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زبانهای اروپایی

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## ***In Crisis of Democracy, We All Must Become Julian Assange***

*When Assange was once asked to describe what exactly he does in life, he answered; "I am an activist, journalist, software programmer expert in cryptography, specialized in systems designed to protect human rights defenders." Assange is an excellent journalist. He published material at a scale and speed that has never been seen before, winning numerous journalistic awards. But he is much more than just a journalist. With a variety of skills and talents, he made significant contributions to the larger society. He was nominated for the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize and was a recipient of the Sydney Peace Foundation Gold Medal, the Sam Adams Award and the Voltaire Award for Free Speech, among others. Perhaps the best way to describe him would be that he is an innovator at heart. Innovators understand the problems that exist in our society and come up with solutions. What were the problems that Assange identified? He recognized anti-democratic forces inside the history of the United States. He also understood that within the existing political system there is no mechanism for ordinary people to check on this power. Upon this analysis, he found a way to tackle this problem by inventing a new form of journalism. WikiLeaks was the solution...With great courage, Assange responded to the crisis of legitimacy. He sacrificed his personal liberty in order to give us a chance to create a society where we have privacy for the weak and transparency for the powerful. Now, this man who defended our rights, is made defenseless. He is not allowed to use a computer and has limited access to his lawyers, making him unable to adequately prepare for his legal defense. In a message sent out from a high security prison, where he is being held in solitary confinement, he asked everyone to take his place. Democracy requires*

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*ordinary' people's participation in power. In order for us to alter this oppressive system, change ought to be made first within ourselves. Each of us needs to start exercising our right to free speech, assemble and associate with one another and organize a society, governed not by elite few, but through networked hearts of common people.*

*Even after his imprisonment, Assange continues to fight. He endures isolation and character assassination with the latest CNN hit piece twisting embassy surveillance records against him. Assange remains silenced. He is suffering for all of us, for us to seize this opportunity to take back the power that belongs to us. Let us fight for his freedom. Let us complete the great work of justice and democracy he started with WikiLeaks. His plight of curtailed freedom is a call for a real democracy. We all must now take his place and claim our own significance. We must become Julian Assange, for his struggle is ours. We are all Julian Assange.*

July 20, 2019 "[Information Clearing House](#)" - The US government's indictment against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange marked the worst attack on press freedom in history. Assange [has been charged](#) on 18 counts, including 17 violations of the Espionage Act. James Goodale, former general counsel of The New York Times, who urged the paper to publish the Pentagon Papers during the Nixon administration [noted](#), "If the government succeeds with the trial against Assange, if any, that will mean that it's criminalized the news gathering process."

On June 12, UK Home Secretary Sajid Javid [has signed](#) the extradition papers. Assange's hearing [is now set](#) to begin next February. He is now being held in London's Belmarsh prison for what amounts to a politically motivated, 50-week sentence given by the judge for him violating bail conditions in 2012 in order to seek and obtain political asylum in Ecuador against the threat of extradition to the US.

Nils Melzer, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, who visited Assange in a notorious UK prison previously referred to as "Britain's Guantanamo Bay", [assessed](#) that Assange has been subjected to prolong psychological torture by the US government and its allies for nearly a decade. While this multi-award winning journalist, who has revealed the governments' war crimes, suffers in jail, the British government that has been a key player of this political persecution recently held a Global Conference for [Media Freedom](#).

Despite its stated mission of protecting the safety and rights of journalists, the conference failed to address the degrading and inhumane treatment of Assange and the US government's prosecution of the publisher that could set a dangerous precedent for press freedom. This hypocrisy of all was best shown by the fact that this gathering was hosted by UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt who, last month, [told](#) the US TV that he would happily extradite Assange to Trump's America where former CIA officer John Kiriakou [indicated](#) that he would receive no fair trial and face life imprisonment.

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### **True face of Western liberal democracy**

What is this Western governments' coordinated attack on this Australian native who published truthful information, in the public interest, about the US government? Over 10 million documents that WikiLeaks released with a pristine record of accuracy informed people around the world about corruption and wrongdoing of governments and corporations. But most importantly, they exposed the true face of Western liberal democracy.

What is Western liberal democracy? It is a particular style of governance that was developed in the US and exported around the world. Political theorist Sheldon S. Wolin (2008) [described](#) it as "modern managed democracy" and attributed its creation to the framers of the Constitution. Wolin described how the Founding Fathers made a system that favored elite rule and that "the American political system was not born a democracy, but born with a bias against democracy" (p. 228).

This managed democracy relies on secrecy and deception to control the will of the populace. In this system, press works as a propaganda machine. Journalists become gatekeepers, whose job is to maintain an illusion of democracy through restricting the flow of information and controlling narratives. Now, WikiLeaks' disclosures on government secrecy have pierced a façade of democracy and began challenging the hidden power inside the system.

## **Crisis of legitimacy**

WikiLeaks revelation, coupled with the 2008 financial meltdown, triggered the global crisis of legitimacy. People came to recognize the unfairness and injustice inherent in the system, where rules don't apply to everyone equally. Weakening of public trust in institutions spawned a cycle of protests around the world.

In 2011, Amnesty International [recognized](#) the role of WikiLeaks' documents in instigating global revolutionary uprisings. The US diplomatic cables leak [helped](#) generate a powerful force that finally toppled the corrupt Tunisian dictator Ben Ali. The fire of self-immolation and global awakening confirmed by the US embassy cables, spread like wildfire through social media and lit the passions of Egyptians in Tahrir Square.

From Spain, Greece, and the London riots to the Occupy movement, waves of action for self-determination were reaching the West. This crisis of liberal democracy didn't just emerge in 2011. The roots of the problems that we are now facing are found at the birth of the American republic.

The truth is that the country has been in crisis from the very beginning. Although the Constitution was founded on the revolutionary ideas that rejected the power of the King's monarchy, it contained contradictions and was far from being perfect. A constitutional republic was built in violation of the ideals infused in the Declaration of Independence, manifested in genocide of natives, the enslavement of blacks, and the suppression of women.

One of influential figures in America's earlier development, Thomas Jefferson, predicted and warned his fellow citizens about the seed of corruption within, when he [feared](#), there would come a time when the American system of government would degenerate into a form of "elective despotism".

## **Invention of new journalism**

Julian Assange, through his work with WikiLeaks responded to this crisis that has existed all along inside this nation. How did he do it? To examine this question, we have to look at who Julian Assange is.

When Assange was once asked to describe what exactly he does in life, he [answered](#); “I am an activist, journalist, software programmer expert in cryptography, specialized in systems designed to protect human rights defenders.”

Assange is an excellent journalist. He published material at a scale and speed that has never been seen before, winning numerous journalistic awards. But he is much more than just a journalist. With a variety of skills and talents, he made significant contributions to the larger society. He was nominated for the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize and was a recipient of the Sydney Peace Foundation Gold Medal, the Sam Adams Award and the Voltaire Award for Free Speech, among others.

Perhaps the best way to describe him would be that he is an innovator at heart. Innovators understand the problems that exist in our society and come up with solutions. What were the problems that Assange identified? He recognized anti-democratic forces inside the history of the United States. He also understood that within the existing political system there is no mechanism for ordinary people to check on this power. Upon this analysis, he found a way to tackle this problem by inventing a new form of journalism. WikiLeaks was the solution.

### **Problems of unaccounted power**

The framers of the constitution wanted to have power over people. As a testimony to this, the original draft of the constitution did not have a Bill of Rights. They were added to the constitution as amendments. This didn't come about without struggle. The proponents of the Bill of Rights demanded them in order to safeguard individual liberty and challenged those who seek to preserve levers of control.

Even after the constitution was ratified with a Bill of Rights, the problem of this unaccounted power was never truly addressed. The wording of the First Amendment [reads](#):

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.”

Here, the First Amendment was aimed to restrict the governmental power. It was specifically addressing what Congress can't do. However, the constitution didn't ensure that corporations would not be able to make laws restricting the freedom of speech. With the infiltration of commercial interests and the consolidation of media, the big business class has found a way to regulate free speech on their terms. The establishment of corporate media turned journalists' First Amendment protection into a privilege that they can use against the public.

### **New mechanism of accountability**

Journalists, who have now become a new class of professionals, no longer share interests with ordinary people. They are systematically placed to serve the agendas of the powerful state. For instance, The New York Times has publicly [acknowledged](#) that it sends some of its stories to the US government for approval from “national security officials” before publication.

With the merger of the state and corporations, the power of private companies to influence governments and erode civil liberty has increased. Transnational corporations can now revoke and restrict basic rights at any time, crossing the judicial boundaries on the borderless cyberspace. Tech giants like Google, Facebook and Twitter censor free speech online and, without warrant, they spy and invade the privacy of people.

Civil right activist Audre Lorde once [wrote](#), “The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.” In a tyranny of corporate takeover, Assange through his work with WikiLeaks found solutions to this problem of corporate subjugation of journalism. WikiLeaks provides vital tools that make it possible for everyday people to dismantle the master's house.

At the core of this invention is scientific journalism. By publishing full archives in a searchable format, WikiLeaks gave ordinary people a mechanism to independently check the claim of journalists and to hold those unelected powers accountable. This way, the whistleblowing site enabled a true function of free press and opened a door for democracy.

### **Call for real democracy**

With the Trump administration's prosecution of Assange, we are now seeing a deepening crisis of enlightenment values. In Chinese, the word for crisis is composed with two meanings. It signifies danger and opportunity. This attack on free press poses great threat to democracy, but at the same time, it presents an opportunity that has never been available before.

With great courage, Assange responded to the crisis of legitimacy. He sacrificed his personal liberty in order to give us a chance to create a society where we have privacy for the weak and transparency for the powerful. Now, this man who defended our rights, is made defenseless. He is not allowed to use a computer and has limited access to his lawyers, making him unable to adequately prepare for his legal defense.

In a message sent out from a high security prison, where he is being held in solitary confinement, he [asked](#) everyone to take his place. Democracy requires ordinary people's participation in power. In order for us to alter this oppressive system, change ought to be made first within ourselves. Each of us needs to start exercising our right to free speech, assemble and associate with one another and organize a society, governed not by elite few, but through networked hearts of common people.

Even after his imprisonment, Assange continues to fight. He endures isolation and character assassination with the latest CNN hit piece [twisting](#) embassy surveillance records against him.

Assange remains silenced. He is suffering for all of us, for us to seize this opportunity to take back the power that belongs to us. Let us fight for his freedom. Let us complete the great work of justice and democracy he started with WikiLeaks. His plight of curtailed freedom is a call for a real democracy. We all must now take his place and claim our own significance. We must become Julian Assange, for his struggle is ours. We are all Julian Assange.

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