

reckless, irresponsible, immoral and responsible for thousands of civilian deaths.

Included among the leaked materials was gunsight video footage from two US AH-64 Apache helicopters engaged in a series of air-to-ground attacks while American air crew laughed at some of the casualties. Among the casualties were two Reuters correspondents who were gunned down after their cameras were mistaken for weapons and a driver who stopped to help one of the journalists. The driver's two children, who happened to be in the van at the time it was fired upon by US forces, suffered serious injuries.

There is nothing defensible about crimes such as these perpetrated by the government.

When any government becomes almost indistinguishable from the evil it claims to be fighting – whether that evil takes the form of war, terrorism, torture, drug trafficking, sex trafficking, murder, violence, theft, pornography, scientific experimentations or some other

diabolical means of inflicting pain, suffering and servitude on humanity – that government has lost its claim to legitimacy.

These are hard words, but hard times require straight-talking.

It is easy to remain silent in the face of evil. What is harder – what we lack today and so desperately need – are those with moral courage who will risk their freedoms and lives in order to speak out against evil in its many forms.

Throughout history, individuals or groups of individuals have risen up to challenge the injustices of their age. Nazi Germany had its Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The gulags of the Soviet Union were challenged by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. America had its colour-coded system of racial segregation and warmongering called out for what it was, blatant discrimination and profiteering, by Martin Luther King Jr.

And then there was Jesus Christ, an itinerant preacher and revolutionary activist, who not only died challenging the police state of his day – the Roman

Empire – but provided a blueprint for civil disobedience that would be followed by those, religious and otherwise, who came after him.

Indeed, it is fitting that we remember that Jesus Christ – the religious figure worshipped by Christians for his death on the cross and subsequent resurrection – paid the ultimate price for speaking out against the police state of his day.

A radical nonconformist who challenged authority at every turn, Jesus was a far cry from the watered-down, corporatised, simplified, gentrified, sissified vision of a meek creature holding a lamb that most modern churches peddle. In fact, he spent his adult life speaking truth to power, challenging the status quo of his day, and pushing back against the abuses of the Roman Empire.

Much like the American Empire today, the Roman Empire of Jesus' day had all of the characteristics of a police state: secrecy, surveillance, a widespread police presence, a citizenry treated like suspects with little recourse against the police state, perpetual wars, a military empire, martial law, and political retribution against those who dared to challenge the power of the state.

For all the accolades poured out upon Jesus, little is said about the harsh realities of the police state in which he lived and its similarities to modern-day America, and yet they are striking.

Unfortunately, the radical Jesus, the political dissident who took aim at injustice and oppres-

sion, has been largely forgotten today, replaced by a congenial, smiling Jesus trotted out for religious holidays but otherwise rendered mute when it comes to matters of war, power and politics.

Yet for those who truly study the life and teachings of Jesus, the resounding theme is one of outright resistance to war, materialism and empire.

What a marked contrast to the advice being given to Americans by church leaders to “submit to your leaders and those in authority,” which in the American police state translates to complying, conforming, submitting, obeying orders, deferring to authority and generally doing whatever a government official tells you to do.

Telling Americans to march in lockstep and blindly obey the government – or put their faith in politics and vote for a political saviour – flies in the face of everything for which Jesus lived and died.

Ultimately, this is the contradiction that must be resolved if the radical Jesus – the one who stood up to the Roman Empire and was crucified as a warning to others not to challenge the powers-that-be – is to be an example for our modern age.

As I make clear in my book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People*, we must decide whether we will follow the path of least resistance – willing to turn a blind eye to what Martin Luther King Jr referred to as the “evils of segregation and the crippling effects of discrimination, to the moral degeneracy of religious bigotry and the corroding effects

of narrow sectarianism, to economic conditions that deprive men of work and food, and to the insanities of militarism and the self-defeating effects of physical violence” – or whether we will be transformed nonconformists “dedicated to justice, peace, and brotherhood”.

As King explained in a powerful sermon delivered in 1954, “This command not to conform comes ... [from] Jesus Christ, the world's most dedicated nonconformist, whose ethical nonconformity still challenges the conscience of mankind”.

We need to recapture the gospel glow of the early Christians, who were nonconformists in the truest sense of the word and refused to shape their witness according to the mundane patterns of the world. Willingly they sacrificed fame, fortune, and life itself in behalf of a cause they knew to be right. Quantitatively small, they were qualitatively giants. Their powerful gospel put an end to such barbaric evils as infanticide and bloody gladiatorial contests. Finally, they captured the Roman Empire for Jesus Christ... The hope of a secure and livable world lies with disciplined nonconformists, who are dedicated to justice, peace, and brotherhood. **CT**

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**John W. Whitehead** is founder and president of the Rutherford Institute. His new book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People* (SelectBooks, 2015) is available online at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). Whitehead can be contacted at [johnw@rutherford.org](mailto:johnw@rutherford.org)

# Uncle Tom's empire of deceit

By **CJ Hopkins**

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**DON'T** normally do this kind of thing, but, given the arrest of Julian Assange, and the awkward and cowardly responses thereto, I felt it necessary to abandon my customary literary standards and spew out a spineless, hypocritical 'hot take' professing my concern about the dangerous precedent the US government may be setting by extraditing and prosecuting a publisher for exposing American war crimes and such, while at the same time making it abundantly clear how much I personally loathe Assange, and consider him an enemy of America, and freedom, and want the authorities to crush him like a cockroach.

Now I want to be absolutely clear. I totally defend Assange and WikiLeaks, and the principle of freedom of the press, and whatever.

And I am all for exposing American war crimes (as long as it doesn't endanger the lives of the Americans who committed those war crimes, or inconvenience them in any way). At

the same time, while I totally support all that, I feel compelled to express my support together with my personal loathing of Assange, who, if all those important principles weren't involved, I would want to see taken out and shot, or at least locked up in Super-Max solitary ... not for any crime in particular, but just because I personally loathe him so much. I'm not quite sure why I loathe Assange. I've never actually met the man. I just have this weird, amorphous feeling that he's a horrible, disgusting, extremist person who is working for the Russians and is probably a Nazi.

**I**t feels kind of like that feeling I had, back in the Winter of 2003, that Saddam Hussein had nuclear weapons, which he was going to give to those Al Qaeda terrorists who were bayonetting little babies in their incubators, or the feeling I still have, despite all evidence to the contrary, that Trump is a Russian intelligence asset who

peed on Barack Obama's bed, and who is going to set fire to the Capitol building, declare himself American Hitler, and start rounding up and murdering the Jews.

I don't know where these feelings come from. If you challenged me, I probably couldn't really support them with any, like, actual facts or anything, at least not in any kind of rational way.

Being an introspective sort of person, I do sometimes wonder if maybe my feelings are the result of all the propaganda and relentless psychological and emotional conditioning that the ruling classes and the corporate media have subjected me to since the day I was born, and that influential people in my social circle have repeated, over and over again, in such a manner as to make it clear that contradicting their views would be extremely unwelcome, and might negatively impact my social status, and my prospects for professional advancement.

Take my loathing of Assange,

for example. I feel like I can't even write a column condemning his arrest and extradition without gratuitously mocking or insulting the man. When I try to, I feel this sudden fear of being denounced as a "Trump-loving Putin-Nazi", and a "Kremlin-sponsored rape apologist", and unfriended by all my Facebook friends.

Worse, I get this sickening feeling that unless I qualify my unqualified support for freedom of press, and transparency, and so on, with some sort of vicious, vindictive remark about the state of Assange's body odour, and how he's probably got cooties, or has pooped his pants, or some other childish and sadistic taunt, I can kiss any chance I might have had of getting published in a respectable publication goodbye.

But I'm probably just being paranoid, right? Distinguished, highbrow newspapers and magazines like the *Atlantic*, the *Guardian*, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, *Vox*, *Vice*, *Daily Mail*, and others of that calibre, are not just propaganda organs whose primary purpose is to reinforce the official narratives of the ruling classes. No, they publish a broad range of opposing views. The *Guardian*, for example, just got Owen Jones to write a full-throated defence of Assange on that grounds that he's probably a Nazi rapist who should be locked up in a Swedish prison, not in an American prison!

The *Guardian*, remember, is the same publication that

printed a completely fabricated story accusing Assange of secretly meeting with Paul Manafort and some alleged 'Russians', among a deluge of other such Russiagate nonsense, and that has been demonising Jeremy Corbyn as an antisemite for several years.

Plus, according to NPR's Bob Garfield (who is lustfully "looking forward to Assange's day in court"), and other liberal lexicologists, Julian Assange is not even a real journalist, so we have no choice but to mock and humiliate him, and accuse him of rape and espionage ... oh, and speaking of which, did you hear the one about

how his cat was spying on the Ecuadorian diplomats?

**B**ut seriously now, all joking aside, it's always instructive (if a bit sickening) to watch as the mandarins of the corporate media disseminate an official narrative and millions of people robotically repeat it as if it were their own opinions.

This process is particularly nauseating to watch when the narrative involves the stigmatisation, delegitimisation, and humiliation of an official enemy of the ruling classes. Typically, this enemy is a foreign enemy,

like Saddam, Gaddafi, Assad, Milošević, Osama bin Laden, Putin, or whoever. But sometimes the enemy is one of 'us'



... a traitor, a Judas, a quisling, a snitch, like Trump, Corbyn, or Julian Assange.

In either case, the primary function of the corporate media remains the same: to relentlessly assassinate the character of the 'enemy', and to whip the masses up into a mindless frenzy of hatred of him, like the Two-Minutes Hate in 1984, the Kill-the-Pig scene in *Lord of the Flies*, the scapegoating of Jews in Nazi Germany, and other examples a bit closer to home.

Logic, facts, and actual evidence have little to nothing to do with this process. The goal of the media and other propagandists is not to deceive or mislead the masses.

Their goal is to evoke the pent-up rage and hatred simmering within the masses and channel it toward the official enemy. It is not necessary for the demonisation of the official enemy to be remotely believable, or stand up to any kind of serious scrutiny. No one sincerely believes that Donald Trump is a Russian Intelligence asset, or that Jeremy Corbyn is an antisemite, or that Julian Assange has been arrested for jumping bail, or raping anyone, or for helping Chelsea Manning 'hack' a password.

The demonisation of the empire's enemies is not a deception ... it is a loyalty test. It is a ritual in which the masses (who, let's face it, are de facto slaves) are ordered to display their fealty to their masters, and their hatred of their masters' enemies.

Cooperative slaves have plen-

## The goal of the media and other propagandists is to evoke the pent-up rage and hatred simmering within the masses and channel it toward the official enemy

ty of pent-up hatred to unleash upon their masters' enemies. They have all the pent-up hatred of their masters (which they do not dare direct at their masters, except within the limits their masters allow), and they have all the hatred of themselves for being cooperative, and ... well, basically, cowards.

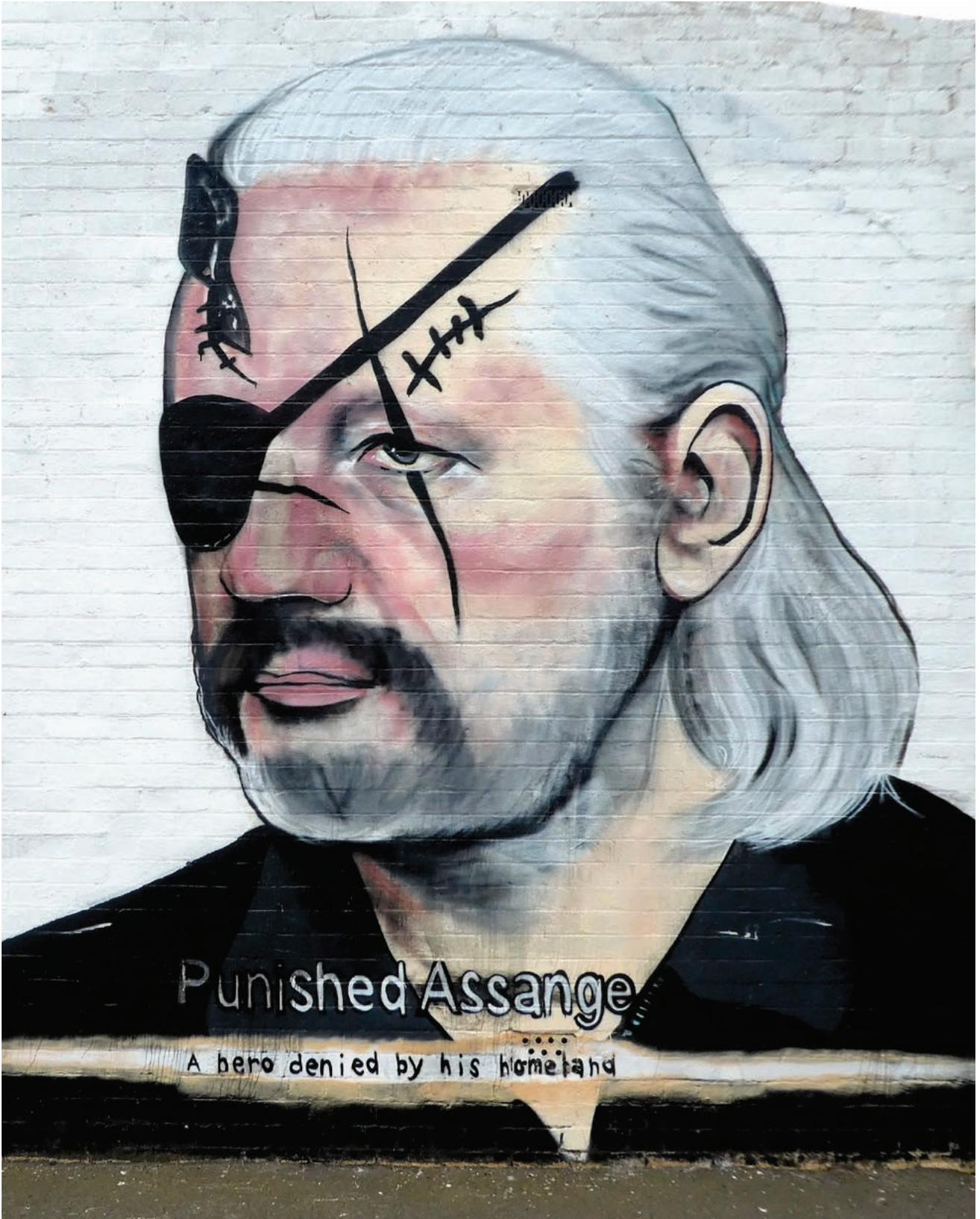
**J**ulian Assange is being punished for defying the global capitalist empire. This was always going to happen, no matter who was in the White House. Anyone who defies the empire in such a flagrant manner is going to be punished. Cooperative slaves demand this of their masters. Defiant slaves are actually less of a threat to their masters than they are to the other slaves who have chosen to accept their slavery and cooperate with their own oppression. Their defiance shames these cooperative slaves, and shines an unflattering light on their cowardice.

This is why we are witnessing so many liberals (and liberals in leftist's clothing) rushing to express their loathing of

Assange in the same breath as they pretend to support him, not because they honestly believe the content of the official Julian Assange narrative that the ruling classes are disseminating, but because (a) they fear the consequences of not robotically repeating this narrative, and (b) Assange has committed the cardinal sin of reminding them that actual 'resistance' to the global capitalist empire is possible, but only if you're willing to pay the price.

Assange has been paying it for the last seven years, and is going to be paying it for the foreseeable future. Chelsea Manning is paying it again. The Gilets Jaunes protestors have been paying it in France. Malcolm X paid it. Sophie Scholl paid it. Many others throughout history have paid it. Cowards mocked them as they did, as they are mocking Julian Assange at the moment. That's all right, though, after he's been safely dead for ten or 20 years, they'll name a few streets and high schools after him. Maybe they'll even build him a monument. **CT**

**CJ Hopkins** is an award-winning American playwright, novelist and political satirist based in Berlin. His plays are published by Bloomsbury Publishing (UK) and Broadway Play Publishing (USA). His debut novel, *ZONE 23*, is published by Snogsworthly, Swaine & Cormorant Paperbacks. He can be reached at [www.cjhopkins.com](http://www.cjhopkins.com) or [www.consentfactory.org](http://www.consentfactory.org)



OFF THE WALL /5 - Graffiti by LushSux, Melbourne, Australia

Photo: Duncan Cumming

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