

WikiLeaks founder jailed in London on bogus charges

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WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was arrested by British police Tuesday morning, denied bail by a London magistrate and then jailed. Assange faces a hearing December 14 on an extradition request by Swedish authorities, who issued a warrant last week on fabricated charges of sexual misconduct.

US officials applauded the arrest and noted that Washington has had an extradition treaty with Sweden for the past 50 years, a signal that once in Swedish custody Assange would face the danger of being shipped off to an American detention facility like Guantanamo Bay or a CIA “black site” prison.

Such comments underscore the basic political reality in the Assange case: the WikiLeaks leader has been targeted, not because of his private conduct in Sweden, but in retaliation for the devastating worldwide impact of the WikiLeaks exposures of US military atrocities and diplomatic skullduggery.

Assange is in jail, while the real criminals, the American warmongers whose crimes against humanity are being exposed daily on WikiLeaks, remain free.

A statement issued by the Metropolitan Police (New Scotland Yard) said that officers in its extradition unit had arrested Assange in response to a European Arrest Warrant. “He is accused by the Swedish authorities of one count of unlawful coercion, two counts of sexual molestation and one count of rape, all alleged to have been committed in August 2010,” the statement said.

Police brought him later in the day to Westminster Magistrates’ court, where he was denied bail and remanded to police custody for seven days, until a further hearing. The WikiLeaks leader said little during his court appearance, except to declare his unwillingness to be extradited to Sweden and to formally request bail.

Prosecutor Gemma Lindfield, representing the Swedish authorities, objected to the bail request, citing Assange’s “nomadic lifestyle” (he moves frequently because of death threats), temporary residence in Britain, and media reports that he would seek political asylum in Switzerland. She also cited his refusal to have his fingerprints taken or give a DNA sample on arrest.

The prosecutor actually cited the large number of death threats issued against Assange as a reason for keeping him in detention, warning “any number of unstable persons could take it upon themselves to cause him serious harm.” This statement is remarkable for its chutzpah: the same US military/intelligence apparatus that created the climate for the death threats is

behind the Swedish prosecution.

Despite the fact that Assange voluntarily surrendered to the police before the hearing, Lindfield declared, "This is someone for whom, simply put, no conditions, even the most stringent conditions that could be imposed, would ensure he would surrender to the jurisdiction of this court."

Assange's attorney Mark Stephens called the outcome "unfortunate" but said Assange would make another bail application. "This is going to go viral," he said. "Many people believe Mr. Assange to be innocent, myself included. Many people believe the prosecution to be politically motivated."

Another of his London-based lawyers, Jennifer Robinson, told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation,

"I think he will get a fair hearing here in Britain but I think our, his, prospects if he were ever to be returned to the US, which is a real threat, of a fair trial, is, in my view, nigh on impossible."

Magistrate Howard Biddle denied bail despite the declaration by a half dozen prominent British citizens that they were willing to post bond to assure Assange's future. Several of them appeared in the courtroom, including film director Ken Loach, journalist and documentarian John Pilger, and Jemima Khan, former wife of Pakistan cricket star Imran Khan.

John Pilger told reporters, "This is a man who's made some very serious enemies for the very best of reasons." He said he knew Assange personally and had "a very high regard for him."

Pilger added: "I am aware of the offenses and I am also aware of quite a lot of the detail around the offenses. I am here today because the charges against him in Sweden are absurd and were judged as absurd by the chief prosecutor there when she threw the whole thing out until a senior political figure intervened."

In an implicit criticism of the reporters who were questioning him about his support for Assange, Pilger said, "One only has to read the document to understand the enormous service that Julian Assange has put to us and when I say us, I mean the whole of humanity and journalism. This is the best type of journalism. It is telling the truth."

He said that he was prepared to put up £20,000 as surety "because there was a possibility of an injustice being perpetrated against Julian Assange personally. He has been doing the job of a journalist and he deserves the support of people who believe that the free flow of information is the bedrock of a democracy."

Ken Loach, director of such films as *Land and Freedom*, *Bread and Roses*, and *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, said that he did not know Assange personally but was willing to put up £20,000 for bond. "I think the work he has done has been a public service," he said. "I think we are entitled to know the dealings of those that govern us."

Speaking with ZDNet UK, he called the judge's decision to deny bail "very shocking." He cited "the coincidental nature of the charges and that he has published documents,"

concluding, “It’s just bizarre that a person who makes documents available should be treated in this way.”

Jemima Khan, who is also the sister of Conservative Member of Parliament Zac Goldsmith, told the court that although she did not personally know Assange she was prepared to offer £20,000, “or more if need be.” Retired solicitor Geoffrey Shears and retired Professor Patricia David also pledged the same sum, while a sixth unnamed person offered to put up £80,000, for a total bail fund of £160,000.

The decision of these individuals, including leading figures in art and journalism, to come forward in defense of WikiLeaks is to be welcomed. It is a demonstration of the shift in public opinion on a world scale, and a growing recognition of and hostility toward the crimes of American imperialism.

This shift is taking place within the borders of the United States as well, despite the universal demonization of WikiLeaks in the corporate-controlled media and both big business political parties. It is significant that in the Internet voting on *Time* magazine’s web site for the “Man of the Year” award, Julian Assange is the top choice, with more than 300,000 online votes.

The legal persecution by Sweden makes a mockery of genuine rape charges, as it involves admittedly consensual sexual encounters with two women, both of whom subsequently posted celebratory comments via Twitter and SMS.

While press accounts invariably describe the two as “WikiLeaks volunteers,” at least one of them, Anna Ardin, has ties to right-wing organizations in Sweden, contributing regularly to a Swedish/Spanish anti-Castro publication affiliated with the Union Liberal Cubana, a right-wing exile group.

While this frame-up has sent Assange to a British jail, at least temporarily, the technological and financial attack on his organization continues. Visa and MasterCard announced Tuesday that they were suspending all payments to WikiLeaks pending an investigation of the legality of the group’s activities.

At the same time, as Charles Arthur, the technology editor of the British newspaper the *Guardian*, points out, both financial companies continue to allow users to make donations to “overtly racist organisations such as the Knights Party, which is supported by the Ku Klux Klan.” The Ku Klux Klan web site directs users to a site called Christian Concepts. It takes Visa and MasterCard donations for users willing to profess their racist and Christian convictions.

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