

Julian Assange vs. USA and accomplices

1 January – 24 March 2020

This is a somewhat random collection of news reports and other information relating to the ongoing persecution of Julian Assange by the government of the United States and its accomplices in the United Kingdom, Sweden and Ecuador.

Inclusion here does not imply endorsement, approval or recommendation. In fact, some items have been chosen to illustrate how ill-informed, misleading and/or malicious that reporting and commentary on the Assange case can be.

Readers with various sorts of aversion to Russian and "leftist" media may be discomfited by the relatively large proportion of information from such sources in this compilation. That is not the result of any ideological or other bias. It is simply because other media — most notably those in the western world's mainstream — have systematically ignored the systematic persecution of Julian Assange. For the most part, not even the U.N. special rapporteur on torture's devastating and well-documented critique of the four conspiring governments has been allowed to penetrate the mainstream wall of silence and wilful neglect.

For those with good basic knowledge and understanding of the Assange case, mis- and disinformation about it should be fairly easy to recognize or at least suspect. For others, it would be advisable to become acquainted with the background and current context; for that purpose, some references are suggested below.

Some of the items included in the following pages are especially pertinent, for example:

"Six legal arguments why the US extradition of Julian Assange should be denied"
25 January, p. 37

"A murderous system is being created before our very eyes"

Lengthy interview with Nils Melzer, U.N. Special Rapporteur, who reviews many of his findings regarding torture and other serious crimes committed against Assange by the United States and its accomplices. For complete findings, see References below.
31 January, p. 55

"130 prominent Germans appeal for Julian Assange's release"
7 February, p. 85

"What Is Happening to Assange Will Happen to the Rest of Us"

Includes details on extensive illegal surveillance of Julian Assange and visitors during his years of asylum in the London embassy of Ecuador.
10 February, p. 102

"Doctors For Assange Ratchet Up Pressure"

In a letter to *The Lancet*, 117 physicians and psychologists from 18 nations call for an end to the psychological torture and medical neglect of Julian Assange.
17 February, p. 112

"Julian Assange Must Be Freed, Not Betrayed"

John Pilger provides valuable context to the forthcoming hearing concerning extradition of Julian Assange to the United States.

17 February, p. 137

"Julian Assange should not be extradited due to potential impact on press freedom and concerns about ill-treatment"

Statement by the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights.

20 February, p. 165

"Chief Magistrate In Assange Extradition Received Financial Benefits From Shadowy Groups"

Details regarding gross conflicts of interest on the part of the British judge overseeing the legal proceedings designed to ensure the extradition of Assange to the U.S.

23 February, p. 184

"Your Man in the Public Gallery — Assange Hearing Day 1"

The first of four reports by former British ambassador Craig Murray who elucidates how the extradition process is being orchestrated by British authorities to ensure that Assange will be shipped off to the United States where more injustice, torture and ultimately death await him. Remaining three reports on subsequent pages.

Essential reading.

25 February, p. 212

"Julian Assange Hearing — Your Help Wanted"

Craig Murray offers suggestions on how to support Assange's struggle for liberation.

6 March, p. 288

"IBAHRI condemns UK treatment of Julian Assange in US extradition trial"

Statement by International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI).

10 March, p. 295

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References

Findings of Nils Melzer, U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, regarding the persecution of Julian Assange by Sweden, the United States, the United Kingdom and Ecuador.

<https://www.julian-assange.se/english/torture.htm>

Courage Foundation

<https://couragefound.org/>

Assange & Sweden

<http://www.nnn.se/nordic/assange.htm>

Questions and comments regarding any of the information included here are welcome and may be addressed to Al Burke via e-mail at: editor@nnn.se

News reports, commentaries and other information concerning the persecution of Julian Assange

1 January – 24 March, 2020

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Mexico president calls for Assange to be released from UK prison

*Diego Oré
Reuters
January 3, 2020*

MEXICO CITY — Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador on Friday called for Wikileaks founder Julian Assange to be released from prison in London, urging an end to what he described as his "torture" in detention.

Assange, 48, is in a British jail for skipping bail when he sought asylum in Ecuador's embassy in London, where he spent nearly seven years to avoid extradition to Sweden over allegations of rape that were dropped in November.

Assange is also battling U.S. attempts to extradite him over Wikileaks' publication of vast caches of leaked military documents and diplomatic cables. He faces a lengthy prison term if extradited to the United States.

A U.N. human rights investigator last year said Assange has suffered psychological torture from a defamation campaign and should not be extradited to the United States where he would face a "politicized show trial."

Lopez Obrador, a leftist who has close ties with Britain's opposition Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, expressed his solidarity with Assange and said he hoped the former hacker and activist is "forgiven and released" from prison.

"I don't know if he has recognized that he acted against rules and norms of a political system, but at the time these cables demonstrated how the world system functions in its authoritarian nature," Lopez Obrador said in response to a question about Assange at a regular government news briefing.

"Hopefully consideration will be given to this, and he's released and won't continue to be tortured."

Assange's presence in London, holed up in Ecuador's embassy and then in jail, has been a diplomatic irritation for Britain, affecting domestic politics and relations with several countries.

Corbyn, who was a guest of honor at Lopez Obrador's inauguration in December 2018, said Assange should not be extradited to the United States "for exposing evidence of atrocities in Iraq and Afghanistan."

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, whose Conservative Party trounced Labour in last month's elections, has vowed to strike new trade deals with countries outside Europe after Britain's departure from the European Union.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-president-assange/mexico-president-calls-for-julian-assange-to-be-released-from-uk-prison-idUSKBN1Z21S8>

‘Hardly Any Coverage’: Media Ignores UN Accusations of Torture in Manning, Assange Cases

Sputnik
2020-01-03

*A top UN official has accused the UK and US of torturing whistleblowers Chelsea Manning and Julian Assange in an attempt to hold the two governments accountable, independent journalist **Diani Baretto** told Radio Sputnik’s Loud & Clear Thursday.*

In one of the two statements, which was written in November but only released publicly this week, Nils Melzer, the UN special rapporteur on torture, wrote that Manning -- who is currently being held in an Alexandria, Virginia, jail for not testifying before a grand jury investigating Assange -- is undergoing “open-ended, progressively severe measure of coercion fulfilling all the constitutive elements of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”

In a second statement written in October, Melzer noted that Assange, the WikiLeaks co-founder who is currently detained in London’s Belmarsh Prison, is being subjected to “severe mental and emotional suffering which, in light of the circumstances, clearly amounts to psychological torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”

Despite the seriousness of Melzer’s statements, media coverage regarding them has been limited.

“Sadly, in the UK there is hardly any coverage of this,” Baretto told hosts John Kiriakou and Brian Becker.

“There were two letters sent from the High Office, the UN Human Rights [Office]. This one was sent in November, for example, was only released on Tuesday ... and [in] this message, Manning, for example, is being subjected to an open-ended, progressively severe measure of coercion by refusing to testify ... and of course, [there’s] also the financial aspect of financially ruining her by facing fines running at \$1,000 a day” for as long as she does not comply with the grand jury summons, Baretto told Sputnik.

“This is very, very significant,” she continued, pointing out that **the US and UK are both signatories of UN Human Rights Council Resolution 34/19**, and the conditions in which Manning and Assange are being held mean both countries “are not complying with their human rights obligations.”

In March, Manning’s lawyers called her detention “pointless, punitive, and cruel,” noting that the former US Army intelligence analyst is unlikely to change her mind about testifying against Assange.

“Chelsea has clearly stated her moral objection to the secretive and oppressive grand jury process. We are Chelsea’s friends and fellow organizers, and we know her as a person who is fully committed to her principles,” Manning’s lawyers wrote in a letter in March.

Manning, an ex-US Army intelligence analyst, was sentenced to 35 years in prison in 2010 for providing hundreds of thousands of military intelligence records to WikiLeaks. She was released from prison in May 2017, having served seven years of her term, after then-US President Barack Obama commuted her sentence.

The documents she provided to WikiLeaks included incident reports from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and dossiers on prisoners being held without trial at the US' Guantanamo Bay Naval Base. She was sent back to jail in March 2019 when a federal judge found her in contempt of court for refusing to respond to any and all questions before a grand jury, after she was subpoenaed to testify in the case against Assange.

Meanwhile, Assange was holed up inside the London-based Ecuadorian Embassy from 2012 until April 2019 -- when he was arrested after the Ecuadorian government terminated his asylum -- for fear of arrest and extradition to the US on rumored charges against him there. The US government indicted Assange on 17 counts of violating the Espionage Act of 1917 in a court document unsealed the following month. Assange is scheduled to appear in a British court in February, where the court will determine whether he will be extradited to the US.

On November 22, 2019, more than 60 medical professionals wrote an open letter to UK Home Secretary Priti Patel expressing their "grave concern" that Assange could die from "deliberate medical negligence," calling the UK government's behavior "incompatible with medical ethics and unworthy of a democratic society bound by the rule of law."

"[Assange's] solitary confinement ... of up to 22 hours a day ... also constitutes torture," Baretto told Sputnik, noting that due to "bias by the courts in the UK," he is not getting a chance at a fair trial. Baretto also referred to Melzer's statements as "a very diplomatic, strong statement" trying to hold the US and UK governments accountable.

"The UK is undermining due process and the belief in the rule of law," Baretto added. "Do they [the US and UK governments] want to see him broken, die in prison under this distress or not be able to prepare his defense, which would then make it easier for them to prosecute him?" Baretto said regarding Assange.

"This is clearly a political prosecution here and this is clearly also in violation of human law that you cannot be extradited under political crimes," she continued, adding that as a journalist, she is concerned that this might be the beginning of a "new era" in which publishers and journalists can be criminally prosecuted for releasing factual information.

<https://sputniknews.com/analysis/202001031077925042-hardly-any-coverage-media-ignores-un-accusations-of-torture-in-manning-assange-cases/>

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Ex-Australian foreign minister calls for release of Julian Assange to halt damage to US alliance

*Mike Head
World Socialist Web Site
4 January 2020*

In a revealing intervention, former Foreign Minister Bob Carr has urged the Australian government to ask the Trump administration to drop its extradition proceedings against imprisoned WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, for fear of further eroding public support for the US military and intelligence alliance.

Carr's call, published today as an opinion column in Nine (previously Fairfax) Media newspapers, is expressed in the most deferential language. Canberra is a "good ally" to Washington, he emphasises, to the point of dispatching a warship to the Persian Gulf, risking a conflict with Iran, and hosting "two communications bases that probably make Australian territory a nuclear target...

"All said, we are entitled to one modest request: that in the spirit with which Barack Obama pardoned Chelsea Manning, and given President Trump's own objection to 'endless wars' in desert sands, it would be better if the extradition of Assange were quietly dropped."

Carr's statement is, first of all, a symptom of the alarm within the ruling class about the mounting popular demand for Assange's freedom, both in Australia and internationally. A life-long supporter of the US alliance, he specifically warns that the treatment of Assange is dangerously undermining support for it. He refers to a survey by the Lowy Institute, a pro-US think-tank, showing support for the alliance had "fallen from 78 percent to 66 percent and that only 25 percent of Australians had confidence in the US President. Among Australians under 29 years it was almost non-existent."

Carr voices concern about the naked assertion by Washington of its right to extradite any journalist, anywhere in the world. "If the American bid succeeds, this extra-territorial reach will be brought home sometime in 2020 when we see Assange in shackles, escorted across a British airfield into a CIA aircraft to be flown to Virginia."

Carr, who was foreign minister in the last Labor government, from March 2012 until its landslide defeat in September 2013, says the danger is that Assange is being turned into a "martyr" just like Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the Pentagon Papers in 1971. Those documents exposed the lies and war crimes committed by successive US administrations in the Vietnam War, and ultimately leading to the political crisis that forced the resignation of President Richard Nixon.

"How better to seed sourness about the alliance than running a year's trial in British courts against this Aussie maverick, followed by a battle in American courts, with liberal media defining it as an issue of freedom, transmuting him into a second Daniel Ellsberg [sic]," Carr writes.

Despite the end of Assange's sentence for supposedly skipping bail by seeking political asylum in Ecuador in 2012, to avoid extradition to Sweden and likely rendition to the US, he remains incarcerated in London's notoriously brutal Belmarsh prison. He is being held in solitary confinement and sedated in what doctors globally and UN Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer have condemned as psychological torture and a threat to his life.

Like Ellsberg, Assange faces charges under the US Espionage Act that could see him locked away for life, if not placed on death row. Ellsberg ultimately escaped imprisonment when a federal judge declared a mistrial because of the Nixon administration's illegal bugging of his medical files.

Chelsea Manning, the young US soldier convicted of giving WikiLeaks tens of thousands of damning files documenting US war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq and anti-democratic interventions around the world, is also back behind bars. Contrary to Carr's statement, Obama's administration did not pardon her after jailing her in

military prisons for seven years, but only commuted her sentence. This left her open to being imprisoned again—now indefinitely—to try to compel her to testify against Assange.

Carr's media column is all the more extraordinary because of the political reversal involved. As foreign minister, Carr repeatedly refused to defend Assange. In fact, he played a pivotal part in the assistance provided to Washington's persecution of Assange by the Greens-backed Labor minority government of Julia Gillard.

Gillard's government pioneered the refusal of every Australian government over the past decade to exercise its legal and diplomatic powers to intervene on behalf of Assange, as an Australian citizen. **Gillard declared publicly that WikiLeaks' exposures were "illegal" and launched an unsuccessful investigation into charging Assange under Australia's own draconian espionage and official secrets laws.**

Gillard had been installed in office in mid-2010, ousting Kevin Rudd, as the result of a backroom coup. Labor Party and trade union leaders who were later identified, in documents published by WikiLeaks, to be "protected sources" of the US embassy in Canberra, were centrally involved. Rudd had no difference at all with the US alliance, but he had suggested that the US should make some room for the rise of China.

Carr, like all his fellow cabinet ministers, falsely denied any knowledge of the US grand jury established by the Obama administration to pursue Espionage Act charges against Assange. Instead, he adhered to the line of the US and British governments that Assange was only facing extradition to Sweden for questioning on what were trumped-up allegations of sexual assault.

"As foreign minister I explained that the dispute between Sweden and Assange was something in which Canberra had no standing," Carr writes in an attempt to justify Labor's complicity. "His supporters did not like to hear that."

Right up until Assange was dragged out of his asylum inside Ecuador's London embassy last April, every Australian government insisted it had "no evidence" of US attempts to extradite the Australian citizen. In reality, as far back as 2012 — when Carr was in office — declassified cables, obtained under Freedom of Information laws, revealed that Australian **embassy officials in Washington had informed the Gillard government in detail about US plans to prosecute Assange.**

The Labor Party, which committed Australia to the US "pivot to Asia" against China and expanded US military access across the country under Gillard, has never shifted from its hostility toward WikiLeaks.

What then accounts for Carr's about-face? It can be understood only in the context of the deepening movement against US militarism, as well as the mass uprisings that have erupted globally against the yawning social inequality, attacks on working class conditions, corporate corruption, authoritarian regimes and environmental disasters being produced by the capitalist profit system.

The growing support for Assange is a key aspect of this seething discontent. In the lead-up to his extradition trial in February, protests demanding his freedom are emerging in many parts of Australia. And there is growing support for the campaign launched by the WSWS to mobilise working class opposition globally.

Another indicator of the concern in ruling circles came with a call on Friday by Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador for Assange to be released from prison in London, to end his "torture" in detention (see: "Mexican president calls for Julian Assange's freedom").

At rallies and public meetings over the past 18 months, the Socialist Equality Party has raised the demand that the Australian government intervene diplomatically and legally to secure Assange's release and ensure his right to return to Australia with a guarantee of protection from extradition to the US.

There must be no illusions in the Australian political and media establishment, however. From Gillard's government to the current Liberal-National Coalition government of Scott Morrison, it is directly responsible and culpable for Assange being incarcerated.

That is why everything depends on turning to the working class and young people, as part of the struggle to overturn the profit system and its drive to austerity, police-state repression and war. The defence of free speech and all basic democratic rights is bound up entirely with the fight against capitalism, that is, for socialism.

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/01/04/assa-j04.html>

Two months before Assange's extradition hearing, RSF calls for his release on humanitarian grounds and for US Espionage Act charges to be dropped

Reporters Without Borders
January 6, 2020

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) is alarmed by reports that Wikileaks founder Julian Assange's health has deteriorated in detention, and calls for his immediate release on humanitarian grounds. RSF condemns the continued targeting of Assange for his journalistic-like activities, which sets a dangerous precedent.

Assange's extradition hearing is due to begin at the Westminster Magistrates' Court in London on 25 February. RSF is concerned by reports that Assange has had insufficient opportunity to prepare for this hearing, and that his lawyers do not have adequate access to him in prison. Both of these measures violate his fundamental rights. RSF representatives plan to monitor the extradition hearing.

RSF is deeply concerned by the statement issued by UN Special Rapporteur on torture Nils Melzer on 1 November, in which he "expressed alarm at the continued deterioration of Julian Assange's health since his arrest and detention earlier this year, saying his life was now at risk." A group of more than 60 doctors also issued a similar warning in an open letter dated 25 November, expressing concern that Assange's health was so bad he could die in prison without urgent medical care.

Assange appeared in a Madrid court via videolink from the UK on 20 December as part of an investigation into his allegations that a Spanish firm spied on him while he lived inside the Ecuadorian embassy in London.

RSF has previously condemned the US government's targeting of Assange for his journalistic-like activities, as classified documents leaked by WikiLeaks led to journalistic revelations that were in the public interest. Assange should not be prosecuted for being an intermediary between a whistleblower and media outlets. In the US, Assange faces a total of 18 charges, 17 of them under the Espionage Act, which has been increasingly used by the Trump administration to target reporting and whistleblowing on matters related to national security.

"We are alarmed by the current state of Julian Assange's health, and call for his immediate release on humanitarian grounds, said RSF Secretary-General Christophe Deloire. Assange is being targeted by the US for his journalistic-like activities, which sets a dangerous precedent for press freedom. The journalistic community in the US and abroad is worried that these proceedings take the criminalization of national security journalism to a new level. This precedent could be used to prosecute journalists and publishers in the future for engaging in activities necessary for public interest investigative reporting. The US should cease its persecution of Assange and drop the charges under the Espionage Act without further delay."

RSF has expressed concern that leak prosecutions under the Espionage Act do not adequately protect whistleblowers; defendants are not permitted to present a public interest defence, and prosecutors need only show that the leak could have harmed national security – not that it actually did. RSF worries that targeting Assange under the Espionage Act could set a dangerous precedent.

RSF has also condemned the decision by the UK Home Office to green-light the US extradition request. Assange currently remains detained at Belmarsh prison, awaiting his US extradition hearing, after receiving a 50-week sentence in May 2019 for breaking bail by seeking refuge at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London in June 2012, where he remained until his removal and arrest in April 2019.

The US and UK are currently ranked 48th and 33rd respectively in RSF's 2019 World Press Freedom Index.

<https://rsf.org/en/news/two-months-assanges-extradition-hearing-rsf-calls-his-release-humanitarian-grounds-and-us-espionage>

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Sri Lanka: SEP meeting in Colombo demands release of Assange and Manning

World Socialist Web Site
7 January 2020

Around 75 workers and young people attended a January 2 public meeting at the Public Library Auditorium in central Colombo in defence of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning. The event, which was convened by the **Socialist Equality Party (SEP)** and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), unanimously passed a resolution calling for the immediate and unconditional release of WikiLeaks publisher Assange and US whistleblower Manning.

SEP members and supporters campaigned for the meeting in railway, irrigation, and harbour workers' neighbourhoods and other working-class areas in Colombo, as well

as among university students. The Sri Lankan media and the parliamentary parties have largely blacked out information about the ongoing repression of Assange and Manning. The SEP and IYSSE are the only organisations in Sri Lanka that have held public meetings and rallies in defence of the two.

The meeting was chaired by SEP political committee member Pani Wijesiriwardena who reviewed the campaign being conducted by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the World Socialist Web Site for the release of Assange and Manning.

Wijesiriwardena stressed the urgency of this international campaign, explaining that Assange, who is currently being held in solitary confinement at Belmarsh maximum security prison in London, will face an extradition trial in the UK in late February. If he is extradited to the US, he will be tried on 18 bogus charges, including for espionage, and could be imprisoned for 175 years or face capital punishment.

Chelsea Manning is incarcerated at the prison in Alexandria, Virginia and is being punished for refusing to give perjured testimony against Assange. Wijesiriwardena quoted Manning's powerful refusal to cooperate with prosecutors earlier this year, in which she declared: "I can either go to jail or betray my principles. The latter exists as a much worse prison than the government can construct."

Pani Wijesiriwardena

Wijesiriwardena outlined the response of the pseudo-left parties and figures such as Bernie Sanders from the US Democratic Party and British Labor Party leader Jeremy Corbyn to the witch hunt against Assange and Manning. Their refusal to defend these courageous individuals is mirrored in Sri Lanka by the silence of the pseudo-left Frontline Socialist Party, the Nava Sama Samaja Party and the United Socialist Party, he said.

IYSSE convenor Kapila Fernando told the meeting that the attack on Assange and Manning is being carried out by the most powerful imperialist powers in the world. "Their goal," he said, "is both to prevent the masses from learning about their crimes and block workers from opposing the wars that the imperialist powers are now preparing... That is why we say that the exposure of war crimes [by Assange and Manning] is a great service for mankind."

The speaker documented the situation now confronting the working class—the closures of factories and plants, the destruction of thousands of jobs and mounting global debt — and the growing determination of workers to fight.

Autoworkers in America and Mexico, teachers, rail workers and other workers all over the world, he continued, are engaged in struggle. Although the trade unions have worked to undermine workers' actions, the ruling classes are frightened. At the same time, governments in this region, including in India and Sri Lanka, have lined up with Washington's war drive against China. The fight to free Assange and Manning is a vital part of the emerging struggles of workers for their social and democratic rights, and against imperialist militarism, Fernando said.

K. Ratnayake, the WSWP national editor in Sri Lanka, was the final speaker. "The struggle for the release of Assange and Manning is bound up with the international movement of workers in the third decade of the 21st century — against a third world war, the attack on social rights and the danger of fascist dictatorships and authoritarian rule," he said.

The ICFI, its sections and the WSWs opposed the witch hunt of Assange and Manning from the outset and initiated a continuous fight for their defence. Assange, Manning and National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden are heroes of the working class, Ratnayake said.

“According to the US and its imperialist allies, the greatest crime of Assange and Manning is their exposure of the truth about the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere,” the speaker said. The war logs on Afghanistan and Iraq, which revealed hundreds of US war crimes, such as video footage of a US helicopter attack in Baghdad that killed over 15 people, including two Reuters journalists, were leaked by Manning and published by WikiLeaks.

The jailing of Assange and Manning, Ratnayake said, is part of the preparations for new imperialist wars. “While the White House and the Pentagon want to subjugate Russia and China, they will not stop there and are already engaged in trade wars with the European powers,” Ratnayake told the meeting. “As Lenin explained in the last century, we are in the era of imperialism, that of wars and revolutions. Mankind is now in an advanced stage of that era.”

The major working class struggles that emerged in 2018 and 2019 are expanding and now posing revolutionary questions. The response of the ruling classes is war, social counterrevolution, fascism and dictatorship, the speaker said. He elaborated on how these developments are being expressed in Sri Lanka.

The recently-elected President Gotabaya Rajapakse, who is widely despised, Ratnayake said, came to power by using the Easter Sunday terrorist attacks to stoke anti-Tamil and anti-Muslim chauvinism.

The new president is now appealing to Sinhala-Buddhist fascist outfits and the military with the aim of erecting a dictatorship, Ratnayake warned. The Rajapakse government has attacked scores of journalists and political opponents and is surely backing the anti-democratic attacks on Assange.

The speaker explained that the fight to free Julian Assange, in line with the rising militancy of the international working class, is winning new support.

The Open Letter issued by the WSWs International Editorial Board on June 20, 2019 calling for an internationally unified fight to defend Assange is gaining ground, he said. Ratnayake cited significant recent initiatives, including open letters signed by eminent doctors demanding that Assange receive urgent medical care, a statement by more than 1,000 journalists defending the WikiLeaks founder and the decision late last month by the Sri Lankan Journalists for Global Justice to issue a statement calling for his immediate freedom.

Ratnayake concluded by calling for an intensification of meetings and other defence actions in the weeks leading up to the Assange extradition trial in London in late February. He urged all those in attendance to join the SEP and IYSSE and build the revolutionary leadership of the working class required to take forward the fight for democratic rights and for socialism.

The audience responded enthusiastically, passing the resolution that was presented.

After the meeting, Mahinda Haththaka, the chairman of Sri Lankan Journalists for Global Justice, stated: “I highly appreciate the campaign carried out by the ICFI and its sections, the Socialist Equality Parties, through the WSWs, to free Julian Assange

and Chelsea Manning who have been subjected to a brutal witch-hunt by the imperialists, led by the US. I would like to express my full support for that campaign. Mahinda Haththaka

“I am a WSWS reader and have read almost all WSWS articles about the campaign to free Assange and Manning.

“The exposure made by Assange and Manning of the crimes of the imperialists is very important for the progressive masses throughout the world. I fully agree with the characterisation made by the WSWS that the assault on them is the highest point of the entire attack carried out by capitalists ruling classes throughout the world against the working class and oppressed masses.

“All those who cherish democratic rights must actively join the struggle to free Assange and Manning. I have attended this meeting in that spirit.

“Under conditions of the support extended by all other political parties in Sri Lanka for this witch-hunt through their complicit silence, the struggle waged only by the SEP is very principled and I highly appreciate it. I am ready to do whatever possible to bring forward this campaign with the SEP in the coming period.”

Musahith, a physical science student at the University of Colombo, said: “I was shocked when I heard about the present situation of Julian Assange. People should not fear to raise their voices in his defence. Workers should take it up as one of the main slogans in their protests.

“I oppose any violation of democratic rights in any corner of the world. That’s the reason why I was first attracted to an earlier SEP meeting opposing the siege in Kashmir by India’s BJP government.

“And it’s not just in Kashmir. The entire attack unleashed by the BJP government through its anti-democratic citizenship bill is unprecedented. However, the courage shown in numerous protests across India against those measures is significant. The Indian government, like its counterparts, fears the opposition and unity of workers and youth across ethnic lines.

“In Sri Lanka, the situation is not different. President Gotabhaya Rajapakse is strengthening police state measures in preparation for the forthcoming struggles. I agree with the point made in this meeting that the fight for the freedom of Assange is so crucial for the defence of democratic rights internationally.”

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/01/07/meet-j07.html>

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UN rapporteur Nils Melzer condemns Britain’s criminal role in the torture of Julian Assange

*Oscar Grenfell
World Socialist Web Site
10 January 2020*

United Nations official Nils Melzer has publicly released a powerful letter he addressed to the British government on October 29, documenting the criminal culpability of the country’s authorities, including its political leadership, in what he condemned last year as the “psychological torture” of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

Melzer's letter, published online on December 31, was a response to earlier correspondence from the British authorities, in which they blithely dismissed his finding that Assange was subject to ongoing psychological torture. This resulted in part from his almost seven-years of effective detention in Ecuador's London embassy, enforced by British threats to arrest him if he set foot outside the building, and his imprisonment since April 2019 in the maximum-security Belmarsh Prison.

Melzer had addressed a series of queries to the British government over the conditions of Assange's incarceration, including why he was being held in conditions of virtual solitary confinement and denied the necessary means to prepare his defence for US extradition hearings in February.

The British government had blandly declared its opposition to torture, while claiming that it was upholding Assange's legal rights. It answered none of Melzer's specific questions and dismissed his call for the WikiLeaks founder to be released from prison, despite warnings from medical professionals that his health has deteriorated to the point that his life is at risk.

In his latest document, Melzer stressed the scientific rigor of the assessment that Assange had been tortured, which was based on a four-hour consultation in Belmarsh Prison involving the UN rapporteur and two medical experts. The diagnosis stemmed from medically-verifiable evidence and conformed to "The Istanbul Protocol" — the international standard for identifying the symptoms of torture.

Melzer pointed to the implications of Britain's rejection of these findings, stating that "the conduct of Your Excellency's Government in the present case severely undermines the credibility of the UK's commitment to the prohibition of torture and illtreatment, as well as to the rule of law more generally."

Melzer bluntly wrote: "The official findings of my mandate, supported by two experienced medical experts specialized in the examination of torture victims, unquestionably provide 'reasonable ground to believe' that British officials have contributed to Mr. Assange's psychological torture or ill-treatment, whether through perpetration, or through attempt, complicity or other forms of participation.

"Under Art. 12 of the Convention against Torture, British authorities do not have the political discretion to simply reject these findings, but have a clear and non-derogable treaty obligation to conduct a prompt and impartial investigation into these allegations and, if confirmed, to prosecute the perpetrators and provide redress and rehabilitation to Mr. Assange."

The UN rapporteur documented that Britain had similarly stymied his calls for a judicial investigation into its involvement in the US-led torture programs associated with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan — which WikiLeaks and Assange have done so much to expose. This, he noted, "gives the impression of a broader policy of impunity, which would be incompatible with the UK's legal obligations and would seriously undermine the credibility of its commitment to human rights and the rule of law."

Melzer's detailed letter outlined Britain's involvement in the attempted frame-up of Assange on sexual misconduct allegations by Sweden, its collaboration with the US attempts to conduct what can only be described as an extraordinary rendition operation against the WikiLeaks founder and its persistent denial of his rights to due process over the past 12 months.

The UN official's conclusion demonstrates that Assange is being subjected to a lawless attempt to silence him and to destroy WikiLeaks. Melzer wrote: "I am of the considered opinion that recurring and serious violations of Mr. Assange's due process rights by UK authorities have rendered both his criminal conviction and sentencing for bail violation and the US extradition proceedings inherently arbitrary, to the point even of rendering any legal remedies a pointless formality devoid of prospect."

Melzer demanded the abandonment of the extradition proceedings, Assange's freedom and a criminal investigation into those responsible for his persecution.

Melzer also drew attention to reports that Assange's health has continued to deteriorate. Last year, dozens of eminent doctors wrote twice to the British authorities, as well as to the Australian government, voicing their fears that Assange could die in prison. Their calls for him to be moved to a university teaching hospital and provided with urgent medical treatment have been ignored.

The latest testimony concerning Assange's health situation was provided by British journalist Vaughan Smith, who tweeted that Assange had called his family on New Year's Eve. Smith wrote: "He told my wife and I how he was slowly dying in Belmarsh where, though only on remand, he is kept in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day and is often sedated."

Meanwhile, disturbing new indications have emerged of the conditions at Belmarsh, a facility designed to hold those convicted of the most serious crimes, including murder and terrorism offenses.

On Wednesday, RT reported that Liridon Saliuka, a 29-year-old prisoner at Belmarsh, was found dead in his cell on January 2. According to RT's sources, the death was the third fatality in less than a year at the prison. The British authorities claim that Saliuka was a victim of self-inflicted wounds, but this has been disputed by his family.

RT wrote: "Saliuka's family claim there have been delays to the postmortem. His sister, Dita, revealed that her brother was involved in a car crash two years ago that left him requiring major reconstructive surgery. He was given metal plates that made it hard for him to walk or stand for long periods of time. A report by a surgeon, commissioned by his defense lawyer, had determined that he should be considered as 'permanently disabled.' However, his family say he had recently been transferred from a special cell to a standard one."

A 2009 report by the Chief Inspector of British Prisons noted an "extremely high" amount of force used against prisoners at Belmarsh. A number of detainees reported they had been intimidated, threatened or assaulted by staff. The inspector's 2018 report said many recommended "improvements" at the facility had not been "embedded" and in some areas "we judged outcomes to have been poorer than last time."

That Assange, a journalist on remand, is being held in such a facility, demonstrates that the British state, no less than its American counterpart, is seeking nothing less than his physical and psychological destruction. While doing everything they can to facilitate Assange's extradition to the US, the British are seeking to replicate, on their own soil, the conditions that he would confront in a CIA prison in America.

The extraordinary assault on Assange's democratic rights is a stark symptom of a broader turn to authoritarianism, directed against the working class and the growing emergence of mass social and political opposition. This underscores the necessity for all defenders of civil liberties to do everything possible to prevent Assange's extradition to the US and secure his freedom.

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/01/10/assa-j10.html>

The rising support for Julian Assange

*Davey Heller
Independent Australia
12 January 2020*

In recent months there has been a welcome upturn in support for Julian Assange.

The working class is increasingly supporting Assange as they learn more about his dire conditions in Belmarsh Prison, the threat to his health and the end of the bogus Swedish investigation into him. However, there has also been increased support amongst layers of the ruling class, including social democratic forces who had previously abandoned Assange.

This has taken the form of statements of support by prominent Australian politicians. Though when any faction of the ruling class start talking in defence of human rights, they cannot be taken on face value and their motivations must be examined.

In Australia, the deafening Parliamentary silence maintained since 2011 has broken down. In late October a cross Parliamentary grouping of eleven MP's formed. Labor Party stalwart Bob Carr, former Foreign Minister spoke out on November 14th at the EU Parliament, calling on the Australian Government to intervene to free Julian Assange.

On Jan 4th, Carr published an opinion piece in the Sydney Morning Herald, supporting Assange. In a letter made public on November 26th, Kevin Rudd, a former Labor Party Prime Minister, also spoke out against the extradition of Assange to the U.S. in November.

When in power both Rudd and Carr actively participated in the conspiracy against Julian Assange. Why would they be speaking out now? Rudd and Carr represent a section of the social democratic (the Labor Party-aligned element) faction of the ruling class that wants Australia to still be in the U.S. camp but also pursue its own imperialist and profit interests with some independence from the U.S.

Rudd and Carr have demonstrated this by articulating policies and concerns that too openly aligning with the U.S. war drive against China threatens the massive profits to be made out of trade. Carr has spoken out prominently in defence of Australia-Sino relations and was the Director of the Australia-China Relations Institute (ACRI) at the University of Technology Sydney from 2014-2019.

Kevin Rudd was perhaps removed by the machinations of several "protected assets" of the U.S. (as revealed by Wikileaks) in a parliamentary coup in 2010 and replaced by Julia Gillard in 2010. Rudd, at the time, was pushing for Australia to play an intermediary role between the rising power of China and the U.S. in the Pacific and was not seen as sufficiently supportive of the Obama Administration's "Pivot to Asia" aimed at containing China.

The push by these two prominent Labor politicians in support of Assange must be seen in this context. I believe that opposing Assange's extradition by the Trump Administration is part of pushing back against aligning one hundred per cent with U.S. imperialism's war drive against China and the Trump Administration.

An additional motivation is that this wing of the social democrats pragmatically perceives that the sight of Julian Assange dying in jail or being shipped to a CIA black site in an orange jumpsuit will risk provoking mass hostility to the U.S./Australia alliance.

Carr has stated that many Australian's would be 'deeply uneasy' at a fellow citizen being handed over to the 'living hell of a life sentence in an American penitentiary'. This adds weight to the idea that their support for Assange is predicated on the belief that his extradition to the U.S. will be "bad for business".

The social-democratic Labor Party is not united on this issue. The Labor Party overall is still an unquestioningly loyal servant of U.S. imperialist interests. This was graphically illustrated by Tony Burke, the Manager of Opposition Business moving a motion to shut down a speech in favour of defending Assange being given by conservative National MP Barnaby Joyce in Parliament on November 26th.

Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese has stayed virtually silent on the issue as well.

The speech by Barnaby Joyce that the ALP moved to shut down is part of a **push by a section of the right of the ruling class to use Assange**. Along with the prominent right-wing populist Joyce, the Parliamentary group for Assange is co-chaired by far-right conservative Liberal MP George Christensen.

Far-right populists in Australia are seeking to harness the mass support that exists for Assange to burnish their own phoney "anti-establishment" credentials and to push legitimate hostility to the mainstream press down a right-wing "fake-news" path. **The phenomenon of the far-right and right-wing populists attempting to co-opt Julian Assange has been seen both in the UK and the U.S.** In addition, the right can use Assange to whip up a nationalistic "hands off an aussie" sentiment.

Although Joyce appears to have some genuine sentiment based on the fact he was the first Australian politician to speak out in defence of David Hicks, Christensen, who is co-chair of the twelve member Parliamentary "Friends of Bring Julian Assange Home Group, recently showed his "commitment" to free speech and anti-war sentiment by working to have anti-war artwork removed from display in his home State of Queensland.

Again, like the Social Democratic wing of the ruling class, the right is split on Assange. Scott Morrison, of Australia's evangelical hard right, Trump-loving Prime Minister, has publicly supported the show trial of Assange occurring in the UK.

On radio and in a written response to a letter from Pamela Anderson, he has repeated the lie that Australia can do nothing to "intervene" in the legal processes of the UK and that Julian Assange should "face the music" in the UK. Morrison, who was recently feted in Washington by Trump has fully aligned his Government with the Trump Administration and its aggressive moves against China and Iran.

It is worth noting that **the factions of both the social democrats and the right that have spoken out in support of Assange are both relatively marginalised from the leadership of their respective major parties. This reflects the ongoing purge within the Parliamentary Labor and Liberal Parties of any forces which are not completely**

aligned with the aims of U.S. imperialism. A similar process has been underway in many countries around the world.

A letter now signed by over eighty-five doctors, calling for Assange to be immediately moved out of Belmarsh prison to a hospital setting finally broke through much of the silence in the mainstream press about Assange's dire condition. It shows how this campaign, suppressed artificially for so long by tricks such as the Swedish investigation, can and will quickly grow in the build-up to the scheduled February extradition hearing in London.

An open letter has also now been signed by over 900 journalists. Julian Assange wrote a letter from Belmarsh encouraging people to form Free Assange "blocks" in their workplaces. The doctors and journalists initiatives must be built on in other workplaces and professions.

It should be obvious that the far right are not to be relied on in this struggle for democratic rights. Nor can we place our hopes in sections of the ALP, let alone follow their lead. Even as we welcome growing support for Assange from these forces we cannot forget their silence for much of the last ten years of Assange's persecution.

We cannot forget that they represent in some form or another, the same class that is persecuting Assange. Instead, the movement to Free Assange must remain focused on the only social force with the power to free him: the working class. The fight to defend Julian can and must become the rallying cry for the working class to protect its own interests.

Davey Heller is a writer and campaigner.

<https://independentaustralia.net/politics/politics-display/the-rising-support-for-julian-assange,13472>

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Will alleged CIA misbehavior set Julian Assange free?

James C. Goodale
The Hill
2020-01-13

A few days before Christmas, Julian Assange testified to a Spanish court that a Spanish security company, UC Global S.L., acting in coordination with the CIA, illegally recorded all his actions and conversations, including with his lawyers, and streamed them back in real time to the CIA. He will, at the end of February, make a similar complaint to a British extradition court about the CIA's alleged misbehavior.

Will such misbehavior, if proven, set Assange free?

The Daniel Ellsberg case may be instructive. You may recall that after the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the "Pentagon Papers" case, Ellsberg was indicted under the Espionage Act for leaking Pentagon documents to The New York Times and The Washington Post.

After the trial commenced in San Francisco, it was brought to the judge's attention that the "White House plumbers" broke into the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist. Based on that information and other complaints of government misbehavior, including the

FBI's interception of Ellsberg's telephone conversations with a government official, **Judge William Matthew Byrne decided that the case should be dismissed with prejudice because the government acted outrageously.**

For similar reasons, the case against Assange should be dismissed, if it reaches the U.S. courts.

The "plumbers" were a covert group formed by the Nixon White House to stop leaks of information from the government, such as the Pentagon Papers. They are notorious for their burglary at the Watergate complex, which led to former President Nixon's downfall. Approximately nine months before the Watergate break-in, the plumbers, led by former CIA agent E. Howard Hunt, burglarized a psychiatrist's office to find information that could discredit Ellsberg.

The CIA also was involved with the break-in. It prepared a psychiatric profile of Ellsberg as well as an ID kit for the plumbers, including drivers' licenses, Social Security cards, and disguises consisting of red wigs, glasses and speech alteration devices.

Additionally, the CIA allowed Hunt and his sidekick, G. Gordon Liddy, to use two CIA safe houses in the D.C. area for meetings and storage purposes. Clearly, the CIA knew the plumbers were up to no good. It is unclear whether the CIA knew Ellsberg was the target, but it would not have taken much to figure it out.

The Spanish newspaper *El Pais* broke the story that UC Global invaded Assange's privacy at the Ecuadorian embassy and shared its surveillance with the CIA. It demonstrated step-by-step, document-by-document, UC Global's actions and its contacts with the CIA. UC Global reportedly installed cameras throughout Assange's space in the embassy — including his bathroom — and captured Assange's every word and apparently livestreamed it, giving the CIA a free TV show of Assange's daily life.

After reading *El Pais's* series, you would have to be a dunce not to believe the CIA didn't monitor Assange's every move at the Ecuadorian embassy, including trips to the bathroom.

Ecuador granted Assange asylum in their embassy for seven years, after he jumped bail in London to avoid extradition to Sweden for allegedly raping two Swedish women. (Those charges are now dismissed.) If you can believe it, Ecuador had hired UC Global to protect the Ecuadorian embassy and Assange. Not surprisingly, the CIA later made UC Global its spy to surveil Assange.

When there was a change of administration in Ecuador, Assange's asylum was withdrawn, and he was immediately arrested by British police at the request of U.S. officials. The United States subsequently indicted him for violating the Espionage Act, for publishing the very same information published roughly contemporaneously by *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *El Pais*, *Le Monde* and *Der Spiegel*. (Assange already was subject to a sealed indictment in the United States for computer hacking.)

The behavior of UC Global and the CIA seems indistinguishable from the government's behavior in the Ellsberg case, which a federal judge found to have "offended a sense of justice" and "incurably infected the prosecution" of the case. Accordingly, he concluded that the only remedy to ensure due process and the fair

administration of justice was to dismiss Ellsberg's case "with prejudice," meaning that Ellsberg could not be retried.

Can anything be more offensive to a "sense of justice" than an unlimited surveillance, particularly of lawyer-client conversations, livestreamed to the opposing party in a criminal case? The alleged streaming unmasked the strategy of Assange's lawyers, giving the government an advantage that is impossible to remove. Short of dismissing Assange's indictment with prejudice, the government will always have an advantage that can never be matched by the defense.

The usual remedy for warrantless surveillance is to exclude any illegally obtained information from the trial, but that remedy is inapplicable here. The government's advantage in surveilling Assange is not the acquisition of tangible evidence but, rather, intangible insights into Assange's legal strategy. There is no way, therefore, to give Assange a fair trial, since his opponents will know every move he will make.

When Assange begins his extradition hearing, this will be part of his argument — that the CIA's misbehavior violates his human rights by depriving him of his right to a fair trial.

The CIA will no doubt attempt to trump this argument by defending the surveillance on grounds of national security. This may be easier said than done, however: It is one thing to say the CIA can engage in surveillance abroad for its own intelligence-gathering purposes, and another to say it can listen to the private lawyer-client communications of a person against whom the U.S. government has an open criminal investigation.

More to the point, **it does not seem immediately clear why eavesdropping on conversations of legal strategy protects U.S. national security.** In my experience in national security cases (I led *The New York Times* lawyers in the "Pentagon Papers" case), **every time the government is backed into a corner in such cases, it will simply serve up a defense of "national security"** because it is difficult to defend against such an assertion and the government, consequently, has the ability to trump every competing argument.

Violation of Assange's fair-trial rights is only one of many arguments he can make to defeat extradition. For example, he can argue that his health is so poor that he cannot survive extradition. His father has said Assange will die in prison, and the United Nations Special Rapporteur overseeing his case, Nils Melzer, believes Assange's mental acuity has been damaged irreparably through "psychological torture."

Most importantly, Assange can assert that the action of the U.S. government is for its own political benefit. It is standard law that extradition be refused when a country seeks it in order to prosecute a political offense. In this case, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has said the U.S. government would seek to shut down Assange for using "free speech values against us" and characterized Assange's organization, WikiLeaks, as "a non-state hostile intelligence service."

That statement does not sound like the government wishes to convict Assange for violating U.S. national security laws as much as to get rid of Assange himself for disclosing embarrassing information that is detrimental to American diplomatic and political interests. Whether the actions the U.S. government takes against Assange constitute a "political" offense will be hotly contested.

Former State Department and National Security Council legal adviser John Bellinger recently predicted on NPR a “battle royal because Assange and his lawyers will argue very forcefully that ... the Trump administration is coming after him for political reasons.”

No doubt there also will be a “battle royal” regarding whether the CIA can, with impunity, surveil Assange’s actions and conversations — including those with his lawyers — and then livestream those to its offices without being heavily penalized for its behavior. It would seem the only appropriate remedy for such outrageous conduct would be to set Assange free.

James C. Goodale was the vice chairman and general counsel of The New York Times and is the author of “Fighting for the Press: The Inside Story of the Pentagon Papers and other battles.”

<https://thehill.com/opinion/criminal-justice/477939-will-cia-misbehavior-set-julian-assange-free>

Rapper MIA supports Julian Assange at court

*Ed Sykes
The Canary
13 January 2020*

Rapper and singer MIA has supported Julian Assange as the WikiLeaks founder appeared in court on Monday. She joined dozens of Assange supporters as he attended a hearing at Westminster Magistrates’ Court.

Fellow rapper Lowkey has also supported Assange, and recently spoke to The Canary about the importance of whistleblowers and media freedom.

Assange, 48, is currently being held in HMP Belmarsh, awaiting the outcome of an extradition request by the US, where he faces 18 charges, including conspiring to commit computer intrusion.

A statement from Veterans for Peace UK (VfP UK) in 2019 explained how the Iraq War Logs and Afghan War Diaries from WikiLeaks had: “revealed the true human cost of our wars in the Middle East. Wikileaks acted in the public interest by releasing these documents and Julian Assange, as a journalist, was right to publish in association with newspapers including The Guardian, The New York Times, Le Monde, and Der Spiegel.”

Over 60 doctors previously wrote to the British government in late 2019 to outline serious concerns about Assange’s health. Critics of Assange’s potential extradition, meanwhile, highlighted reasons for dismissing the US request.

Assange is accused of working with former US army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning to leak hundreds of thousands of classified documents.

Speaking outside court, MIA told the PA news agency that “to give somebody an hour to put their case together is not right”.

During the 12-minute hearing on Monday, Assange's lawyers complained they had not been granted sufficient contact time with him.

Gareth Peirce told the court there had been a lack of contact time to speak with her client at high-security Belmarsh, something which threatened to delay the serving of evidence ahead of the trial.

She said: "We have pushed Belmarsh in every way — it is a breach of a defendant's rights."

District Judge Vanessa Baraitser agreed to adjourn the hearing until the end of the day, in order to allow Assange and Ms Peirce a chance to sign off papers and go over their case together at court, rather than have Assange sent back to prison.

Assange spoke only to confirm his name, his date of birth, and to briefly state he did not understand an element of proceedings.

Such was the clamour for a seat in court that supporters queued for 30 minutes to get into the building, then filed in a line outside the first floor court number one, long before the case opened.

MIA was among more than 40 people who were allowed inside the packed public gallery, who were required to show security they had switched their phones off before entering.

Assange briefly re-appeared in courtroom one later on Monday afternoon, after spending an hour discussing his case with his lawyer.

Before proceedings were adjourned for the day, a case management hearing date was confirmed for January 23 at the same court, with Assange due to appear via videolink.

Australian Assange was jailed for 50 weeks in May last year for breaching his bail conditions after seeking asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy in London. He had been dramatically removed from the embassy building in April.

Assange's full extradition hearing is scheduled for February 24 at Woolwich Crown Court.

<https://www.thecanary.co/uk/news/2020/01/13/rapper-mia-supports-julian-assange-at-court/>

'Stay Strong, You Will Be Free!' Watch Julian Assange Get Cheered On Outside London Court

Sputnik
2020-01-13

The imprisoned WikiLeaks founder appeared at the Westminster Magistrates' Court in London on Monday, where a multipart hearing on his possible extradition to the United States was started.

Journalists armed with cameras managed to catch a glimpse of Julian Assange Monday night following his extradition hearing, with the WikiLeaks founder filmed from inside a police van outside the court.

Assange, wearing glasses and sporting a grey beard, was encouraged to “stay strong” and told that people were fighting for him.

“Stay strong Julian, we’re fighting for you. We won’t let them do this to you! Remember that! Stay strong, you will be free!” an unidentified man could be heard shouting.

Encouraged by a second journalist to talk to camera, Assange shook his head and gestured toward his ear, indicating that he couldn’t hear or wasn’t in a condition to speak.

The 48-year-old Australian-born activist made a brief appearance at the Westminster Magistrates’ Court on Monday, with his lawyers seeking to prevent his extradition to the United States. At the hearing, Judge Vanessa Baraitser ruled that Assange’s next hearing would take place on January 23. Assange is to take part in that hearing by video linkup.

Assange, accused of sexual harassment and rape in Sweden in 2010, sought shelter in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London between 2012 and early 2019, maintaining that the charges against him were false. In April 2019, UK police were given permission by the Lenin Moreno government to enter the embassy and arrest him, with UK authorities sentencing him to 50 weeks prison time for breaching his original bail conditions. In May 2019, the US Department of Justice indicted Assange under the Espionage Act and demanded his extradition. If extradited and convicted, the WikiLeaks founder could spend the rest of his life in prison.

Swedish authorities dropped their investigation into the rape allegation made against Assange in November, citing a 'weakened evidential situation.'

Assange's friends and fellow journalists have repeatedly expressed concerns over a "rapid decline" in the WikiLeaks founder's health since his imprisonment. Assange's health is believed to have deteriorated steadily since his confinement to the Ecuadorian Embassy in 2012, getting worse after he was jailed.

<https://sputniknews.com/europe/202001131078027241-stay-strong-you-will-be-free-watch-julian-assange-get-cheered-on-outside-london-court/>

Assange attends procedural hearing at Westminster Magistrates Court

*Thomas Scripps
World Socialist Web Site
14 January 2020*

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange appeared in person in central London at Westminster Magistrates Court yesterday, at a hearing scheduled to process the submission of defence evidence. The hearing was the latest procedural step in the extradition request from the US for Assange, which will be subject of a scheduled four-week trial beginning next month.

It was revealed that, since his last hearing on December 19, Assange had been granted just two hours total to review that evidence with his legal team. What is being conducted in the British courts is not a trial but a legal farce, designed to cover up the lawless rendition of a political prisoner to a country that brazenly assassinates political opponents.

Assange is wanted by his US persecutors on trumped-up Espionage Act charges that could see him jailed for 175 years. Assange and whistle-blower Chelsea Manning are being persecuted for their role in bringing to the world's population the truth about the war crimes, anti-democratic intrigues and mass surveillance conducted globally by the US government and other imperialist powers, including the United Kingdom. WSWS reporter Thomas Scripps speaks outside the hearing

Assange appeared defiant in court. He held a short conversation with his lawyer Gareth Peirce and nodded to and saluted his supporters gathered in the public gallery before the hearing began. He also raised his clenched fist to the gallery as he left the dock.

Peirce began the hearing with reference to the continuing and deliberate isolation of Assange from his lawyers and the impossibility of conducting a defence on this basis.

According to Peirce, evidence that is yet to be submitted includes a volume on prison conditions that she has only begun to discuss with her client. There are three further "substantial volumes" of exhibited material that Assange had not yet had a chance to see at all.

The legal team had hoped, Peirce noted, to have time to go through this material while Assange was held in the cells at Westminster Magistrates Court, after a "difficult journey" in a police van from the maximum security Belmarsh prison where he is being incarcerated. **However, court security insisted that an interview could not be guaranteed, and that any session would be limited to just one hour.**

Peirce explained "this has set us back on our timetable enormously."

District Judge Vanessa Baraitser was unmoved. She stated that there were 47 people held in the court's cells and eight available interview rooms, and that therefore the decision to limit Assange's time was "not an unreasonable position for them to take."

Baraitser has repeatedly refused to direct Belmarsh prison to make more visiting time available to Assange's lawyers, despite the availability of interview rooms. In a previous hearing, she brazenly questioned how important it actually was for Peirce to go over this information in detail with her client.

When Baraitser asked how much time had so far been available to Assange's legal team to discuss the evidence in question with him, Peirce responded that, since their last contact with the court, they had just two hours.

This was compounded, as what little time was available this week was reduced by the last-minute change of the hearing date from Tuesday to Monday.

Peirce said, "We did not book a visit for tomorrow [Tuesday] because we thought it was a court day, so we have lost the opportunity for that. If it were made available, we would take it." Baraitser made no move to address this issue.

In the coming days, Assange will have just one hour-long Thursday afternoon session at Belmarsh to review the remaining evidence before the deadline for submission at the end of the week.

On Belmarsh prison's continued refusal to allow Assange sufficient time to review his case with his lawyers, Peirce said, "We have pushed Belmarsh in every way" and indicated that the legal team were seriously considering launching a judicial review—**"it is a breach of a defendant's rights."**

Speaking outside the court, Joseph Farrell, WikiLeaks ambassador and a Centre for Investigative Journalism board member, said, "Julian has had extremely poor access to his lawyers. The reason he was brought here in person was that after the hearing he would be able to stay and work through the evidence, at least pieces of it, with his lawyers. Due to the various limitations here at Westminster court the judge said that he would be entitled to an hour. His lawyer pointed out that since the last time he spoke to the court he had only received two hours with his lawyers and that the way Belmarsh has been acting is brinking on judicial review.

"The idea that somebody doesn't have access to their lawyers when they're facing a life sentence, when they have 175 years [of imprisonment] ahead of them, when the prosecution has had 10 years to mount the hardest case that they have with unlimited resources, and for somebody to have three hours with their lawyers in order to sign off on their future, it's unacceptable."

Also in attendance at the hearing was independent journalist Tareq Haddad. Haddad resigned from the US magazine *Newsweek* in December after its editors refused to publish his story on the documented doctoring of an Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) report on an alleged chemical attack in Douma, Syria, in April 2018.

The WSWS spoke with Haddad about his resignation and about his views on the Assange case:

"I frequently write about foreign affairs and international politics. When Turkey's invasion of Syria started, I was asked to report on that and a week into the Turkish invasion there was alleged white phosphorous use by Turkey, so I investigated that. In the course of that investigation I was interviewing a lot of chemical weapons investigators or people from bodies related to chemical weapons such as the International Committee for the Red Cross.

"As I was doing that story, I started to hear rumblings of leaks within the OPCW. At the very beginning it wasn't something I could report on but as I followed it more closely it reached the point at which I thought 'okay, something needs to be printed.' And that point was the documents released by WikiLeaks, then the letter which hadn't yet been released by WikiLeaks, which was published in the Mail on Sunday, and then when that letter was verified by Reuters . . .

"Even when I had this, I was told I couldn't report on it, and that was the moment I had to resign. Also, in the process of trying to write this story, I was personally attacked and smeared as a journalist despite not having any prior issues with my stories. It was only when I tried to write anything controversial that my character started to be attacked. They said that the sources I was using for my stories — not just this one but all them — were bad sources or that I was editorialising. **I've got over a thousand by-lines for *International Business Times*, I've got over 200 by-lines for**

***Newsweek* and this never came up. It was only when I was trying to discuss the doctoring of chemical weapons reports.”**

Asked about the wider war danger in the Middle East, Haddad said, “So what’s happened in Syria is part of a much wider process. Essentially, what’s been happening for the last 50 or 60 years is that the United States and the United Kingdom have been repeatedly breaking international law, invading countries, not respecting international sovereignty.

“Now there’s a fairly recent alliance of Russia, China, Iran, Iraq that all kind of agree that we’re stronger together than apart and our alliance should be centred on two things: international sovereignty and the following of international law. They have their own bad records in these areas, but they understand that it’s in their interests to stand up for this, because they’ve been the victims of US foreign policy all this time.

“My understanding of what’s going on in relation to Assange is that freedom of speech is very quickly dying or already dead in the Western world. This case is symbolic of something much bigger. People need to be aware of it and understand the complexity of the case. It’s inspiring to see so many people here. I think it’s one of the most important court cases in the history of the West, for sure. And it will have a symbolic outcome. If freedom of speech is not respected here, in the case of Assange, it’s not going to be respected in wider society and the world that we live in is not going to look the same in a few years. We’re already going down that path of authoritarianism.”

Assange’s next procedural hearing is scheduled for Thursday, January 23.

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/01/14/assa-j14.html>

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Short of Time: Julian Assange at the Westminster Magistrates Court

Binoy Kampmark
Off-Guardian
Jan. 16, 2020

Another slot of judicial history, another notch to be added to the woeful record of legal proceedings being undertaken against Julian Assange. The ailing WikiLeaks founder was coping as well as he could, showing the resourcefulness of the desperate at his Monday hearing.

At the Westminster Magistrates Court, Assange faced a 12-minute process, an ordinary affair in which he was asked to confirm his name, an ongoing ludicrous state of affairs, and seek clarification about an aspect of the proceedings.

Of immediate concern to the lawyers, specifically seasoned human rights advocate Gareth Peirce, was the issue that prison officers at Belmarsh have been obstructing and preventing the legal team from spending sufficient time with their client, despite the availability of empty rooms.

Three substantial sets of documents and evidence required signing off by Assange before being submitted to the prosecution, a state of affairs distinctly impossible given the time constraints.

A compounding problem was also cited by Peirce: the shift from moving the hearing a day forward resulted in a loss of time. "This slippage in the timetable is extremely worrying."

Whether this shows indifference to protocol or malice on the part of prosecuting authorities is hard to say, but either way, justice is being given a good flaying.

The argument carried sufficient weight with District Judge Vanessa Baraitser to result in an adjournment till 2 pm in the afternoon, but this had more to do with logistics than any broader principle of conviction.

As Baraitser reasoned, 47 people were currently in custody at court; a mere eight rooms were available for interviewing, leaving an additional hour to the day.

In her view, if Assange was sinned against, so was everybody else, given that others in custody should not be prevented from access to counsel. (This judge has a nose for justice, albeit using it selectively.)

As things stand, Peirce is aiming to finalise the exhibits for submission to the prosecution by January 18. The government deadline for responding to those documents will be February 7. The case proceeding itself was adjourned till January 23, and Assange will have the choice, limited as it is, of having the hearing at the Westminster Magistrates Court or Belmarsh.

Supporters outside the court were also of same mind regarding the paltry amount of time awarded Assange.

The rapper M.I.A, showing how support for the publisher can at times be sketchy, managed to have a dig at the state while also acknowledging thanks from it. (An announcement had just been made that she would be receiving an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.)

"I think it is important to follow this case. I am off to get a medal at Buckingham Palace tomorrow and I think today is just as important. To give somebody an hour to put their case together is not quite right." Assange supporters would agree with her view that, for "a case of this scale, having only access to two hours to prepare, is illegal in itself."

The atmosphere around the proceedings has thickened of late, and the WikiLeaks argument here about CIA interference and surveillance conducted by the Spanish firm Undercover Global S.L. while Assange was in the Ecuadorean embassy in London is biting.

Prior to Christmas he gave testimony to Spanish judge Jose de la Mata claiming he was not aware that cameras installed by the company in the Ecuadorean embassy were also capturing audio details.

Leaving aside the broader issues of free speech, an argument has been made that CIA meddling might well be the fly in the ointment that impairs the prosecution's case.

This might be wishful thinking, but this is a line of inquiry worth pursuing. The WikiLeaks legal team is keen to press the matter in February during the extradition hearing.

In the well-considered view of James C. Goodale, former Vice Chairman and General Counsel for *The New York Times*, “After reading *El Pais*’s series, you would have to be a dunce not to believe the CIA didn’t monitor Assange’s every move at the Ecuadorean embassy, including trips to the bathroom.”

Goodale cites the Pentagon Papers case as an example that the defence may well draw upon.

Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked classified Pentagon reports to *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, had the office of his psychiatrist broken into by President Richard Nixon’s notorious “plumbers”, led by former CIA agent E. Howard Hunt.

The conscience-stricken analyst was also facing charges under the Espionage Act of 1917. When it came to the trial judge’s attention that government misconduct, including the FBI’s interception of Ellsberg’s telephone conversations with a government official had characterised the entire effort against the whistleblower, the case was dismissed with prejudice. Ellsberg’s treatment had “offended a sense of justice” and “incurably infected the prosecution”.

As with Assange, the footprint of the CIA in Ellsberg’s case was far from negligible. It assisted in the muddled break-in. It penned a clumsy psychiatric profile of Ellsberg and assembled a full identification ensemble for the plumbers: Social Security cards, disguises, drivers’ licenses, speech alternation devices.

As Goodale rhetorically poses, “Can anything be more offensive to a ‘sense of justice’ than an unlimited surveillance, particularly of lawyer-client conversations, livestreamed to the opposing party in a criminal case?” It remains for the British courts to consider whether that degree of offensiveness has been achieved in this case.

Dr. Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne. Email: bkampmark@gmail.com

<https://off-guardian.org/2020/01/16/short-of-time-julian-assange-at-the-westminster-magistrates-court/>

Why Americans — and the World — Ought to Be Concerned About Julian Assange's Extradition Case

The indictment of Assange is recognized by many free speech groups as the most important press freedom case of our time. Yet, with mainstream media blackout and utter silence of political leaders on this important issue, criminalization of journalism goes on without much of the public being aware of it.

Nozomi Hayase
Common Dreams
January 19, 2020

On Monday January 13, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange appeared at Westminster Magistrates Court in his fight against extradition to the US. The administrative hearing concerned Assange's lack of access to legal counsel, making it difficult for him to adequately prepare for his case. His lawyer, Gareth Peirce, told the Judge that UK prison is blocking her client from reviewing key evidence. She has only had 2 hours with him since last hearing in December.

Travesty of injustice is woven into the UK legal system itself. This procedural hearing, which was originally scheduled on Tuesday, was moved earlier by a day at the last minute. This gave Assange's defense team only 1 hour with him rather than the full day they had expected.

Assange has been charged with 17 counts of espionage for publishing the government's documents exposing US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan and torture in Guantanamo Bay. The indictment of Assange is recognized by many free speech groups as the most important press freedom case of our time. Yet, with mainstream media blackout and utter silence of political leaders on this important issue, criminalization of journalism goes on without much of the public being aware of it.

America's betrayal of its ideals

What is this prosecution of Assange really about? Why do Americans need to be concerned about this Australian journalist who is charged with violating the Espionage Act by our government? WikiLeaks has radically changed the media landscape. By publishing truthful information about the United States, the organization came head-to-head with the Pentagon and the CIA. Yet, effectiveness of his fearless journalism is not the only reason Assange became a political prisoner; designated as an enemy of the state and psychologically tortured inside Belmarsh prison (once known as the UK's Guantanamo Bay).

"WikiLeaks has radically changed the media landscape. By publishing truthful information about the United States, the organization came head-to-head with the Pentagon and the CIA. Yet, effectiveness of his fearless journalism is not the only reason Assange became a political prisoner."

WikiLeaks 2010 publication of the *Collateral Murder* video shed light on a hidden history of the United States. Raw footage of a US Army attack in the suburb of Iraq, carried out under the banner of "Operation Iraqi Freedom" recovered lost pages of history. The unfolding imagery seen from the view of an Apache helicopter reached back to a time before the invasion of Iraq, before 9/11, and even before the nation's addiction to oil began; to the genocide of the natives in the warfare led by American guns and cannons.

Memories retrieved let people see America's hypocrisy and betrayal of its own ideals. This, manifested in exclusion of some from the premise of equality of all people, stated as self-evident truth in its founding document.

Carrying on the struggles of the past

Assange, through his work with WikiLeaks, not only informed the public about America's troubled beginning but also provided a mechanism for people to redeem its unaccounted past. Throughout history, from the defiance of abolitionists to the women's suffrage movement, demands for equality came from below. Ordinary

people pushed boundaries of the Constitution to make ideals in the Declaration of Independence legally binding.

The '60s brought political upheaval, and resistance came full force. Individuals like Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X, through their united words and actions, inspired black people to mobilize in their fight to achieve civil rights. Mario Savio, the spokesperson for the free speech movement instigated the nation-wide student protests against government censorship and restriction of free speech on campus.

In this digital age, Assange, who has won numerous awards for journalism, found a way to help a new generation of America to carry on this struggle of the past. He did this by innovating a new form of journalism online that is run on free software.

Open experiment of democracy

Jérémie Zimmermann, a French computer science engineer and co-founder of the most prominent organization in Europe that defends online freedoms described free software as a social contract and noted that it is a way to organize a public sphere.

Zimmermann delved deeper to reveal that the drive behind free software is love. He described how, "love is about understanding, understanding of flaws of others and of ourselves". He then spoke how free software is, "a joyful practice with a role for everyone where we learn collectively about our flaws, where we learn to fail and love our failures, and learn about our failures".

With WikiLeaks as a project of free software, Assange brought love to the Internet that could transform it into becoming a powerful tool for democracy. This love shared among the youth who grew up on the Internet fueled acts of civil disobedience. The former US Army intelligence analyst, Chelsea Manning, lit the spark of conscience, by releasing the largest trove of state secrets in US history. This source behind WikiLeaks disclosure of the Bush Era's war crimes remains incarcerated for refusing to cooperate at a grand jury targeting the publisher.

From Manning to Jeremy Hammond to Edward Snowden — waves of whistleblowers created an insurgency of contagious courage. People inside the institutions who want change came forward to defy the unjust laws in order to uphold the high ideals. This kick-started an open experiment of democracy, creating a network that seeks to understand flaws, collaborates to amend them, and invites all to participate in envisioning a new society.

"By releasing documents, WikiLeaks set a frozen history in motion. History is now happening, and Assange's plight for freedom is our story, where each person has a significant role to play."

Claiming our history

With this platform of democracy that Assange helped to launch, what did he try to do? Assange came to see how ordinary people are made passive; being tossed around and excluded from vital decision-making processes. He decided to side with those who are oppressed, wanting to help people recognize their own significance.

While being held in solitary confinement in a maximum high security prison in London, Assange was awarded the 2019 Dignity Prize for his support of Catalan

people's struggle for independence and their fight against Spanish police brutality. Just as he aspired to walk alongside Catalans on their path for self-determination from behind the computer screen inside a tiny room in the Ecuadorian embassy, where his every move was monitored by the CIA, he also cared about the destiny of America and what it is becoming.

After Monday's hearing, while being transported from Westminster Magistrates Court, Assange looked out at a crowd from inside a police van and acknowledged their support as a man shouted loudly, "Stay strong, you will be free!" Assange sacrificed his liberty so that we could all be free. By releasing documents, WikiLeaks set a frozen history in motion. History is now happening, and Assange's plight for freedom is our story, where each person has a significant role to play.

Only through each of us choosing freely to respond to this love for the world that Assange has demonstrated, may we be able to claim our own history. Only through love for one another that allows us to see perfection in our flaws, and find beauty in messes and our failures, can we begin to work to correct errors of our leaders—and together to end this egregious miscarriage of justice.
Nozomi Hayase

Nozomi Hayase, Ph.D., is an essayist and author of WikiLeaks, the Global Fourth Estate: History Is Happening. Follow her on Twitter: @nozomimagine

<https://www.commondreams.org/views/2020/01/19/why-americans-and-world-ought-be-concerned-about-julian-assanges-extradition-case>

DOCTORS FOR ASSANGE

Consortium News
January 21, 2020

CN Live! will webcast an event in Sydney featuring doctors who've petitioned the UK & Australia to provide urgent medical care for Julian Assange.

On Nov. 22 more than 100 doctors petitioned British Home Secretary Priti Patel to allow imprisoned WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange to be transferred to a university hospital to receive urgent medical care. The letter has so far been unanswered. On Dec. 4 the doctors wrote again, this time to Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice the Rt Hon Robert Buckland QC.

"We reiterate our grave concern that Mr Assange could die of deliberate medical negligence in a British prison and demand an urgent response from the UK Government," the doctors wrote. "In our open letter, we urged the UK Government to change course immediately and transfer Mr Assange from Belmarsh Prison to a university teaching hospital for appropriate expert medical assessment and care. So far, we have received no substantive reply from the UK Government, nor has receipt of our letter been acknowledged.

"In our opinion, the UK Government's conduct in this matter is irresponsible, incompatible with medical ethics and unworthy of a democratic society bound by

the rule of law,” the doctors said. On Dec. 16 the doctors wrote to the Australian foreign minister urging that Assange’s government intervene.

Tonight doctors in Bolivia, Britain, the U.S. and Australia will take part in an event in Sydney to make their mounting concerns further known.

You can watch it here on Consortium News



<https://consortiumnews.com/2020/01/21/cn-live-season-2-episode-2-doctors-for-assange/>

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Witnesses testify that CIA spied on Assange and his lawyers

*Mike Head
World Socialist Web Site
22 January 2020*

Further detailed evidence has been produced in a Spanish court that the CIA systematically and illegally recorded conversations between WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and his lawyers, and all other visitors, while he was trapped inside Ecuador’s London embassy before he was dragged out and arrested last April to face extradition to the US.

The Spanish newspaper *El País* yesterday reported that three people who worked for the Spanish security company UC Global S.L. have testified as protected witnesses in Spain’s High Court, the Audiencia Nacional, that **the company’s head David Morales handed over the surveillance material to the CIA.**

The testimony is another devastating exposure of the decade-long political conspiracy conducted against Assange by the American, British and Australian governments, and their collaborators in Sweden and Ecuador. US imperialism and its allies want to silence him for life for publishing hundreds of thousands of documents laying bare the war crimes and other criminal activities of the US and its allies around the world.

They are equally desperate to prevent further damning leaks by courageous whistle blowers and journalists as they prepare new wars, assassinations and coups.

The witness statements also confirm the extraordinary extent to which these governments have trampled over Assange's legal and democratic rights, including the fundamental and precious protection of lawyer-client confidentiality. This evidence alone requires the US extradition case to be thrown out of court on the grounds of illegality.

According to the evidence provided by the witnesses — videos, audio tapes and dozens of emails — the surveillance operation was extensive. In particular, **Assange's meetings with his legal team were videoed and recorded** in order to gain material to try to incriminate him and to identify the evidence and legal arguments they would marshal against any prosecution under the US Espionage Act.

Under Morales' express orders, the security company photographed the passports of all of Assange's visitors, took apart their cell phones, downloaded content from their iPads, took notes and put together reports on each meeting. The Ecuadorian diplomats who worked in the London embassy were also spied on.

Morales, a former Spanish military officer, is being prosecuted in Spain, after being charged in October with privacy violation, bribery and money laundering. His company was officially employed by the Ecuadorian government to provide security at the embassy but that became a cover for a bugging operation against Assange.

According to *El País*, two of the witnesses confirmed that, in December 2017, Morales ordered workers to change the surveillance cameras in the embassy and replace them with others that could capture audio. From that moment on, they monitored conversations between Assange and his lawyers, **even in the female toilet that Assange and his legal team used in attempt to avoid illegal bugging.**

During these meetings with his lawyers, Assange prepared his legal defence. The Australian citizen faces trumped-up charges under the US Espionage Act that carry penalties of a total of 175 years in prison. While awaiting the extradition hearing, due to commence in the last week of February, he also has been sedated and denied adequate medical treatment, placing his life in danger.

El País reported that the three witness statements all described the phrases that Morales used with his most-trusted workers, referring to UC Global's collaboration with the US secret service. These included: "We are playing in the first division," "I have gone to the dark side," **"Those in control are the American friends,"** "The American client," "The American friends are asking me to confirm," "The North American will get us a lot of contracts around the world," and "US intelligence."

The recordings from the cameras installed in the embassy were extracted from the hard drive every 15 days — along with recordings from microphones placed in fire extinguishers — and delivered personally to Morales at the headquarters of UC Global, located in Jerez de la Frontera in the south of Spain.

Morales travelled to the US once or twice a month, allegedly to hand over the material to "the Americans." Morales also had installed remote-operated computer servers that collected the illegally obtained information, which could be accessed from the United States.

The witnesses testified that the material on Assange was handed over to the CIA by a member of the security service of Sheldon Adelson, the owner of the casino and resort company Las Vegas Sands Corporation. Adelson is a friend of US President Donald Trump and a large donor to the Republican Party.

Last year, the Italian newspaper, *La Repubblica*, obtained files evidencing UC Global's spying operation, including on doctors, journalists, politicians and celebrities who visited Assange. UC Global compiled profiles on Assange's London-based lawyer Jennifer Robinson and the head of his legal team in Spain, Baltasar Garzon. The video and audio footage showed a half-naked Julian Assange during a medical check-up and two of his lawyers, Gareth Peirce and Aitor Martinez, entering the women's bathroom for a private conversation with their client.

The extradition and prosecution of Assange is an historic assault on basic democratic principles enshrined over hundreds of years in constitutional and common law, including in the US and Britain.

Assange's legal team has already submitted evidence showing the blatantly political nature of the persecution of Assange, including material relating to Chelsea Manning, the former soldier being imprisoned indefinitely to attempt to force her to testify against Assange. They have also submitted public statements by US politicians denouncing Assange and WikiLeaks that jeopardise any prospect of a fair trial, and evidence relating to abuse of due process, vindictive prison conditions and denial of medical treatment.

In any criminal proceeding, evidence that the prosecution had illegally recorded conversations between the defendant and his lawyers would result in a mistrial, the dropping of charges, the release of the defendant and the disbaring and possible prosecution of all those involved.

In 1973, whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg — like Assange — was prosecuted under the Espionage Act for leaking documents to the New York Times and the Washington Post. The Pentagon Papers revealed how the US government had for years lied to the public in order to expand the Vietnam War, which led to the deaths of three million Vietnamese people and 55,000 US soldiers. Their publication triggered an explosion of public anger and fuelled anti-war protests.

During Ellsberg's trial, President Richard Nixon's "plumbers" broke into the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist and wiretapped his phone. In that case, Judge William Matthew Byrne ruled that the surveillance had "incurably infected the prosecution" and dismissed the charges, setting Ellsberg free.

But even more is at stake in Assange's case, because WikiLeaks has helped expose the much greater crimes being committed by the US and its partners, including Britain and Australia. Moreover, the trampling over legal and democratic rights has advanced far further since the 1970s as the US ruling class has increasingly resorted to military aggression to try to overcome the erosion and decay of the global economic hegemony it asserted after World War II.

Moral appeals to politicians will not halt this travesty, let alone the underlying drive by US imperialism. The fight to defend democratic rights and stop the global lurch toward dictatorship and war requires a mass movement. The new year has begun with the resumption of momentous struggles by the working class around the world

against government austerity measures, social inequality, environmental catastrophe and war. This is the force that must be mobilised, against capitalism, in order to free Assange and Manning.

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/01/22/ucgl-j22.html>

Julian Assange extradition trial to be held in two parts spread over several months, judge rules

*Andrew Blake
Washington Times
January 23, 2020*

The extradition trial of Julian Assange, the WikiLeaks publisher wanted in the U.S., will be split into two phases held a few months apart, a British judge ruled [today].

District Judge Vanessa Baraitser agreed during a pre-trial hearing held in London to hold **extradition proceedings for Mr. Assange during a week next month and three weeks in May.**

The judge's decision was made at the request of lawyers on each side of the extradition battle who had asked the court for more time to prepare for the complex legal case.

"No one knew how long this would take, I don't think anyone could have said then it would be longer than two weeks. We simply did not know," said Clair Dobbin, a lawyer representing the U.S., the Australian Associated Press reported.

Edward Fitzpatrick, an attorney for Mr. Assange, similarly argued that more time was needed to review evidence recently provided by the prosecution, adding that the defense team has had a difficult time meeting with their client while he remains jailed at a high-security prison in London.

"Frankly madam, we are not now, because of all those matters coming in ... we are not in a position where it would be fair to Mr. Assange to call the main body of evidence to go ahead," Mr. Fitzgerald said, AAP reported.

The judge reluctantly agreed to split the extradition hearing into two parts, but she indicated she would frown upon any subsequent attempts to postpone proceedings, AAP reported.

<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2020/jan/23/julian-assange-extradition-trial-to-be-held-in-two/>

WikiLeaks Editor: US Is Saying First Amendment Doesn't Apply To Foreigners In Assange Case

*Caitlin Johnstone
2020-01-24*

WikiLeaks editor-in-chief Kristinn Hrafnsson gave a brief statement to the press after the latest court hearing for Julian Assange's extradition case in London today, saying the Trump administration is arguing that the First Amendment of the US Constitution doesn't provide press freedom protection to foreign nationals like Assange.

"We have now learned from submissions and affidavits presented by the United States to this court that they do not consider foreign nationals to have a First Amendment protection," Hrafnsson said.

"Now let that sink in for a second," Hrafnsson continued.

"At the same time that the US government is chasing journalists all over the world, they claim they have extra-territorial reach, they have decided that all foreign journalists which include many of you here, have no protection under the First Amendment of the United States. So that goes to show the gravity of this case. This is not about Julian Assange, it's about press freedom."

Hrafnsson's very newsworthy claim has as of this writing received no mainstream news media coverage at all. The video above is from independent reporter Gordon Dimmack.

This prosecutorial strategy would be very much in alignment with remarks made in 2017 by then-CIA Director Mike Pompeo. "Julian Assange has no First Amendment freedoms. He's sitting in an embassy in London. He's not a U.S. citizen," Pompeo told the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

That, like nearly every sound which emits from Pompeo's amorphous face, was a lie. The First Amendment is not a set of special free speech privileges that the US government magnanimously bestows upon a few select individuals, it's a limitation placed upon the US government's ability to restrict rights that all persons everywhere are assumed to have.

This is like a sex offender who's barred from living within 500 yards of a school claiming that the school he moved in next to is exempt because it's full of immigrants who therefore aren't protected by his restriction. It's a restriction placed on the government, not a right that is given to certain people.

Attorney and Future of Freedom Foundation president Jacob Hornberger explained after Pompeo's remarks, "As Jefferson points out, everyone, not just American citizens, is endowed with these natural, God-given rights, including life, freedom, and the pursuit of happiness. That includes people who are citizens of other countries. Citizenship has nothing to do with rights that are vested in everyone by nature and God. At the risk of belaboring the obvious, that includes Julian Assange."

Journalist Glenn Greenwald, who is himself now being legally persecuted by the same empire as Assange under an indictment which Hrafnsson in the aforementioned statement called "almost a carbon copy of the indictment against Julian Assange", also denounced Pompeo's 2017 remarks.

"The notion that WikiLeaks has no free press rights because Assange is a foreigner is both wrong and dangerous," Greenwald wrote at the time.

“When I worked at the Guardian, my editors were all non-Americans. Would it therefore have been constitutionally permissible for the U.S. Government to shut down that paper and imprison its editors on the ground that they enjoy no constitutional protections? Obviously not.”

Greenwald, who is a former litigation attorney, referenced a *Salon* article he’d written in 2010 skillfully outlining why Senator Susan Collins’ attempts to spin constitutional rights as inapplicable to foreigners would be outlandish, insane, illegal and unconstitutional to put into practice.

“To see how false this notion is that the Constitution only applies to U.S. citizens, one need do nothing more than read the Bill of Rights,” Greenwald argued in 2010. “It **says nothing about ‘citizens.’** To the contrary, many of the provisions are simply restrictions on what the Government is permitted to do (‘Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion . . . or abridging the freedom of speech’; ‘No soldier shall, in time of peace be quartered in any house, without the consent of the owner’). And where rights are expressly vested, they are pointedly not vested in ‘citizens,’ but rather in ‘persons’ or ‘the accused’ (‘No person shall . . . be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law’; ‘In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the state and district wherein the crime shall have been committed . . . and to have the assistance of counsel for his defense’).”

“The U.S. Supreme Court, in 2008, issued a highly publicized opinion, in *Boumediene v. Bush*, which, by itself, makes clear how false is the claim that the Constitution applies only to Americans,” Greenwald wrote. “The *Boumediene* Court held that it was unconstitutional for the Military Commissions Act to deny *habeas corpus* rights to Guantanamo detainees, none of whom was an American citizen (indeed, the detainees were all foreign nationals outside of the U.S.). If the Constitution applied only to U.S. citizens, that decision would obviously be impossible.”

“The principle that the Constitution applies not only to Americans, but also to foreigners, was hardly invented by the Court in 2008,” Greenwald added.

“To the contrary, **the Supreme Court — all the way back in 1886 — explicitly held this to be the case, when, in *Yick Wo v. Hopkins*, it overturned the criminal conviction of a Chinese citizen living in California on the ground that the law in question violated his Fourteenth Amendment rights to due process and equal protection.** In so doing, the Court explicitly rejected what Susan Collins and many others claim about the Constitution.”

These “and many others” Greenwald referred to would now include both Mike Pompeo and the Department of Justice prosecutors who are attempting to extradite and imprison Assange for publishing information exposing US war crimes.

So let’s be clear here: the Trump administration isn’t just working to establish a legal precedent which will demolish press freedoms around the world, it’s also working to change how the US Constitution operates on a very fundamental level.

Does now seem like a good time to fight against this to you? Because it sure as hell seems like that time to me.

Hrafnsson also said in this same statement that Assange’s extradition trial is going to be split into two separate dates, the first on February 24 for one week and then

reconvening again for three weeks starting May 18. If you care about freedom of virtually any sort, I highly recommend paying very, very close attention.

<https://caitlinjohnstone.com/2020/01/23/wikileaks-editor-us-is-saying-first-amendment-doesnt-apply-to-foreigners-in-assange-case/>

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Six legal arguments show why the US extradition of Julian Assange should be denied

*Tom Coburg
The Canary
25 January 2020*

There are at least six legal reasons why the extradition request by the US against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange should be dismissed by the UK courts. The main extradition hearing is scheduled to commence 24 February 2020, with district judge Vanessa Baraitser presiding. The evidence to support Assange is compelling.

1. Client-lawyer confidentiality breached

It's a cornerstone of English law that client-lawyer confidentiality (also known as client-lawyer privilege) is sacrosanct and should not be violated. Yet Assange's case raises serious questions about this.

In September 2019, *The Canary* reported that a private security company organised 24/7 surveillance of Assange during his stay at the Ecuadorian embassy in London. Spanish-based firm UC Global conducted the surveillance and installed a video streaming service direct to the US. Also monitored were meetings between Assange and his lawyers, including Melynda Taylor, Jennifer Robinson, and Baltasar Garzón.

Spanish lawyer Aitor Martinez, another member of Assange's legal team, commented:

"Over the years Mr. Assange and his defense team held legal meetings inside the embassy. Those meetings were protected by the lawyer-client relationship and the fundamental right to defense. However we can see those meetings were spied on, according to the videos published by different media. Under these conditions, it is clear that extradition must be denied."

Should it also be shown that the Ecuadorian government passed on evidence seized from the Ecuadorian embassy in London to the US authorities, then that could also equate to a breach of legal privilege.

It should also be noted that at the Daniel Ellsberg trial the judge dismissed charges relating to the Espionage Act given that evidence against him had been obtained illegally (via a break-in).

2. The initial charge is flawed

The initial charge raised in the indictment against Assange is "conspiracy to commit computer intrusion" in relation to the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (CFAA). *The Canary* suggested this charge is flawed.

For example, the US authorities claim that during an exchange with Assange, whistleblower Chelsea Manning told him: "After this upload, that's all I really have got left". Assange allegedly responded, "Curious eyes never run dry in my experience". However, this simply states that a source was encouraged to provide further information – which is what all journalists do.

Elsewhere in the indictment, it states: "it was part of the conspiracy that Assange and Manning used a special folder on a cloud drop box of WikiLeaks to transmit classified records containing information related to the national defense of the United States."

What this refers to is the facility known as SecureDrop, which helps anonymise receipt of documents. It is used by numerous media outlets around the world, including the *Financial Times*, *Huffington Post*, *BuzzFeed*, the *Guardian*, the *New York Times* and the *Intercept*.

The indictment also alleges that: "it was part of the conspiracy that Assange and Manning took measures to conceal Manning as the source of the disclosure of classified records to WikiLeaks, including by removing usernames from the disclosed information and deleting chat logs between Assange and Manning."

However, protecting the identity of a source is, again, what all journalists do. Human Rights Watch executive director Kenneth Roth agrees: "It is dangerous to suggest that these actions [as listed in the indictment] are somehow criminal rather than steps routinely taken by investigative journalists who communicate with confidential sources to receive classified information of public importance."

Electronic Frontier Foundation writer Cindy Cohen adds that the practices referred to in the indictment involve standard security measures, such as: "using a secure chat service, using cloud services to transfer files, removing usernames, and deleting logs to protect the source's identity."

3. Initial charge relies on co-operation from Manning

In April 2019, The Canary reported how a 40-page affidavit, submitted by FBI agent Megan Brown to the WikiLeaks Grand Jury, could provide clues to how the prosecution of Assange might proceed.

An extract of the chat logs between Manning (Bradass87) and FBI informant Adrian Lamo was presented at her court-martial. Another selected chat log between Manning and 'Nathaniel Frank' (alleged by US authorities to be Assange) was also presented. (A fuller, un-redacted version of the chat logs is available.)

But there are problems with that evidence. On page 21 of the FBI affidavit, reference is made to a question to 'Frank' about LM [LAN Manager] hash cracking (breaking a password in the network Manning had access to). 'Frank' responded by saying "Yes... we have rainbow tables for LM". Two days later, Manning asked if there were "any more hints about this LM hash?" 'Frank' stated, "no luck so far."

Crucially, the FBI affidavit adds: "Investigators have not recovered a response by Manning to Assange's question, and there is no other evidence as to what Assange did, if anything, with respect to the password."

In other words, the affidavit indicates that successful prosecution of Assange on the critical password cracking charge (and perhaps on other charges too) will rely on Manning's full co-operation. But she is still incarcerated, refusing to testify.

There is also no evidence that 'Frank' is Assange.

4. Additional charges raised by the US are political

The 17 charges subsequently added to the initial charge against Assange relate to the Espionage Act. But as pointed out by *The Canary*, some of the world's most high-profile media outlets directly partnered with WikiLeaks to publish the content of leaked documents.

Under UK law an extradition request can be rejected if charges raised are accepted as being political. In this particular case that is apparent, given it can clearly be argued that the prosecution of Assange is selective.

5. US legal precedent argues that Assange's work is protected by the US Constitution

According to WikiLeaks editor in chief Kristinn Hrafnsson, the US government does not believe that foreign nationals, including journalists, are protected by the First Amendment of the US Constitution....

However, in July 2019 *The Canary* reported that Judge John Koeltl of the US District Court for the Southern District of New York takes a different view. He dismissed a civil lawsuit by the Democratic National Committee (DNC), alleging that WikiLeaks conspired with the Russian government to steal and leak DNC emails.

Significantly, the judge commented: "If WikiLeaks could be held liable for publishing documents...then so could any newspaper or other media outlet... This type of information is plainly of the type entitled to the strongest protection that the First Amendment offers."

Greg Barns, a barrister and long-time adviser to the Assange campaign, told *The Canary*: "The court, in dismissing the case, found that the First Amendment protected WikiLeaks' right to publish illegally secured private or classified documents of public interest, applying the same First Amendment standard as was used in justifying the *The New York Times* publication of the Pentagon Papers."

6. Threats of violence against Assange mean he's unable to receive a fair trial

There are numerous examples of threats by US citizens, some prominent, against Assange's life. *Washington Post* columnist Jeffrey T Kuhner, in an article headlined 'Kuhner: Assassinate Assange?', commented: "Mr. Assange is not a journalist or publisher; rather, he is an enemy combatant – and should be treated as such... We should treat Mr. Assange the same way as other high-value terrorist targets."

As reported by *The Canary*, there have been many inflammatory statements, including death threats, issued by US politicians and political commentators against Assange. For example:

- Former Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin reportedly demanded Assange be hunted down like the Al-Qaeda leadership.
- Former political operative and media pundit Bob Beckel suggested in 2011 that the US should assassinate Assange, saying: "A dead man can't leak stuff. This guy's a traitor... treasonous. And he has broken every law of the United States... And I'm not for the death penalty, so... there's only one way to do it: illegally shoot the son of a bitch".

It can be argued, therefore, that the case against Assange is prejudiced and that he cannot receive a fair trial in the US.

Each of any one of the six arguments summarised above could arguably be grounds for dismissal of the extradition request by the US. Collectively, they present an even stronger case for Assange's defence.

The outcome of the extradition hearings will determine not only the fate of Assange but possibly the fate of journalists globally.

<https://www.thecanary.co/uk/analysis/2020/01/25/six-legal-arguments-show-why-the-us-extradition-of-julian-assange-should-be-denied/>

Evidence mounts of irregularities in UK court procedures in Assange extradition case

The second of two articles examining Julian Assange's upcoming extradition trial.

Tom Coburg
The Canary
26 January 2020

The first article in this series proposed that there are at least six legal reasons why the extradition request by the US against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange should be dismissed by the UK courts.

But there is another dimension – that of alleged prejudice by UK justices and other legal irregularities. This builds another strong case to challenge extradition.

Conflicting interests

The Guide to Judicial Conduct in England and Wales states: "The judiciary must be seen to be independent of the legislative and executive arms of government both as individuals and as a whole."

However, in November 2019 *Daily Maverick* journalists Mark Curtis and Matt Kennard revealed that: "at the same time Lady [Emma] Arbuthnot was presiding over Assange's legal case, the judge's husband [Lord James Arbuthnot], was holding talks with senior officials in Turkey, exposed by WikiLeaks, some of whom have an interest in punishing Assange and the WikiLeaks organisation."

Curtis and Kennard additionally revealed that: "[Lord] Arbuthnot was also until February 2019 an "adviser" to the military corporation, Babcock International, on whose board sits the former head of GCHQ, Sir David Omand....

"Before becoming a peer, Lord Arbuthnot was a member of the parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee from 2001-06. He is also currently an officer of the all party parliamentary group on cybersecurity which is administered by the Information Security Group (ISG) at Royal Holloway, University of London. ...

"He is also a former member of the national security strategy joint committee and the armed forces bill committee."

In a follow-up article, Curtis and Kennard revealed that Vitruvian Partners, the employer of Arbuthnot's son Alexander, has a multimillion-pound investment in cybersecurity firm Darktrace, whose officials originate from the National Security Agency (NSA) and the CIA.

Neither Lady nor Lord Arbuthnot returned requests for comment to Daily Maverick. But that's not all.

Previously, *The Canary* reported how WikiLeaks files had revealed Arbuthnot family business and intelligence connections. *The Canary* also revealed how Lord Arbuthnot is a member of the advisory board of the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI); is chair of the advisory board of the UK division of defence and security systems manufacturer Thales; and that when a Tory MP he was chair of the Defence Select Committee.

The Canary further reported that Lord Arbuthnot is listed as senior consultant to SC Strategy and, until 2017 was director. His co-directors were Lord Alex Carlile and former MI6 head Sir John Scarlett, both of whom remain active in the company. In October 2013, Carlile argued that the publication of whistleblower Edward Snowden's revelations about mass surveillance "amounted to a criminal act". Carlile also oversaw UK anti-terrorism laws and supported the introduction of the 'Snoopers' Charter'.

Neither Lady nor Lord Arbuthnot returned requests for comment to The Canary.

There are other concerns.

At a hearing in December 2019, Gareth Peirce, Assange's UK lawyer, told the court that access to her client at Belmarsh prison had been restricted. Consequently, Assange had not been provided with access to evidence in preparation for the main extradition hearing.

Regarding that evidence, Peirce explained to the court: "Without Mr Assange's knowledge, some of it is recently acquired evidence, some of it is subject to months of investigation not always in this country, of which he is unaware because of the blockage in visits."

Indeed, such evidence would include the surveillance footage of Assange in the Ecuadorian embassy. For in the latest twist, witnesses during the trial of UC Global head David Morales stated how that footage and other material was regularly provided to the CIA by him via a security operator working for billionaire gambling magnate Sheldon Adelson, who just happens to be one of Donald Trump's "biggest benefactors".

At another hearing, on 15 January, presiding magistrate District Judge Vanessa Baraitser made it clear to Peirce that she and her legal team will only have access to Assange for one hour, during which evidence can be examined. Consequently, Peirce has raised the possibility of a judicial review.

Implications for journalists

The outcome of Assange's trial is also significant for journalists around the world. Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Chris Hedges argues that if the extradition proceeds: "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."

And *Shadowproof* journalist Kevin Gozstola points out that the charges raised against Assange have wider implications: "Assange holds citizenship in Australia and was also granted citizenship by Ecuador a little over one year ago. Invoking secrecy regulations in the US as part of an indictment against someone who is not an American citizen carries implications for world press freedom."

Global implications indeed.

Altogether, the six legal arguments, as well as claims of impartiality by UK justices and restriction of access to Assange by his lawyers, could see the extradition request denied.

At a hearing on 23 January, it was agreed that the main extradition hearing will start on 24 February at Woolwich Crown Court and will last about one week, with further proceedings expected on 18 May to last another three weeks. A number of parliamentarians from across Europe have indicated they hope to attend the court hearings.

Let battle commence.

<https://www.thecanary.co/uk/analysis/2020/01/26/evidence-mounts-of-irregularities-in-uk-court-procedures-in-assange-extradition-case/>

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Canada's complicity in the persecution of Julian Assange

*Roger Jordan
World Socialist Web Site
27 January 2020*

The British government is conspiring with the Trump administration to extradite WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to the US to face bogus Espionage Act charges and a possible 175-year prison term.

The Australian-born journalist and publisher has been the target of a 9-year legal vendetta, mounted by British and US authorities, and supported by the Canadian

political establishment, because he sought to inform working people around the world of the crimes carried out by US imperialism and its allies.

The prosecution of Assange is a legal travesty. One, moreover, that is being used to gut basic democratic rights, including the rights of free speech and freedom of the press and the right to due process.

United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer has repeatedly denounced his treatment by British authorities — including his seven years of effective detention in the Ecuadorean Embassy and his current incarceration, in virtual solitary confinement, at the hellish maximum security Bellmarsh Prison—as psychological torture. Scores of doctors have warned that this torture has placed Assange’s life in grave danger.

The CIA has spied on Assange’s interactions with his lawyers. Chelsea Manning, who handed over hundreds of thousands of secret US cables to WikiLeaks in 2010, has also been detained since last March because she refused to testify against Assange in a rigged US Grand Jury proceeding.

Assange has been subjected to this horrific treatment by some of the world’s most powerful governments for the “crime” of informing the public about the war crimes and diplomatic skullduggery of their governments. These include the massacre of civilians in Iraq by US troops, the mistreatment of prisoners of war in Afghanistan, and Washington’s bullying of governments around the world. Even leading bourgeois newspapers, like the New York Times, that have published scurrilous attacks on Assange have been forced to concede that his successful prosecution would represent a threat to journalists and the freedom of the press the world over.

The Canadian political establishment has maintained a deafening and complicit silence about the prosecution and persecution of Assange throughout the past nine years. This is true of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his Liberals, but also of all the other parties that posture as “progressive,” from the New Democrats and Greens to the Bloc Quebecois, and the pseudo-left Quebec Solidaire.

The reason for this deafening silence is not hard to find. The Canadian capitalist elite, which is more reliant than ever on its military-strategic partnership with US imperialism to advance its own predatory interests on the global stage, fears the impact of WikiLeaks’ exposures. Like its British and American allies, the Canadian ruling elite is anxious that Assange be subjected to exemplary punishment so as to intimidate all those who seek to lay bare the crimes and machinations of the western imperialist powers.

Whilst the Trudeau government is not directly involved in Assange’s prosecution, it has provided crucial political support for it. Last July, for example, the then Canadian Foreign Minister, Chrystia Freeland, co-hosted a Global Media Freedom Conference in London along with British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, just weeks after Hunt had presided over the British government’s illegal seizure of Assange from his refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy.

“Canada and the UK are working together to defend media freedom and improve the safety of journalists who report across the world,” Freeland’s office declared in a truly Orwellian statement. Needless to say, neither Freeland nor Hunt mentioned the fate of Assange, an award-winning journalist and publisher, at the meeting.

The refusal of any section of Canada’s political establishment to criticize the persecution of Assange, let alone mobilize popular opposition to it, is a damning

exposure of their oft-repeated claims to stand for “human rights” and “democracy” on the world stage. The reality is Ottawa, like Washington, cynically and hypocritically invokes human rights as a cover for the rapacious pursuit of their imperialist interests. The North American imperialist powers denounce both real and fabricated violations of human rights committed by governments they view as obstacles to their interests, while covering up and excusing state repression, torture, and war crimes carried out by their client regimes, allies, and, last but not least, their own military and security intelligence apparatuses.

Since 1999, successive Liberal and Conservative governments have participated in US-led wars and “regime change” military interventions in the Balkans, Afghanistan, Haiti, Libya, Syria and Iraq that have left entire societies in ruins. Trudeau’s Liberals have further integrated Canada into US military-strategic offensives around the world. This includes participating in Washington’s war preparations against nuclear-armed Russia and China, but also its regime-change intrigues in Venezuela.

Canada’s ruling elite has also moved to criminalize dissent and workers’ struggles at home and to build up the repressive powers of the state with the aim of suppressing popular opposition to austerity, social inequality, and war. Canada is a key partner in the global US National Security Agency-led “Five Eyes” spying network. Under the phony pretext of “the war on terror,” successive governments have dramatically expanded the powers of the intelligence services. Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS) has been empowered to break virtually any law in “disrupting” activities deemed to pose a threat to “public security” or Canada’s “territorial integrity.”

The work of whistleblowers like Assange and former NSA contractor Edward Snowden has been invaluable in bringing to light some of the crimes Canadian imperialism has committed as it pursues aggression abroad and attacks democratic rights at home. It was a US State Department memo released by WikiLeaks that informed the Canadian population that while the Liberal government of Jean Chretien publicly posed as an opponent of the George W. Bush-ordered 2003 invasion of Iraq, it was reassuring Washington behind the scenes that it would provide “discreet” support for the illegal US war.

“Following the meeting, political director Jim Wright emphasized that, despite public statements that the Canadian assets in the Straits of Hormuz will remain in the region exclusively to support Enduring Freedom,” noted the memo, which described a meeting between top US and Canadian foreign ministry officials on March 17, 2003. “They will also be available to provide escort services in the Straits and will otherwise be discreetly useful to the military effort. The two ships in the Straits now are being augmented by two more en route, and there are patrol and supply aircraft in the U.A.E. [United Arab Emirates] which are also prepared to ‘be useful.’”

Snowden’s disclosures in 2013 revealed that the Canadian Security Establishment (CSE), Canada’s signal intelligence agency, acts as a veritable arm of the NSA. **Documents leaked by Snowden showed that the CSE helps develop NSA spying operations and techniques, provides information on countries that US citizens have difficulty accessing, and conducts economic spying for Canadian corporations around the world.**

The Canadian ruling elite was outraged by these exposures. In 2013, Conservative Foreign Minister John Baird declared that Snowden should hand himself over to the US authorities, effectively condemning him to a death sentence. Three years later,

Michael Doucet — the government's top "watchdog" for the country's intelligence agencies — blurted out the true feelings of the ruling elite towards whistleblowers like Snowden and Assange. Asked his opinion on how Snowden would have been treated had he been an employee of CSIS, the country's premier domestic spy agency, Doucet responded, "If Edward Snowden had worked for CSIS and did what he did, he should be shot." (See: "Canada's top spy "watchdog" says Edward Snowden should be shot") Underscoring the fact that Doucet's remark reflected broader sentiments in ruling circles, the Trudeau government took no action against him for this outrageous comment.

The complicit silence of Canada's political elite on Assange's torture, persecution, and imminent extradition underscores that his freedom can be won only through the mobilization of the working class, the basic constituency for the defence of democratic rights around the world.

Workers and young people who want to oppose Canadian imperialist aggression and war overseas and attacks on democratic rights at home should join the global struggle for the freedom of Assange and Manning, which has already won important and growing support in Britain, Australia, France, South Asia, and countries around the world. The struggle to defend these two courageous whistleblowers must be made the spearhead of the fight to oppose the imperialist powers' drive to war and the gutting of democratic rights.

The Socialist Equality Party (Canada) is holding a public meeting in Montreal on Sunday, February 2 to initiate steps to develop a cross-Canada campaign to win Assange's freedom, defend democratic rights, and oppose Canadian imperialism and war.

We strongly urge those living in western Quebec and eastern Ontario to make plans to attend. For details see below.

No to war and the assault on democratic rights: Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning must be defended!

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/01/27/asca-j27.html>

Julian Assange Must Not Be Extradited to the US and 'Must Be Released Promptly' — Council of Europe

Mohamed Elmaazi
Sputnik
29.01.2020

The parliamentary arm of Europe's largest human rights body says it is unacceptable that journalists are subjected to the misuse of anti-terrorism, public order, and national security laws. Assembly members singled out the case of Julian Assange as part of its demands for member states to do more to protect journalists and whistleblowers

The extradition of Julian Assange to the United States “must be barred” and he “must be promptly released” by UK authorities, says the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly.

The demands by the Assembly, which is made up of 327 legislatures from each of the Council's member states, form part of a five page resolution passed on 28 January entitled “Threats to media freedom and journalists’ security in Europe”.

In a section dedicated to calling on member states to do more to protect journalists and whistleblowers Resolution 2317 (2020) says:

“...in this respect, consider that the detention and criminal prosecution of Mr Julian Assange sets a dangerous precedent for journalists, and join the recommendation of the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment who declared, on 1 November 2019, **that Mr Assange's extradition to the United States must be barred and that he must be promptly released**”.

Nils Melzer, the UN torture expert, has heavily criticised the UK, US, Swedish and Ecuadorian governments for failing to properly investigate his findings that Assange has been “psychologically tortured”.

Assange faces up to 175 years in prison if convicted on charges relating to his role in publishing classified US documents which revealed alleged war crimes committed by US forces in Iraq. On 23 January WikiLeaks editor-in-chief revealed that among the legal arguments being made by the US government is the claim that protections for free speech and a free press guaranteed under the US constitution don't apply to foreign journalists. The implication being that Assange would not be protected under the First Amendment of the US constitution the way a US journalist would be protected when publishing the same material Assange did.

<https://sputniknews.com/europe/202001291078172708-julian-assange-must-not-be-extradited-to-the-us-and-must-be-released-promptly---council-of-europe/>

Snowden Warns Targeting of Greenwald and Assange Shows Governments 'Ready to Stop the Presses — If They Can'

“The most essential journalism of every era,” says the NSA whistleblower, “is precisely that which a government attempts to silence.”

Jessica Corbett
Common Dreams
January 27, 2020

In an op-ed published Sunday night by the Washington Post, National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden connected Brazilian federal prosecutors' recent decision to file charges against American investigative journalist Glenn Greenwald to the U.S. government's efforts to prosecute WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

Snowden, board of directors president at Freedom of the Press Foundation, is among those who have spoken out since Greenwald was charged with cybercrime on Jan. 21. Reporters and human rights advocates have denounced the prosecution as "a straightforward attempt to intimidate and retaliate against Greenwald and The Intercept for their critical reporting" on officials in Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's government.

Greenwald, who is also on Freedom of the Press Foundation's board, is one of the journalists to whom Snowden leaked classified materials in 2013.

As Common Dreams reported last week, the NSA whistleblower, who has lived with asylum protection in Russia for the past several years, is also among the political observers who have pointed out that although even some of Greenwald's critics have rallied behind him in recent days, Assange has not experienced such solidarity. Assange is being held in a London prison, under conditions that have raised global alarm, while he fights against extradition to the United States.

In his Post op-ed, "Trump Has Created a Global Playbook to Attack Those Revealing Uncomfortable Truths," Snowden wrote of Greenwald's case that "as ridiculous as these charges are, they are also dangerous — and not only to Greenwald: They are a threat to press freedom everywhere. The legal theory used by the Brazilian prosecutors — that journalists who publish leaked documents are engaged in a criminal 'conspiracy' with the sources who provide those documents—is virtually identical to the one advanced in the Trump administration's indictment of [Assange] in a new application of the historically dubious Espionage Act."

Snowden — who said in December that he believes that if he returned to the United States, he'd spend his life in prison for exposing global mass surveillance practices of the U.S. government — explained:

In each case, the charges came as an about-face from an earlier position. The federal police in Brazil stated as recently as December that they had formally considered whether Greenwald could be said to have participated in a crime, and unequivocally found that he had not. That rather extraordinary admission itself followed an order in August 2019 from a Brazilian Supreme Court judge — prompted by displays of public aggression against Greenwald by Bolsonaro and his allies—explicitly barring federal police from investigating Greenwald altogether. The Supreme Court judge declared that doing so would "constitute an unambiguous act of censorship."

For Assange, the Espionage Act charges arrived years after the same theory had reportedly been considered — and rejected — by the former president Barack Obama's Justice Department. Though the Obama administration was no fan of WikiLeaks, the former spokesman for Obama's Attorney General Eric Holder later explained. "The problem the department has always had in investigating Julian Assange is there is no way to prosecute him for publishing information without the same theory being applied to journalists," said the former Justice Department spokesman Matthew Miller. "And if you are not going to prosecute journalists for publishing classified information, which the department is not, then there is no way to prosecute Assange."

Although Obama's administration was historically unfriendly to journalists and leakers of classified materials, President Donald Trump's administration has taken things a step further with its indictment of Assange. "The Trump administration," he

wrote, "with its disdain for press freedom matched only by its ignorance of the law, has respected no such limitations on its ability to prosecute and persecute, and its unprecedented decision to indict a publisher under the Espionage Act has profoundly dangerous implications for national security journalists around the country."

Highlighting another similarity between the cases of Greenwald and Assange — that "their relentless crusades have rendered them polarizing figures (including, it may be noted, to each other)" — Snowden suggested that perhaps "authorities in both countries believed the public's fractured opinions of their perceived ideologies would distract the public from the broader danger these prosecutions pose to a free press." However, he noted, civil liberties groups and publishers have recognized both cases as "efforts to deter the most aggressive investigations by the most fearless journalists, and to open the door to a precedent that could soon still the pens of even the less cantankerous."

"The most essential journalism of every era is precisely that which a government attempts to silence," Snowden concluded. "These prosecutions demonstrate that they are ready to stop the presses — if they can."

Journalists and press freedom advocates have shared Snowden's op-ed on social media since Sunday night.

Trevor Timm, executive director of Freedom of the Press Foundation, tweeted Monday morning that Snowden's piece "should be read in tandem" with an op-ed published Sunday in the *New York Times* by James Risen, a former reporter for the newspaper who is now at *The Intercept*. Risen also argued that "the case against Mr. Greenwald is eerily similar to the Trump administration's case against Mr. Assange."

And, according to Risen, Greenwald concurred:

In an interview with me on Thursday, Mr. Greenwald agreed that there are parallels between his case and Mr. Assange's, and added that he doesn't believe that Mr. Bolsonaro would have taken action against an American journalist if he had thought President Trump would oppose it.

"Bolsonaro worships Trump, and the Bolsonaro government is taking the signal from Trump that this kind of behavior is acceptable," he said.

Notably, Risen added, "the State Department has not issued any statement of concern about Brazil's case against Mr. Greenwald, which in past administrations would have been common practice."

<https://www.commondreams.org/news/2020/01/27/snowden-warns-targeting-greenwald-and-assange-shows-governments-ready-stop-presses>

Human rights report to oppose extradition of Julian Assange to US

European assembly says WikiLeaks founder's detention 'sets dangerous precedent'

Ben Quinn
The Guardian
28 Jan. 2020

Julian Assange's detention "sets a dangerous precedent for journalists", according to politicians from the Council of Europe's parliamentary arm, who voted on Tuesday to oppose the WikiLeaks founder's extradition to the US.

The words of support for Assange and implicit criticism of the UK government will be contained in a final report produced by the Labour peer Lord Foulkes for the **Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe**, which focuses on upholding human rights across the continent.

Assange is being held in London's Belmarsh prison prior to an extradition hearing that will begin in February. A US grand jury has indicted him on 18 charges — 17 of which fall under the Espionage Act — around conspiracy to receive, obtaining and disclosing classified diplomatic and military documents.

Foulkes had drafted an initial report — *Threats to Media Freedom and Journalists' Security in Europe* — that will now contain amendments referring to Assange tabled by a number of European parliamentarians.

One of the amendments backs the recommendation of the UN special rapporteur on torture who called last year for Assange's release and for extradition to the United States to be blocked. The other states that his possible extradition to the US "would set a precedent and threaten journalists' freedoms in all member states".

Foulkes told the Guardian that campaigners and supporters of Assange had written to him while he was writing the report, which addresses media freedoms and threats to journalists in countries including Russia, Turkey and Malta, and asked that he consider including an amendment mentioning Assange.

As a rapporteur for the assembly, he said it was not his role to do so but that colleagues from other states had done so.

He added: "I was in favour of him being sent back to Sweden when there were allegations against him to face that, but as far as the US is concerned I think there would be deep concerns if he were to be sent there."

While the report is non-binding on the UK or on British courts, Assange's supporters are likely to cite it as a moral weight in their campaign to stop his extradition.

If convicted, Assange faces a prison term of up to 175 years.

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/jan/28/julian-assange-detention-sets-dangerous-precedent-for-journalists>

Federal MPs fail to demonstrate support for Julian Assange

Australian politicians in a position to advocate for Julian Assange have, thus far, failed to do so, writes Sean O'Reilly.

Sean O'Reilly
Independent Australia
29 January 2020

ON 24 JANUARY of this year, the Brisbane Assange Action group took our campaign to free Julian Assange, to federal politicians in Brisbane.

It marked one month until the commencement of Julian's extradition hearing in London.

If the Australian Government had taken a proactive stance over the past seven-plus years the U.S. Government might have backed off before now from trying to extradite Julian to the U.S. to face the rest of his life in prison.

The U.S. state is doing this not only to punish Julian for doing the work of a journalist for which he has numerous awards. It is also to send a message to journalists and potential whistleblowers everywhere.

Our first visit was to the office of Federal Labor MP Terri Butler, who sits on the front bench. The office staff claimed not to know if Ms Butler was in fact in the office.

We guessed Terri was out the back somewhere and not interested in meeting us. The staff suggested we should be speaking to the Government's politicians as they had the power to do something. We would be doing that, but when the ALP was in government they had also shown deliberate neglect as Julian took refuge in the Ecuadorian Embassy. We requested an appointment with Terri Butler and now await a meeting. Our group then held a vigil outside, beside Old Cleveland Road, where we received positive responses.

From there it was onto the office of Larissa Waters, Greens Senator for Queensland. Unfortunately, she was not in the office but one her staff invited us in. That staff member was unaware that, although three Green parliamentarians are members of the federal cross-party Assange support group, Larissa Walters is not one of them.

We also pointed out that Walters made less than supportive comments on Q&A regarding Assange. Whilst there were excuses along the lines that each Greens Senator has their own portfolio, we asked for a public show of support from Larissa Walters and await an appointment with her.

The decision to form the support group to fight for the defence of @wikileaks founder Julian Assange, made after the SEP's Nov public meeting in Alice Springs, is a powerful indication of the widespread popular support for his freedom. [wsws.org/en/articles/20...](https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2019/12/30/assange-2019-12-30.html) #FreeAssange #ntpol



Australia: Julian Assange support group formed in Alice Springs

The central Australian group points to the sort of formations workers and youth around the world need to establish in order to secure the release of Assange and [wsws.org](https://www.wsws.org)

141 11:53 AM - Dec 30, 2019



Whilst consulting the Senator's office, we received word of an appointment with the MP for Petrie, Luke Howarth, this week so we bypassed his office and made our way directly to the Dickson Electorate office of Peter Dutton, Minister for Home Affairs.

Dutton's reputation is well-known and his electorate office has been targeted many times in protest on numerous issues. We arrived to find the door locked and had to speak to staff through an intercom system. They refused to come to the door or make an appointment for us as nobody present was from the Dickson Electorate. We had to leave a copy of the UN Report on Julian Assange's treatment and a copy of the list of his journalism awards at the door. The group held a vigil on the busy Gympie Road, with again positive responses from the public, and certainly no negative ones.

We will continue to lobby federal politicians to speak out in support of Julian Assange and ask folks across the country to make representations to federal politicians in their own area. We must keep interrupting the silence from the Australian Government when one of our own citizens continues to be subjected to torture and faces extradition to the U.S., for speaking truth to power and exposing injustice

Sean O'Reilly is a member of the Brisbane branch of the Assange Action group.

<https://independentaustralia.net/politics/politics-display/federal-mps-fail-to-demonstrate-support-for-julian-assange,13539>

How Canada's corporate media smeared WikiLeaks publisher and journalist Julian Assange

Roger Jordan
World Socialist Web Site
30 January 2020

Since WikiLeaks began a decade ago to publish secret US cables exposing many of the war crimes and imperialist intrigues perpetrated by Washington and its allies around the world, Canada's corporate-controlled media outlets have made the whistle-blowing website and its founder, Julian Assange, the target of a smear campaign.

Newspapers — ranging from the “liberal” *Toronto Star* and the *Globe and Mail*, the Canadian elite's supposed “newspaper of record,” to the neoconservative *National Post* — **have vilified Assange as a manipulative, self-obsessed monster who supports dictators, while bemoaning the adverse impact of WikiLeaks' exposures on the global interests of American and Canadian imperialism.**

The Canadian media's witch-hunting of Assange reached a high point last April following his illegal arrest in the Ecuadorian embassy in London. In a video comment, *National Post* “star” columnist Christie Blatchford declared, “Assange is no journalist.” She sought to justify her view by citing Assange's alleged responsibility for endangering the lives of Afghans and Iraqis who had cooperated with the US military in its neocolonial occupations of those countries.

This charge was repeated verbatim by Terry Glavin in a long, tendentious piece published in *Macleans*' magazine around the same time. A virulent right-winger and anti-Russia and anti-China war-hawk who argued that Canada should have officially joined Washington in its illegal 2003 invasion of Iraq, Glavin took Assange to task for disregarding “the innocent victims of his vanity.”

The cynicism of such criticisms is hard to overstate. Journalists who have spent large parts of their careers propagandizing for Canadian imperialist participation in the US-led wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya, which collectively have led to the deaths of millions, and Canada's involvement in NATO's military encirclement of Russia, which has increased the likelihood of a catastrophic conflict fought with nuclear weapons, assert the right to pass moral judgment on Assange and WikiLeaks.

In his *Macleans*' piece Glavin also trotted out the Democratic Party's self-serving anti-Russia narrative to account for Hillary Clinton's defeat at the hands of Donald Trump in the 2016 US presidential election. Principal responsibility for Clinton's electoral debacle, Glavin ranted, lay with Assange and WikiLeaks, who published a “steady, debilitating drip of the Clinton campaign's emails, now conclusively shown to have been hacked by the Russians.”

Leaving aside the fact that no such thing has been proven, “conclusively” or otherwise, but only ever asserted by the US intelligence agencies and their Democratic Party mouthpieces, Glavin neglected to inform his readers why the WikiLeaks releases in 2016 had had significant impact. The leaked emails uncovered the newsworthy story, which any genuine journalist would have been obligated to report, that the Democratic Party National Committee effectively rigged the Democratic nomination process to ensure Hillary Clinton's victory over “democratic socialist”

Bernie Sanders. Further leaks revealed how Clinton was in the pocket of Wall Street and the corporate elite.

But that is not all. Glavin and his fellow right-wing commentators sought to discredit Assange's personal character, culminating in the repulsive spectacle of their gloating over his illegal seizure. Assange had simply "worn out his welcome" at the Ecuadorian embassy, proclaimed Glavin, who reveled in the pictures showing how "the bedraggled 47-year-old WikiLeaks headman" was "dragged... kicking and shouting from the Ecuadorian embassy." Tabatha Southey, a longstanding *Globe and Mail* columnist who now writes for *Maclean's*, authored a scurrilous piece entitled "How to be a better house guest than Julian Assange." The article contained cynical statements such as, "Generally keep your visit to three nights. Seven years is right out," and, "help out, especially in the kitchen and not in the internal affairs of the most powerful nation on earth."

These statements testify to the indifference, indeed hostility, to democratic rights in the editorial offices of the country's leading corporate media outlets. Far from being a "guest," Assange resided in the Ecuadorian embassy after being granted political asylum — a status that is supposed to be protected by international law — so as to shield him from the combined efforts of the US, British, Australian and Swedish governments to persecute him for having exposed imperialist crimes.

Due to US and British pressure, Assange was subjected to ever more onerous restrictions in the tiny embassy premises, especially after 2016. He was denied access to the internet and prevented from meeting supporters, and the CIA spied on his interactions with those he did meet, including, in a further travesty, his lawyers.

The determination on the part of Canada's media to denigrate and smear Assange reflects their unflinching support for the powers-that-be and visceral hatred of what he represents. The very idea that the population has a right to know about the criminal conspiracies and activities of the world's governments is anathema to these scribblers, who make a profession out of filtering official propaganda to justify the pro-corporate, pro-imperialist policies of Canada's ruling elite and its state. They viewed with horror how WikiLeaks disclosures about the corrupt practices of former Tunisian dictator Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali helped fuel the popular revolutionary movement that toppled his pro-Western regime in early 2011.

The fear and outrage this privileged layer feels at the damage WikiLeaks has caused to imperialist interests was summed up in a 2010 *Globe* column authored by Scott Gilmore, a journalist and former diplomat who, not incidentally, is the husband of Catherine McKenna, the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities in the Liberal government of Justin Trudeau. Under the headline "WikiLeaks just made the world more oppressive," Gilmore raged against the publication of further secret US diplomatic cables, then, referencing his own time working for the Canadian government in Jakarta, declared, "American diplomats [were] doing the same thing we were trying to do in Indonesia: Make the world a little better."

Gilmore's arrogance and mendacity is hard to stomach. After all, it was in Indonesia that the US, with Canada's support, backstopped the bloody Suharto dictatorship for three decades from 1965 to 1998 — a regime that came to power following a CIA-abetted massacre of over 1 million workers and Communist Party members.

The contempt for Assange and WikiLeaks extends to the nominally liberal *Star*, which published an attack on his publishing activities in 2011 under the headline,

“WikiLeaks, Canadian media and democracy: Media with a face.” The piece denounced Assange’s insistence on anonymity for WikiLeaks’ sources as “antithetical to journalism,” and proceeded to describe the whistleblowing platform, which by that time had already won a series of international awards for its journalistic activities, as “an odd blend of information leaker, newsmaker, editorializer, self-styled journalist, and unclassified news media.”

Underscoring where its true loyalties lie, the *Star* proceeded to declare its support for “responsible journalism” and argued that “freedom of speech does not mean that all expression is accepted in a democratic society.” In other words, points of view deemed intolerable to, or inconsistent with, the interests of the political and corporate elite can simply be dismissed as the products of anonymous cranks who operate unethically and have no democratic rights. Or, to put it another way, the main threat to democracy currently is not the global criminal operations of US imperialism and its allies, but ... WikiLeaks and Julian Assange!

Predictably enough, the would-be crusaders for “democracy” at the *Star* and Canada’s other major media outlets have published next to nothing about Assange and the legal vendetta being mounted against him since his illegal seizure by British police last April, let alone sought to alert the public to the critical democratic issues — including freedom of the press, free speech, and the right to due process—involved in his prosecution and persecution.

The Australian citizen is being held in the maximum security Belmarsh Prison alongside convicted murderers and terrorists, and denied regular access to his lawyers or to the documents he needs to review to prepare his legal defence. UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer has stated that Assange shows symptoms of prolonged exposure to psychological torture, and dozens of doctors from around the world have warned that if he continues to be denied proper medical care he could die in prison.

But the Canadian media excises, or to be more precise, self-censors all this from “the News.”

This silence is all the more damning given that Assange is being prosecuted under the US Espionage Act — although he is neither a US citizen nor a US resident — for publishing leaked documents, an activity constitutionally protected under US law. His conviction would open the door for other critical journalists whether working in Canada or any other part of the world to be swept up in the dragnet of US imperialist “justice.”

With Assange facing an extradition hearing next month and the threat of being transferred to the US to face bogus charges and a possible 175-year prison sentence, it is high time for workers and young people across Canada to break through the media’s silence and mobilize to defend Assange and democratic rights. As a first step in this process, the Socialist Equality Party is organizing a public meeting in Montreal this Sunday, February 2. We encourage all our readers to make plans to attend. For details see below:

No to war and the assault on democratic rights: Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning must be defended!

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/01/30/caas-j30.html>

"A murderous system is being created before our very eyes"

A made-up rape allegation and fabricated evidence in Sweden, pressure from the UK not to drop the case, a biased judge, detention in a maximum security prison, psychological torture—and soon extradition to the U.S., where he could face up to 175 years in prison for exposing war crimes. For the first time, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Nils Melzer, speaks in detail about the explosive findings of his investigation into the case of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange.

*An interview by Daniel Ryser
Republik (Switzerland)
31 January 2020*

1. The Swedish Police constructed a story of rape

Nils Melzer, why is the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture interested in Julian Assange? That is something that the German Foreign Ministry recently asked me as well: Is that really your core mandate? Is Assange the victim of torture? What was your response?

The case falls into my mandate in three different ways: First, Assange published proof of systematic torture. But instead of those responsible for the torture, it is Assange who is being persecuted. Second, he himself has been ill-treated to the point that he is now exhibiting symptoms of psychological torture. And third, he is to be extradited to a country that holds people like him in prison conditions that Amnesty International has described as torture. **In summary: Julian Assange uncovered torture, has been tortured himself and could be tortured to death in the United States.** And a case like that isn't supposed to be part of my area of responsibility? Beyond that, the case is of symbolic importance and affects every citizen of a democratic country.

Why didn't you take up the case much earlier?

Imagine a dark room. Suddenly, someone shines a light on the elephant in the room—on war criminals, on corruption. Assange is the man with the spotlight. The governments are briefly in shock, **but then they turn the spotlight around with accusations of rape. It is a classic maneuver when it comes to manipulating public opinion. The elephant once again disappears into the darkness, behind the spotlight.** And Assange becomes the focus of attention instead, and we start talking about whether Assange is skateboarding in the embassy or whether he is feeding his cat correctly. **Suddenly, we all know that he is a rapist, a hacker, a spy and a narcissist. But the abuses and war crimes he uncovered fade into the darkness. I also lost my focus,** despite my professional experience, which should have led me to be more vigilant.

Let's start at the beginning: What led you to take up the case?

In December 2018, I was asked by his lawyers to intervene. I initially declined. I was overloaded with other petitions and wasn't really familiar with the case. **My impression, largely influenced by the media,** was also colored by the prejudice that Julian Assange was somehow guilty and that he wanted to manipulate me. In March 2019, his lawyers approached me for a second time because indications were mounting that Assange would soon be expelled from the Ecuadorian Embassy. They sent me a few key documents and a summary of the case and I figured that my professional integrity demanded that I at least take a look at the material.

And then?

It quickly became clear to me that something was wrong. That there was a contradiction that made no sense to me with my extensive legal experience: **Why would a person be subject to nine years of a preliminary investigation for rape without charges ever having been filed?**

Is that unusual?

I have never seen a comparable case. Anyone can trigger a preliminary investigation against anyone else by simply going to the police and accusing the other person of a crime. **The Swedish authorities, though, were never interested in testimony from Assange. They intentionally left him in limbo. Just imagine being accused of rape for nine-and-a-half years by an entire state apparatus and by the media without ever being given the chance to defend yourself because no charges had ever been filed.**

You say that the Swedish authorities were never interested in testimony from Assange. But the media and government agencies have painted a completely different picture over the years: Julian Assange, they say, fled the Swedish judiciary in order to avoid being held accountable.

That's what I always thought, until I started investigating. The opposite is true. Assange reported to the Swedish authorities on several occasions because he wanted to respond to the accusations. But the authorities stonewalled.

What do you mean by that: "The authorities stonewalled?"

Allow me to start at the beginning. I speak fluent Swedish and was thus able to read all of the original documents. **I could hardly believe my eyes: According to the testimony of the woman in question, a rape had never even taken place at all. And not only that: The woman's testimony was later changed by the Stockholm police without her involvement in order to somehow make it sound like a possible rape.** I have all the documents in my possession, the emails, the text messages.

"The woman's testimony was later changed by the police" — how exactly?

On Aug. 20, 2010, a woman named S. W. entered a Stockholm police station together with a second woman named A. A. The first woman, S. W. said she had had consensual sex with Julian Assange, but he had not been wearing a condom. She said she was now concerned that she could be infected with HIV and wanted to know if she could force Assange to take an HIV test. She said she was really worried. The police wrote down her statement and immediately informed public prosecutors. **Even before questioning could be completed, S. W. was informed that Assange would be arrested on suspicion of rape. S. W. was shocked and refused to continue with questioning. While still in the police station, she wrote a text message to a friend saying that she didn't want to incriminate Assange, that she just wanted him to take an HIV test, but the police were apparently interested in "getting their hands on him."**

What does that mean?

S.W. never accused Julian Assange of rape. She declined to participate in further questioning and went home. Nevertheless, two hours later, a headline appeared on

the front page of Expressen, a Swedish tabloid, saying that Julian Assange was suspected of having committed two rapes.

Two rapes?

Yes, because there was the second woman, A. A. She didn't want to press charges either; she had merely accompanied S. W. to the police station. She wasn't even questioned that day. She later said that Assange had sexually harassed her. I can't say, of course, whether that is true or not. **I can only point to the order of events:** A woman walks into a police station. She doesn't want to file a complaint but wants to demand an HIV test. The police then decide that this could be a case of rape and a matter for public prosecutors. The woman refuses to go along with that version of events and then goes home and writes a friend that it wasn't her intention, but the police want to «get their hands on» Assange. Two hours later, the case is in the newspaper. As we know today, **public prosecutors leaked it to the press -- and they did so without even inviting Assange to make a statement.** And the second woman, who had allegedly been raped according to the Aug. 20 headline, was only questioned on Aug. 21.

What did the second woman say when she was questioned?

She said that she had made her apartment available to Assange, who was in Sweden for a conference. A small, one-room apartment. When Assange was in the apartment, **she came home earlier than planned, but told him it was no problem and that the two of them could sleep in the same bed. That night, they had consensual sex,** with a condom. But she said that during sex, Assange had intentionally broken the condom. If that is true, then it is, of course, a sexual offense -- so-called «stealthing». But the woman also said that she only later noticed that the condom was broken. That is **a contradiction that should absolutely have been clarified. If I don't notice it, then I cannot know if the other intentionally broke it. Not a single trace of DNA from Assange or A. A. could be detected in the condom that was submitted as evidence.**

How did the two women know each other?

They didn't really know each other. **A. A., who was hosting Assange and was serving as his press secretary,** had met S. W. at an event where S. W. was wearing a pink cashmere sweater. She apparently knew from Assange that he was interested in a sexual encounter with S. W., because one evening, she received a text message from an acquaintance saying that he knew Assange was staying with her and that he, the acquaintance, would like to contact Assange. A. A. answered: Assange is apparently sleeping at the moment with the "cashmere girl." The next morning, S. W. spoke with A. A. on the phone and said that she, too, had slept with Assange and was now concerned about having become infected with HIV. This concern was apparently a real one, because S.W. even went to a clinic for consultation. **A. A. then suggested: Let's go to the police -- they can force Assange to get an HIV test. The two women, though, didn't go to the closest police station, but to one quite far away where a friend of A. A.'s works as a policewoman -- who then questioned S. W., initially in the presence of A. A., which isn't proper practice.** Up to this point, though, the only problem was at most a lack of professionalism. **The willful malevolence of the authorities only became apparent when they immediately disseminated the suspicion of rape via the tabloid press, and did so without questioning A. A. and in contradiction to the statement given by S. W. It also violated a clear ban in Swedish**

law against releasing the names of alleged victims or perpetrators in sexual offense cases. The case now came to the attention of the chief public prosecutor in the capital city and she suspended the rape investigation some days later with the assessment that while the statements from S. W. were credible, there was no evidence that a crime had been committed.

But then the case really took off. Why?

Now the supervisor of the policewoman who had conducted the questioning wrote her an email telling her to rewrite the statement from S. W.

Sv Förhör.txt
Från: Mats Gehlin
Till: [REDACTED]
Datum: 8/26/2010 12:30
Ärende: Sv: F2rh?r

Ja men jag skriver ett PM om det.

Med vänliga hälsningar
Mats Gehlin
Kriminalinspektör
[REDACTED]

>>> [REDACTED] 8/24/2010 4:35 >>>
Visst, men då finns det två förhör. Men det är endast ett formellt förhör som har hållits, av mig i alla fall. Vart tar då det andra förhöret vägen? Om det ska gå rätt till antar jag att jag måste göra ändringarna i originalförhöret o signera det. Med risk för att framstå som kränglig vill jag inte ha ett osignerat dokument med mitt namn cirkulerande i durtvårymden. Särskilt inte nu när ärendet har utvecklats som det gjort.

/ [REDACTED]

>>> Mats Gehlin 8/24/2010 1:44 >>>
Gör ett nytt förhör. Klipp in texten i det och adressera förhöret till ärendet. Signera också förhöret.

Med vänliga hälsningar
Mats Gehlin
Kriminalinspektör
[REDACTED]

>>> [REDACTED] 8/24/2010 1:38 >>>
Hej,
jag är kanske trög men jag förstår inte riktigt hur du menar. [REDACTED]
försöker hjälpa mig o vi har ringt upp till er utan att lyckats lösa problemet.

[REDACTED] - 112 55

>>> Mats Gehlin 8/24/2010 9:33 >>>
God morgon [REDACTED]

Gör enligt följande. Klipp in detta i ett förhör och signera förhöret. Det kommer se konstigt ut om jag signerar. Jag bifogar det gamla förhöret.

Med vänliga hälsningar
Mats Gehlin
Kriminalinspektör
[REDACTED]

>>> [REDACTED] 8/23/2010 8:27 >>>
Hej, jag hoppas att jag gjort rätt nu och att dokumentet kommer fram till dig som det ska. Skicka gärna en bekräftelse.

Vad beträffar den muntliga föredragningen för åklagaren har jag ingen mer information än att den gjordes per telefon av Linda Wassgren någon gång under förhörets gång. Vad som föredrogs är för mig obekant då Wassgren inte ville kommunicera med mig. Någon möjlighet att rådgöra brottsrubricering med åklagaren gavs inte utan jag fick veta att det skulle rubriceras som valdakt enligt åklagarens direktiv.

Hälsningar [REDACTED]

Sida 1

The original copies of the mail exchanges between the Swedish police.

What did the policewoman change?

We don't know, because **the first statement was directly written over in the computer program and no longer exists. We only know that the original statement, according to the chief public prosecutor, apparently did not contain any indication that a crime had been committed.** In the edited form it says that the two had had sex several times – consensual and with a condom. But in the morning, according to the

revised statement, the woman woke up because he tried to penetrate her without a condom. She asks: «Are you wearing a condom?» He says: «No.» Then she says: «You better not have HIV» and allows him to continue. **The statement was edited without the involvement of the woman in question and it wasn't signed by her. It is a manipulated piece of evidence out of which the Swedish authorities then constructed a story of rape.**

Why would the Swedish authorities do something like that?

The timing is decisive: In late July, Wikileaks — in cooperation with the «New York Times», the «Guardian» and «Der Spiegel» — published the «Afghan War Diary». It was one of the largest leaks in the history of the U.S. military. The U.S. immediately demanded that its allies inundate Assange with criminal cases. **We aren't familiar with all of the correspondence, but Stratfor, a security consultancy that works for the U.S. government, advised American officials apparently to deluge Assange with all kinds of criminal cases for the next 25 years.**

2. Assange contacts the Swedish judiciary several times to make a statement — but he is turned down

Why didn't Assange turn himself into the police at the time?

He did. I mentioned that earlier.

Then please elaborate.

Assange learned about the rape allegations from the press. He established contact with the police so he could make a statement. Despite the scandal having reached the public, he was only allowed to do so nine days later, after the accusation that he had raped S. W. was no longer being pursued. But proceedings related to the sexual harassment of A. A. were ongoing. On Aug. 30, 2010, Assange appeared at the police station to make a statement. **He was questioned by the same policeman who had since ordered that revision of the statement had been given by S. W.** At the beginning of the conversation, Assange said he was ready to make a statement, but added that he didn't want to read about his statement again in the press. That is his right, and he was given assurances it would be granted. **But that same evening, everything was in the newspapers again. It could only have come from the authorities because nobody else was present during his questioning. The intention was very clearly that of besmirching his name.**

Where did the story come from that Assange was seeking to avoid Swedish justice officials?

This version was manufactured, but it is not consistent with the facts. Had he been trying to hide, he would not have appeared at the police station of his own free will. On the basis of the revised statement from S.W., an appeal was filed against the public prosecutor's attempt to suspend the investigation, and on Sept. 2, 2010, the rape proceedings were resumed. A legal representative by the name of Claes Borgström was appointed to the two women at public cost. The man was a law firm partner to the previous justice minister, Thomas Bodström, under whose supervision Swedish security personnel had seized two men who the U.S. found suspicious in the middle of Stockholm. **The men were seized without any kind of legal proceedings and then handed over to the CIA, who proceeded to torture them. That shows the trans-**

Atlantic backdrop to this affair more clearly. After the resumption of the rape investigation, Assange repeatedly indicated through his lawyer that he wished to respond to the accusations. **The public prosecutor responsible kept delaying.** On one occasion, it didn't fit with the public prosecutor's schedule, on another, the police official responsible was sick. Three weeks later, his lawyer finally wrote that Assange really had to go to Berlin for a conference and asked if he was allowed to leave the country. **The public prosecutor's office gave him written permission to leave Sweden for short periods of time.**

And then?

The point is: On the day that Julian Assange left Sweden, at a point in time when it wasn't clear if he was leaving for a short time or a long time, a warrant was issued for his arrest. He flew with Scandinavian Airlines from Stockholm to Berlin. During the flight, his laptops disappeared from his checked baggage. When he arrived in Berlin, **Lufthansa requested an investigation from SAS, but the airline apparently declined to provide any information at all.**

Why?

That is exactly the problem. In this case, things are constantly happening that shouldn't actually be possible unless you look at them from a different angle. Assange, in any case, continued onward to London, but did not seek to hide from the judiciary. Via his Swedish lawyer, he offered public prosecutors several possible dates for questioning in Sweden — this correspondence exists. Then, the following happened: Assange caught wind of the fact that a secret criminal case had been opened against him in the U.S. At the time, it was not confirmed by the U.S., but today we know that it was true. As of that moment, Assange's lawyer began saying that his client was prepared to testify in Sweden, but he demanded diplomatic assurance that Sweden would not extradite him to the U.S.

Was that even a realistic scenario?

Absolutely. Some years previously, as I already mentioned, Swedish security personnel had handed over two asylum applicants, both of whom were registered in Sweden, to the CIA without any legal proceedings. The abuse already started at the Stockholm airport, where they were mistreated, drugged and flown to Egypt, where they were tortured. We don't know if they were the only such cases. But we are aware of these cases because the men survived. **Both later filed complaints with UN human rights agencies and won their case. Sweden was forced to pay each of them half a million dollars in damages.**

Did Sweden agree to the demands submitted by Assange?

The lawyers say that during the nearly seven years in which Assange lived in the Ecuadorian Embassy, they **made over 30 offers to arrange for Assange to visit Sweden— in exchange for a guarantee that he would not be extradited to the U.S.** The Swedes declined to provide such a guarantee by arguing that the U.S. had not made a formal request for extradition.

What is your view of the demand made by Assange's lawyers?

Such diplomatic assurances are a **routine international practice.** People request assurances that they won't be extradited to places where there is a danger of serious

human rights violations, completely irrespective of whether an extradition request has been filed by the country in question or not. It is a political procedure, not a legal one. Here's an example: Say France demands that Switzerland extradite a Kazakh businessman who lives in Switzerland but who is wanted by both France and Kazakhstan on tax fraud allegations. Switzerland sees no danger of torture in France, but does believe such a danger exists in Kazakhstan. So, Switzerland tells France: We'll extradite the man to you, but we want a diplomatic assurance that he won't be extradited onward to Kazakhstan. The French response is not: "Kazakhstan hasn't even filed a request!" Rather, they would, of course, grant such an assurance. **The arguments coming from Sweden were tenuous at best. That is one part of it. The other, and I say this on the strength of all of my experience behind the scenes of standard international practice: If a country refuses to provide such a diplomatic assurance, then all doubts about the good intentions of the country in question are justified. Why shouldn't Sweden provide such assurances? From a legal perspective, after all, the U.S. has absolutely nothing to do with Swedish sex offense proceedings.**

Why didn't Sweden want to offer such an assurance?

You just have to look at how the case was run: **For Sweden, it was never about the interests of the two women.** Even after his request for assurances that he would not be extradited, Assange still wanted to testify. He said: If you cannot guarantee that I won't be extradited, then I am willing to be questioned in London or via video link.

But is it normal, or even legally acceptable, for Swedish authorities to travel to a different country for such an interrogation?

That is a further indication that Sweden was never interested in finding the truth. **For exactly these kinds of judiciary issues, there is a cooperation treaty between the United Kingdom and Sweden,** which foresees that Swedish officials can travel to the UK, or vice versa, to conduct interrogations or that such questioning can take place via video link. **During the period of time in question, such questioning between Sweden and England took place in 44 other cases. It was only in Julian Assange's case that Sweden insisted that it was essential for him to appear in person.**

3. When the highest Swedish court finally forced public prosecutors in Stockholm to either file charges or suspend the case, the British authorities demanded: "Don't get cold feet!!"

Why was that?

There is only a single explanation for everything — for the refusal to grant diplomatic assurances, for the refusal to question him in London: They wanted to apprehend him so they could extradite him to the U.S. **The number of breaches of law that accumulated in Sweden within just a few weeks during the preliminary criminal investigation is simply grotesque. The state assigned a legal adviser to the women who told them that the criminal interpretation of what they experienced was up to the state, and no longer up to them.** When their legal adviser was asked about contradictions between the women's testimony and the narrative adhered to by public officials, the legal adviser said, in reference to the women: "ah, but they're not lawyers." But for five long years the Swedish prosecution avoids questioning Assange regarding the purported rape, until his lawyers finally petitioned Sweden's Supreme Court to force the public prosecution to either press charges or close the case. When

the Swedes told the UK that they may be forced to abandon the case, the British wrote back, worriedly: "Don't you dare get cold feet!!"

Are you serious?

Yes, the British, or more specifically **the Crown Prosecution Service, wanted to prevent Sweden from abandoning the case at all costs.** Though really, the English should have been happy that they would no longer have to spend millions in taxpayer money to keep the Ecuadorian Embassy under constant surveillance to prevent Assange's escape.

Why were the British so eager to prevent the Swedes from closing the case?

We have to stop believing that there was really an interest in leading an investigation into a sexual offense. What Wikileaks did is a threat to the political elite in the U.S., Britain, France and Russia in equal measure. Wikileaks publishes secret state information — they are opposed to classification. And in a world, even in so-called mature democracies, where secrecy has become rampant, that is seen as a fundamental threat. **Assange made it clear that countries are no longer interested today in legitimate confidentiality, but in the suppression of important information about corruption and crimes.** Take the archetypal Wikileaks case from the leaks supplied by Chelsea Manning: The so-called «Collateral Murder» video. (Ed. Note: On April 5, 2010, Wikileaks published a classified video from the U.S. military which showed the murder of several people in Baghdad by U.S. soldiers, including two employees of the news agency Reuters.) As a long-time legal adviser to the International Committee of the Red Cross and delegate in war zones, I can tell you: **The video undoubtedly documents a war crime.** A helicopter crew simply mowed down a bunch of people. It could even be that one or two of these people was carrying a weapon, but injured people were intentionally targeted. That is a war crime. "He's wounded", you can hear one American saying. "I'm firing". **And then they laugh.** Then a van drives up to save the wounded. The driver has two children with him. **You can hear the soldiers say: Well it's their fault for bringing their kids into a battle. And then they open fire.** The father and the wounded are immediately killed, though the children survive with serious injuries. Through the publication of the video, we became direct witnesses to a criminal, unconscionable massacre.

What should a constitutional democracy do in such a situation?

A constitutional democracy would probably investigate Chelsea Manning for violating official secrecy because she passed the video along to Assange. But it certainly wouldn't go after Assange, because he published the video in the public interest, consistent with the practices of classic investigative journalism. More than anything, though, **a constitutional democracy would investigate and punish the war criminals.** These soldiers belong behind bars. But no criminal investigation was launched into a single one of them. Instead, the man who informed the public is locked away in pre-extradition detention in London and is facing a possible sentence in the U.S. of up to 175 years in prison. That is a completely absurd sentence. By comparison: The main war criminals in the Yugoslavia tribunal received sentences of 45 years. One-hundred-seventy-five years in prison in conditions that have been found to be inhumane by the UN Special Rapporteur and by Amnesty International. **But the really horrifying thing about this case is the lawlessness that has developed: The powerful can kill without fear of punishment and journalism is transformed into espionage. It is becoming a crime to tell the truth.**

What awaits Assange once he is extradited?

He will not receive a trial consistent with the rule of law. That's another reason why his extradition shouldn't be allowed. Assange will receive a trial-by-jury in Alexandria, Virginia — the notorious "Espionage Court" where the U.S. tries all national security cases. **The choice of location is not by coincidence, because the jury members must be chosen in proportion to the local population, and 85 percent of Alexandria residents work in the national security community** — at the CIA, the NSA, the Defense Department and the State Department. When people are tried for harming national security in front of a jury like that, the verdict is clear from the very beginning. **The cases are always tried in front of the same judge behind closed doors and on the strength of classified evidence. Nobody has ever been acquitted** there in a case like that. The result being that most defendants reach a settlement, in which they admit to partial guilt so as to receive a milder sentence.

You are saying that Julian Assange won't receive a fair trial in the United States?

Without doubt. For as long as employees of the American government obey the orders of their superiors, they can participate in wars of aggression, war crimes and torture knowing full well that they will never have to answer to their actions. What happened to the lessons learned in the Nuremberg Trials? I have worked long enough in conflict zones to know that mistakes happen in war. It's not always unscrupulous criminal acts. A lot of it is the result of stress, exhaustion and panic. That's why I can absolutely understand when a government says: We'll bring the truth to light and we, as a state, take full responsibility for the harm caused, but if blame cannot be directly assigned to individuals, we will not be imposing draconian punishments. But it is extremely dangerous when the truth is suppressed and criminals are not brought to justice. **In the 1930s, Germany and Japan left the League of Nations. Fifteen years later, the world lay in ruins. Today, the U.S. has withdrawn from the UN Human Rights Council**, and neither the «Collateral Murder» massacre nor the CIA torture following 9/11 nor the war of aggression against Iraq have led to criminal investigations. Now, the United Kingdom is following that example. The Security and Intelligence Committee in the country's own parliament published two extensive reports in 2018 showing that Britain was much more deeply involved in the secret CIA torture program than previously believed. The committee recommended a formal investigation. The first thing that Boris Johnson did after he became prime minister was to annul that investigation.

4. In the UK, violations of bail conditions are generally only punished with monetary fines or, at most, a couple of days behind bars. But Assange was given 50 weeks in a maximum-security prison without the ability to prepare his own defense.

In April, Julian Assange was dragged out of the Ecuadorian Embassy by British police. What is your view of these events?

In 2017, a new government was elected in Ecuador. In response, the U.S. wrote a letter indicating they were eager to cooperate with Ecuador. There was, of course, a lot of money at stake, but there was one hurdle in the way: Julian Assange. **The message was that the U.S. was prepared to cooperate if Ecuador handed Assange over to the U.S. At that point, the Ecuadorian Embassy began ratcheting up the pressure on Assange.** They made his life difficult. But he stayed. Then Ecuador voided his

amnesty and gave Britain a green light to arrest him. **Because the previous government had granted him Ecuadorian citizenship, Assange's passport also had to be revoked**, because the Ecuadorian constitution forbids the extradition of its own citizens. All that took place overnight and **without any legal proceedings**. Assange had no opportunity to make a statement or have recourse to legal remedy. He was arrested by the British and taken before a British judge that same day, who convicted him of violating his bail.

What do you make of this accelerated verdict?

Assange only had 15 minutes to prepare with his lawyer. The trial itself also lasted just 15 minutes. Assange's lawyer plopped a thick file down on the table and made a formal objection to one of the judges for conflict of interest because her husband had been the subject of Wikileaks exposures in 35 instances. But the lead judge brushed aside the concerns without examining them further. He said accusing his colleague of a conflict of interest was an affront. Assange himself only uttered one sentence during the entire proceedings: "I plead not guilty." The judge turned to him and said: "You are a narcissist who cannot get beyond his own self-interest. I convict you for bail violation."

If I understand you correctly: Julian Assange never had a chance from the very beginning?

That's the point. I'm not saying Julian Assange is an angel or a hero. But he doesn't have to be. We are talking about human rights and not about the rights of heroes or angels. Assange is a person, and he has the right to defend himself and to be treated in a humane manner. Regardless of what he is accused of, Assange has the right to a fair trial. But he has been deliberately denied that right -- in Sweden, the U.S., Britain and Ecuador. **Instead, he was left to rot for nearly seven years in limbo in a room. Then, he was suddenly dragged out and convicted within hours and without any preparation** for a bail violation that consisted of him having received diplomatic asylum from another UN member state on the basis of political persecution, just as international law intends and just as countless Chinese, Russian and other dissidents have done in Western embassies. It is obvious that what we are dealing with here is political persecution. In Britain, bail violations seldom lead to prison sentences -- they are generally subject only to fines. **Assange, by contrast, was sentenced in summary proceedings to 50 weeks in a maximum-security prison -- clearly a disproportionate penalty that had only a single purpose: Holding Assange long enough for the U.S. to prepare their espionage case against him.**

As the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, what do you have to say about his current conditions of imprisonment?

Britain has denied Julian Assange contact with his lawyers in the U.S., where he is the subject of secret proceedings. His British lawyer has also complained that she hasn't even had sufficient access to her client to go over court documents and evidence with him. Into October, he was not allowed to have a single document from his case file with him in his cell. **He was denied his fundamental right to prepare his own defense, as guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights.** On top of that is the almost total solitary confinement and the totally disproportionate punishment for a bail violation. As soon as he would leave his cell, the corridors were emptied to prevent him from having contact with any other inmates.

And all that because of a simple bail violation? At what point does imprisonment become torture?

Julian Assange has been intentionally psychologically tortured by Sweden, Britain, Ecuador and the U.S. First through the highly arbitrary handling of proceedings against him. **The way Sweden pursued the case, with active assistance from Britain, was aimed at putting him under pressure and trapping him in the embassy. Sweden was never interested in finding the truth and helping these women, but in pushing Assange into a corner.** It has been an abuse of judicial processes aimed at pushing a person into a position where he is unable to defend himself. **On top of that come the surveillance measures, the insults, the indignities and the attacks by politicians from these countries, up to and including death threats.** This constant abuse of state power has triggered serious stress and anxiety in Assange and has resulted in measurable cognitive and neurological harm. I visited Assange in his cell in London in May 2019 together with two experienced, widely respected doctors who are specialized in the forensic and psychological examination of torture victims. The diagnosis arrived at by the two doctors was clear: Julian Assange displays the typical symptoms of psychological torture. If he doesn't receive protection soon, a rapid deterioration of his health is likely, and death could be one outcome.

Half a year after Assange was placed in pre-extradition detention in Britain, Sweden quietly abandoned the case against him in November 2019, after nine long years. Why then?

The Swedish state spent almost a decade intentionally presenting Julian Assange to the public as a sex offender. Then, they suddenly abandoned the case against him on the strength of the same argument that the first Stockholm prosecutor used in 2010, when she initially suspended the investigation after just five days: While the woman's statement was credible, there was no proof that a crime had been committed. It is an unbelievable scandal. But the timing was no accident. On Nov. 11, an official document that I had sent to the Swedish government two months before was made public. In the document, I made a request to the Swedish government to provide explanations for around 50 points pertaining to the human rights implications of the way they were handling the case. **How is it possible that the press was immediately informed despite the prohibition against doing so? How is it possible that a suspicion was made public even though the questioning hadn't yet taken place? How is it possible for you to say that a rape occurred even though the woman involved contests that version of events? On the day the document was made public, I received a paltry response from Sweden: The government has no further comment on this case.**

What does that answer mean?

It is an admission of guilt.

How so?

As UN Special Rapporteur, I have been tasked by the international community of nations with looking into complaints lodged by victims of torture and, if necessary, with requesting explanations or investigations from governments. That is the daily work I do with all UN member states. From my experience, I can say that countries that act in good faith are almost always interested in supplying me with the answers I need to highlight the legality of their behavior. **When a country like Sweden declines to answer questions submitted by the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, it shows**

that the government is aware of the illegality of its behavior and wants to take no responsibility for its behavior. They pulled the plug and abandoned the case a week later because they knew I would not back down. When countries like Sweden allow themselves to be manipulated like that, then our democracies and our human rights face a fundamental threat.

You believe that Sweden was fully aware of what it was doing?

Yes. From my perspective, **Sweden very clearly acted in bad faith.** Had they acted in good faith, there would have been no reason to refuse to answer my questions. The same holds true for the British: Following my visit to Assange in May 2019, **they took six months to answer me -- in a single-page letter,** which was primarily limited to rejecting all accusations of torture and all inconsistencies in the legal proceedings. If you're going to play games like that, then what's the point of my mandate? I am the Special Rapporteur on Torture for the United Nations. I have a mandate to ask clear questions and to demand answers. **What is the legal basis for denying someone their fundamental right to defend themselves? Why is a man who is neither dangerous nor violent held in solitary confinement for several months when UN standards legally prohibit solitary confinement for periods extending beyond 15 days? None of these UN member states launched an investigation, nor did they answer my questions or even demonstrate an interest in dialogue.**

5. A prison sentence of 175 years for investigative journalism: The precedent the USA vs. Julian Assange case could set

What does it mean when UN member states refuse to provide information to their own Special Rapporteur on Torture?

That it is a prearranged affair. A show trial is to be used to make an example of Julian Assange. **The point is to intimidate other journalists.** Intimidation, by the way, is one of the primary purposes for the use of torture around the world. The message to all of us is: This is what will happen to you if you emulate the Wikileaks model. It is a model that is so dangerous because it is so simple: People who obtain sensitive information from their governments or companies transfer that information to Wikileaks, but the whistleblower remains anonymous. The reaction shows how great the threat is perceived to be: Four democratic countries joined forces -- the U.S., Ecuador, Sweden and the UK -- to leverage their power to portray one man as a monster so that he could later be burned at the stake without any outcry. **The case is a huge scandal and represents the failure of Western rule of law. If Julian Assange is convicted, it will be a death sentence for freedom of the press.**

What would this possible precedent mean for the future of journalism?

On a practical level, it means that you, as a journalist, must now defend yourself. Because if investigative journalism is classified as espionage and can be incriminated around the world, then censorship and tyranny will follow. A murderous system is being created before our very eyes. War crimes and torture are not being prosecuted. YouTube videos are circulating in which **American soldiers brag about driving Iraqi women to suicide with systematic rape. Nobody is investigating it.** At the same time, a person who exposes such things is being threatened with 175 years in prison. For an entire decade, he has been inundated with accusations that cannot be proven and are breaking him. And nobody is being held accountable. Nobody is taking

responsibility. It marks an erosion of the social contract. We give countries power and delegate it to governments — but in return, they must be held accountable for how they exercise that power. If we don't demand that they be held accountable, we will lose our rights sooner or later. **Humans are not democratic by their nature. Power corrupts if it is not monitored. Corruption is the result if we do not insist that power be monitored.**

You're saying that the targeting of Assange threatens the very core of press freedoms.

Let's see where we will be in 20 years if Assange is convicted — what you will still be able to write then as a journalist. I am convinced that we are in serious danger of losing press freedoms. **It's already happening: Suddenly, the headquarters of ABC News in Australia was raided in connection with the "Afghan War Diary". The reason? Once again, the press uncovered misconduct by representatives of the state.** In order for the division of powers to work, the state must be monitored by the press as the fourth estate. WikiLeaks is a the logical consequence of an ongoing process of expanded secrecy: **If the truth can no longer be examined because everything is kept secret, if investigation reports on the U.S. government's torture policy are kept secret and when even large sections of the published summary are redacted, leaks are at some point inevitably the result.** WikiLeaks is the consequence of rampant secrecy and reflects the lack of transparency in our modern political system. There are, of course, areas where secrecy can be vital. But if we no longer know what our governments are doing and the criteria they are following, if crimes are no longer being investigated, then it represents a grave danger to societal integrity.

What are the consequences?

As the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and, before that, as a Red Cross delegate, I have seen lots of horrors and violence and have seen how quickly peaceful countries like Yugoslavia or Rwanda can transform into infernos. **At the roots of such developments are always a lack of transparency and unbridled political or economic power combined with the naiveté, indifference and malleability of the population.** Suddenly, that which always happened to the other — unpunished torture, rape, expulsion and murder — can just as easily happen to us or our children. And nobody will care. I can promise you that.

<https://www.republik.ch/2020/01/31/nils-melzer-about-wikileaks-founder-julian-assange>

Original version in German:

<https://www.republik.ch/2020/01/31/nils-melzer-spricht-ueber-wikileaks-gruender-julian-assange>

Australia: Alice Springs group condemns silence of "Bring Assange Home" parliamentary group

*World Socialist Web Site
31 January 2020*

Last October an ad hoc grouping of 11 Australian parliamentarians and senators, co-chaired by independent Andrew Wilkie and Liberal/National Coalition government member George Christensen, announced that they planned to campaign in defence of

persecuted WikiLeaks' founder Julian Assange. The parliamentary group includes Richard Di Natale, the leader of the Greens, as well as Greens deputy leader Adam Bandt.

Apart from some perfunctory statements by Wilkie, Christensen and National MP Barnaby Joyce about Assange's plight, the ad hoc group has remained silent and organised nothing in the face of detailed information about ongoing violations of the Australian citizen's basic legal rights, warnings about the dangerous state of his health, and the refusal of the Australian government to demand his release. Di Natale and Bandt have not even issued a statement on their membership of the grouping.

The Open Letter to the "Bring Assange Home Parliamentary Group" published below was written by Margaret Richardson, a registered nurse, on behalf of the Julian Assange Supporters Alice Springs Action Group. The letter was published on the group's Facebook page yesterday.

Richardson is a founding member of the Assange Supporters Alice Springs Action Group, which was established a week after the Socialist Equality Party held a public meeting in the central Australian city on November 24 last year.

* * *

An Open Letter to the "Bring Assange Home Parliamentary Group"

To: George Christensen (Liberal), Barnaby Joyce (National), Andrew Wilkie (Independent), Sali Steggall (Independent), Richard Di Natale (Greens), Peter Whish-Wilson (Greens), Adam Bandt (Greens), Julian Hill (Labor), Steve Georganos (Labor), Roberta Sharkie (Centre Alliance), Rex Patrick (Centre Alliance) and Helen Haines (Independent).

I'm writing to you because I'm seriously concerned about the dangerous and life-threatening health of Julian Assange, the Australian journalist and WikiLeaks publisher, and want to know exactly what you are doing in his defence, and for his freedom.

I have been following with great interest the activities of the "Bring Assange Home Parliamentary Group" of twelve Australian MPs since it was established in October. It is now more than three months since your group was established but it has done nothing of substance in this time.

There is an abundance of evidence to support the fact that Assange's health is fragile. Why are you not raising loud alarm bells about the brutal persecution of Assange? Your inaction shocks me.

Although the group was formally announced on October 22, it did not meet for the first time until late November. Concerned about the holdup, I phoned Mr Wilkie's office to ask why there had been such a delay and was told, "It's the first opportunity they had, to be able to meet together all in one place." This did not ring true.

I then read in the Sydney Morning Herald that plans were being made by George Christensen to visit Assange in the UK "in the coming months." He said that he wanted to "see for himself" whether the abusive treatment of Assange and the "circumstances of his jailing" in Belmarsh Prison had contributed to the Australian citizen's rapidly deteriorating health.

It is patently obvious that Assange's life is in danger. As you are fully aware, all those who have visited Assange in maximum-security Belmarsh Prison including, John Pilger, Julian's brother Gabriel, Julian's father John Shipton and Pamela Anderson, leave with grave concerns about his deteriorating physical and mental health. These concerns have been widely published.

UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer made clear in his May 2019 report that Assange's long confinement inside the Ecuadorian embassy in London and his ongoing illegal incarceration in Belmarsh prison is tantamount to psychological torture and the worst case of mistreatment he has seen in twenty years.

In a letter to the British government published last November, Melzer declared, "Unless the UK urgently changes course and alleviates his inhumane situation, Mr Assange's continued exposure to arbitrariness and abuse may soon end up costing him his life."

On October 21, an RT video clip of Assange in the police van being transported to a case-management hearing in Westminster Magistrates Court gave some indication of the dreadful state of Assange's health. I would expect it has been seen by all members of cross-party group.

On October 22, Craig Murray, former British former diplomat and now whistleblower, human rights campaigner and friend of Assange, was present at the first Westminster Magistrates Court hearing. Murray published a report entitled "Assange in Court," which provided a very chilling description of the event and of the rapidly declining state of Assange's health.

Shock waves reverberated around the world, as reports of the terrible state of his health filtered out. This extremely intelligent and articulate man had become a bumbling wreck and could not even recall his date of birth. Assange's youthful good looks and dignified persona were gone and he was almost unrecognisable, causing great concern internationally.

On November 22, an urgent letter signed by over 65 doctors from around the world was sent to the UK Home Secretary Priti Patel warning that Assange could die in prison and demanding that he be transferred from Belmarsh to a university teaching hospital for urgent medical assessment and treatment. This letter was based on factual medical reports documented over several years.

Since then, another letter signed by more than 100 doctors has been sent to the UK home secretary. Neither letter was answered by the British government.

Recent reports reveal that conditions are so bad in Belmarsh that three people have died in the prison in the previous year, the most recent in January 2020.

What more evidence is required of the parlous state of his health? His most recent appearance at the procedural hearing on January 13 at Westminster revealed a very aged man.

At Christmas, Julian was given a "Christmas treat" and allowed to make a phone call. Julian told his close friend Vaughan Smith "I'm dying in here" and said he that he was being sedated.

Assange's self-reported fear for his life has been greeted with a deafening silence, not just from the Australian government and Labor Party opposition, but also by your "Bring Assange Home Parliamentary Group."

Notwithstanding your claims to be concerned for the WikiLeaks publisher, the "Bring Assange Home Parliamentary Group" has not called any joint press conferences, no public meetings and no rallies.

Rather than mobilise support for Assange you're promoting illusions that "someone" in parliament is "doing something." This is to cultivate a passive attitude, so that ordinary people don't do anything.

Why call yourselves the "Bring Assange Home Parliamentary Group" when you have done nothing to bring Julian home or ensure that the utterly inhumane treatment in Belmarsh doesn't kill him.

Can you please tell me what concrete political actions your group is planning?

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Grace Richardson (Registered Nurse)
On behalf of Julian Assange Supporters Alice Springs Action Group

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/01/31/wilk-j31.html>

Berlin, 31 January 2020

The Norwegian Nobel Committee
Henrik Ibsens gate 51
0255 Oslo
Norway

Dear Members of the Norwegian Nobel Committee,

We wish to nominate Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden for the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize, in honour of their unparalleled contributions to the pursuit of peace, and their immense personal sacrifices to promote peace for all.

The year 2020 began with Julian Assange arbitrarily detained and tortured, at risk of death according to the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and over 100 medical doctors, for revealing the extent of harm and illegality behind the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. 2020 began with Chelsea Manning in her second year of renewed imprisonment for resisting to testify to a Grand Jury empaneled against Wikileaks, after having also been imprisoned seven years previously and tortured, following her disclosures that were published by Julian Assange. 2020 began with Edward Snowden in his 7th year of asylum for revealing illegal mass surveillance, in defence of the liberties underpinning revelations such as those made by Chelsea Manning and Julian Assange.

The *Collateral Murder* video, provided by Chelsea Manning in 2010 and published by Wikileaks, honoured the dignity of those slain needlessly in war. It gave names and identities to victims whose humanity had been kept from public view, capturing the last moments of life for a young Reuters photojournalist, Namir Noor-Eldeen. Namir, who was killed in cold blood while on assignment in Baghdad, was described by his colleagues as among “the pre-eminent war photographers in Iraq” with “a tender eye that brought humanity via quiet moments to a vicious war”.

For humanising Namir and his driver Saeed Chmagh, a father of four, slain in front of two children who sat strafed with bullets in a van, Julian Assange faces 175 years in a US prison under the 1917 Espionage Act, and Chelsea Manning is currently detained without charge.

As well as humanising innocent victims of war, in 2010 Julian Assange and Wikileaks exposed the means by which public abhorrence of killing is overcome, and peace subverted, by psychological manipulation and strategic messaging.

* * *

In March 2010 the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) produced a memorandum, subsequently published by Wikileaks, entitled “Afghanistan: Sustaining West European Support for the NATO-led Mission — Why Counting on Apathy Might Not Be Enough”.

At the time of the memorandum, 80 percent of French and German publics opposed greater troop deployment to Afghanistan. The memo expressed concern that public “indifference might turn into active hostility if spring and summer fighting results in an upsurge in military or Afghan civilian casualties.” To overcome public opposition to the “bloody summer” ahead, the memorandum advised tailoring messages for French audiences that “could tap into acute French concern for civilians and refugees,” given that French “opponents most commonly argued that the mission hurts civilians.”

“Appeals by President Obama and Afghan women might gain traction” the memorandum added.

With respect to the legalities of peace, Julian Assange and Wikileaks have contributed to the historical record on the International Criminal Court (ICC), established in 2002 under the Rome Statute of 1998, to promote the “peace, security and well-being of the world.” The ICC’s mission was to end impunity by prosecuting “the worst atrocities known to mankind”: war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of genocide. When the ICC’s enforcement capabilities were taking shape in the years following its inception, cables published by WikiLeaks exposed bilateral deals between nations under Article 98 of the Rome Statute, in which states placed themselves outside the ICC’s jurisdiction. The Article 98 deals undercut the ICC’s power to prosecute war crimes and other internationally illegal obstacles to a peaceful world order.

Later, in 2013, when Edward Snowden revealed the warrantless mass-surveillance of citizens and officials worldwide, he exposed an immense global network with the capability to intercept and obstruct peace proponents such as Chelsea Manning and Julian Assange. Edward Snowden’s revelations have contributed to international investigations, transparency initiatives and legislative reforms around the globe. These are but a selection of the contributions that Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden have made towards pursuing and defending lasting peace.

Together, their actions have exposed the architecture of abuse and war, and fortified the architecture of peace. In return, all three individuals have been forced to sacrifice the very liberties, rights and human welfare that they worked so hard to defend.

A Nobel Peace Prize for Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden would do more than honour their actions as individuals. It would ennoble the risks and sacrifices that those pursuing peace so often undertake, to secure the peace and freedom for all.

Sincerely,

Sevim Dağdelen
Member of the German Bundestag

Doris Achelwilm
Member of the German Bundestag

Diether Dehm
Member of the German Bundestag

Sylvia Gabelmann
Member of the German Bundestag

Heike Hänsel
Member of the German Bundestag

Andrej Hunko
Member of the German Bundestag

Ulla Jelpke
Member of the German Bundestag

Jutta Krellmann
Member of the German Bundestag

Fabio De Masi
Member of the German Bundestag

Žaklin Nastić
Member of the German Bundestag

Dr. Alexander S. Neu
Member of the German Bundestag

Eva-Maria Schreiber
Member of the German Bundestag

Alexander Ulrich
Member of the German Bundestag

Kathrin Vogler
Member of the German Bundestag

Andreas Wagner
Member of the German Bundestag

Pia Zimmermann
Member of the German Bundestag

Sabine Zimmermann
Member of the German Bundestag

Appendices

Julian Assange's Prizes and Awards

The Economist New Media Award (2008)

The Amnesty New Media Award (2009)

TIME Magazine Person of the Year, People's Choice (highest global vote) (2010)

The Sam Adams Award for Integrity (2010)

The National Union of Journalists Journalist of the Year (Hrafnsson) (2011)

The Sydney Peace Foundation Gold Medal (2011)
 The Martha Gellhorn Prize for Journalism (2011)
 The Blanquerna Award for Best Communicator (2011)
 The Walkley Award for Most Outstanding Contribution to Journalism (2011)
 The Voltaire Award for Free Speech (2011)
 The Int'l. Piero Passetti Journalism Prize of the National Union of Italian Journalists (2011)
 The Jose Couso Press Freedom Award (2011)
 The Privacy International Hero of Privacy (2012)
 The Global Exchange Human Rights People's Choice Award (2013)
 The Yoko Ono Lennon Courage Award for the Arts (2013)
 The Brazilian Press Association Human Rights Award (2013)
 The Kazakhstan Union of Journalists Top Prize (2014)
 The Willy Brandt Award for Political Courage (Harrison) (2015)
 The Galizia Prize for Journalists, Whistleblower & Defenders of the Right to Information (2019)
 The Danny Schechter Global Vision Award for Journalism & Activism (2019)
 The Compassion in Care's Gavin McacFadyen Award for Whistleblowers (2019)

Chelsea Manning's Prizes and Awards

The Army Service Ribbon (2008)
 The National Defense Service Medal (2008)
 The Global War on Terrorism Service Medal (2009)
 The Overseas Service Medal (2009)
 The Iraq Campaign Medal (2009)
 The Whistleblowerpreis (2011)
 The Global Exchange People's Choice Award (2012)
 The US Peace Prize, US Peace Memorial Foundation (2013)
 The Sean McBride Peace Prize, International Peace Bureau (2013)
 The Sam Adams Award for Integrity (2014)
 The EFF Pioneer Award for whistleblowing (2017)

Edward Snowden's Prizes and Awards

The German Whistleblower Prize (2013)
 The Sam Adams Award (2013)
 The Rector of the University of Glasgow (2014)
 The German Big Brother Award (2014)
 The Ridenhour Truth-Telling Prize (2014)
 The Right Livelihood Award (2014)
 The Carl Von Ossietzky Medal (2014)
 The IQ Award (2014)
 The Norsk PEN Ossietzky Prize (2016)

Other Examples of Julian Assange's work

Julian Assange has published over 10 million documents with a perfect verification record. One of his first major releases was the a copy of the Guantanamo Bay prison camp's 2003 Standard Operating Procedures for the US Army.

In 2010, WikiLeaks came to global attention by publishing tens of thousands of classified documents from the United States, including the Afghan War Diaries and the Iraq War Logs, which documented more than 100,000 occupation related civilian killings.

Wikileaks also published "Cablegate" in 2010, the State Department diplomatic cables.

In 2011 Wikileaks published the “Gitmo Files”, documents on 767 of the 779 prisoners in Guantanamo Bay.

WikiLeaks has published the “Global Intelligence Files” (5 million emails from intelligence contractor Stratfor), “Spy Files: Russia”, two million files from Syrian political elites, the “Saudi Cables” (hundreds of thousands of files from the Saudi Foreign Ministry)

WikiLeaks publications have revealed extensive information on the disastrous war on Libya and proof of US knowledge of Saudi and Qatari government backing of ISIS and Al Nusra in Syria.

One of WikiLeaks recent investigations, in collaboration with major European media, revealed a corrupt arms deal between French state-owned company and the United Arab Emirates.

In the European context, Julian Assange revealed that the US’s National Security Agency and the CIA targeted:

- German Chancellor Angela Merkel
 - French Presidents Hollande, Sarkozy, and Chirac, as well as French cabinet ministers and the French Ambassador to the United States.
 - the French Finance Minister and US orders of the interception of every French company contract or negotiation valued at more than \$200 million
 - communications of Foreign Minister Steinmeier, in the context of moves to end extraordinary rendition flights through Germany
 - the Swiss phone of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Chief of Staff for long term interception
 - a meeting between then French president Nicolas Sarkozy, Merkel and Berlusconi
- Julian Assange also published original US intercepts from French senior officials re:
- the leadership and future of the European Union
 - the relationship between the Hollande administration and the German government of Angela Merkel
 - French efforts to determine the make-up of the executive staff of the United Nations
 - French officials’ communications concerning US spying on France
 - French involvement in the conflict in Palestine

Contact:

Sevim Dagdelen, Deutscher Bundestag
Platz der Republik 1, 11011 Berlin, Germany
E-Mail: sevim.dagdelen@bundestag.de

<https://defend.wikileaks.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/2020-01-31-Nobel-Nomination-Julian-Assange-Chelsea-Manning-Edward-Snowden.pdf>

Press freedom is at risk if we allow Julian Assange's extradition

The aim of the charges is to halt whistleblowers and stop journalists giving them a platform

Roy Greenslade
The Guardian
2 Feb. 2020

Later this month, a journalist will appear at a London court hearing in which he faces being extradited to the United States to spend the rest of his life in prison. The 18 charges against him are the direct result of his having revealed a host of secrets, many of them related to the US prosecution of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

They included the “collateral murder” video which showed a US helicopter crew shooting 18 people in Baghdad in 2007, including two Reuters war correspondents, Namir Noor-Eldeen and Saeed Chmagh. Among the files were thousands of military dispatches and diplomatic cables that enabled people in scores of countries to perceive the relationships between their governments and the US. They also showed the way in which American diplomats sought to gather personal information about two UN secretary generals.

Unsurprisingly, the revelations were gratefully published and broadcast by newspapers and media outlets across the world. “Scoop” is far too mundane a term to describe the staggering range of disclosures. By any journalistic standard, it was a breathtaking piece of reporting, which earned the journalist more than a dozen awards.

So, you might think that this press freedom hero, now incarcerated in Belmarsh prison, would be enjoying supportive banner headlines in Britain’s newspapers ahead of his case. **Thus far, however, coverage of his plight has been muted. Why?**

The answer is that our hero is none other than Julian Assange, the man who skipped bail to avoid an extradition order to Sweden over an allegation of rape, which he denies, and took shelter in the Ecuadorian embassy for seven years until police were allowed to enter and arrest him last April. Many falsehoods were told about Assange during his time inside the embassy, including bizarre stories about his smearing faeces on the walls, ruining the floors by skateboarding and torturing a cat.

These tales, and many more like them, have contributed to the largely negative perception of Assange and the website he helped to found, WikiLeaks. Some of it was orchestrated by the US government following the 2010 release of the collateral murder footage and the arrest of the whistleblower, Chelsea Manning, who was responsible for leaking the material.

In Britain, Assange’s reputation suffered from his falling-out with several people who had admired his work, including at the Guardian, which had published stories based on the WikiLeaks documents. As the paper’s then editor, Alan Rusbridger, noted: “The relationship with Assange was fraught ... I found him mercurial, untrustworthy and dislikable: he wasn’t keen on me, either.”

I met Assange only once, when he came to a talk at City, University of London, and was less than impressed by his grandstanding entrance and performance. But, like Rusbridger, I think personal feelings about Assange’s character have to be put to one side. The far-reaching implications of this case against him are hugely significant for the future of the journalistic trade.

Assange has been charged with 17 counts under the US Espionage Act of 1917, each of which carries a 10-year sentence, and one of “conspiracy to commit computer intrusion”, which carries a five-year maximum sentence. He could therefore be jailed for 175 years. These offences may relate specifically to one man’s activities but, should they succeed, they would set a terrible precedent. The aim is to prevent whistleblowers from telling the truth and journalists from giving them a platform.

What Manning and Assange did cannot be construed as espionage. They were casting light on the US government’s murky secrets and, in the case of the collateral murder

video, the lengths it was prepared to go in order to cover up a massacre. That's journalism, pure and simple.

It means that press freedom is at risk, and we should not be persuaded to pass by on the other side of the road just because we don't like the guy involved. I am delighted that national editors who responded to my emailed question last week about their views seem to feel the same way.

The Daily Telegraph's Chris Evans says that although he is "heavily conflicted" about Assange, he is alarmed by "the implications for journalism" should he be extradited. The Daily Express editor, Gary Jones, is "reluctant to describe Mr Assange as a journalist", but thinks he "lifted the lid on very serious abuses of power and corruption" and believes "the British government should stop his extradition".

The Guardian's editor, Katharine Viner, was unequivocal: "State power should never be used to suppress the actions of whistleblowers and investigative journalists pursuing stories that are clearly in the public interest. The US extradition case against Julian Assange is a troubling attack on press freedom and the public's right to know."

Two editors, speaking off the record, were reluctant to take a definitive position before they have more detailed knowledge about the case. Their main concern was about the possibility that the release of files by WikiLeaks may have endangered people's lives. But I cannot find any evidence that anyone was arrested, let alone tortured or killed, as a result.

I would like to see Britain's editors – national, regional and local – get to grips with this case in advance of the first hearing, due to start on 24 February, and then to issue a considered statement, probably through the Society of Editors, opposing Assange's extradition. At the same time, they need to alert their readers and pressure politicians, in order to highlight the injustice of this prosecution and why it is so important. They don't have to change their minds about the man's character. They just need to stick to the principle.

I don't think it's too far-fetched to see a parallel between the Assange case and the Dreyfus affair in the 1890s, in which a Jewish artillery captain in the French army was falsely convicted of spying. At least Dreyfus was eventually released from Devil's Island. If the US gets its hands on Assange, there will be precious little hope of escape.

It is sobering to note that Manning, whose original sentence was commuted, is now in jail because she refuses to testify against Assange. She, too, is a hero of press freedom.

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/feb/02/press-freedom-is-at-risk-if-we-allow-julian-assanges-extradition>

Council of Europe's parliamentary assembly calls for Assange's release, condemns threatened extradition

*Oscar Grenfell
World Socialist Web Site
3 February 2020*

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted a resolution last Tuesday which demands the “prompt release” of imprisoned WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and warns that his threatened extradition from Britain to the US, for lawful publishing activities, “sets a dangerous precedent” for all journalists.

PACE is the parliamentary wing of the Council of Europe, an international assembly with 47 nation-members that was established in 1949. The organisation, which oversees the work of the European Court of Human Rights, states that its role is to serve as “Europe’s guardian of human rights and democracy.”

The references to the Assange case are contained in a resolution titled “Threats to media freedom and journalists’ security in Europe.” It documents a rise in the number of journalists jailed, assaulted and murdered in Europe and internationally, including the killing of Maltese journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia after she exposed official corruption in 2017.

The resolution bluntly declares that “Threats on media freedom and the safety of journalists have become so numerous, repeated and serious that they are jeopardising not only citizens’ right to be properly informed but also the stability and smooth functioning of our democratic societies.”

Significantly, **the draft report, prepared by British Labour peer Lord Foulkes, did not contain any mention of the WikiLeaks founder.** This was in line with the support of all of the official political parties in Britain, including Labour, for the jailing of Assange and the attempt to silence him for exposing war crimes.

Less than a month out from British court hearings aimed at rubber-stamping Assange’s dispatch to the US, however, **other members of PACE recognised that the resolution would not have any credibility if it failed to mention Europe’s most famous imprisoned journalist and publisher.**

Members of the European United Left–Nordic Green Left, comprised of a number of self-styled “left” parties throughout the continent, moved two amendments, both of which were adopted. Their intervention followed lobbying by Assange’s father, John Shipton, and other prominent supporters of the WikiLeaks founder.

The first amendment called on all European governments to “defend the freedom of media and security of journalists, namely in the case of Julian Assange as his possible extradition to the USA would set a precedent and threaten journalists’ freedoms in all member states.”

The second stated that they should “consider that the detention and criminal prosecution of Mr Julian Assange sets a dangerous precedent for journalists, and join the recommendation of the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment who declared, on 1 November 2019, that Mr Assange’s extradition to the United States must be barred and that he must be promptly released.”

The amendments were passed under conditions where Assange’s status as a political prisoner is undeniable. He is being held in the maximum-security Belmarsh Prison, a facility designed to hold murderers and terrorists, despite not having been convicted of any crime. All of Assange’s legal and democratic rights, including to access documents crucial to preparing his defence and to confer freely with his lawyers, have

been trampled on by a British judiciary determined to dispatch him to his American persecutors.

The lawlessness of the operation against Assange has been underscored by revelations, contained in official court filings, that the US does not consider him entitled to the First Amendment protections of the American constitution, which uphold free speech and freedom of the press. It has also been reported that if he is extradited, Assange will be held in the US under Special Administrative Measures—draconian regulations, usually applied in terrorism cases, that prevent a prisoner from communicating with virtually anyone.

The nakedly anti-democratic character of Assange's persecution has placed erstwhile supporters of the campaign against him on the back foot. Foulkes stated that he and his colleagues "don't want to see Julian Assange extradited to the United States to spend centuries in prison."

The Labour peer, however, exposed himself as a supporter of past efforts to frame Assange on bogus sexual misconduct allegations in Sweden. He told the Guardian: "I was in favour of him being sent back to Sweden when there were allegations against him to face, but as far as the US is concerned I think there would be deep concerns if he were to be sent there."

This position — taken by the majority of Labour MPs — amounted to backdoor support for the US attempt to destroy Assange. The Swedish allegations were used by Britain, acting in collaboration with the US and Swedish governments, to deprive Assange of his liberty, embroil him in legal proceedings and to blacken his name.

The attempt to smear Assange as a "sex criminal," however, is increasingly untenable in the wake of the collapse of the Swedish investigation late last year. In the course of almost a decade, the investigation was dropped three times and never progressed beyond the "preliminary stage." Prosecutors did not come close to issuing any criminal charges. UN Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer has documented fifty aspects of the Swedish government which appeared to violate Assange's rights to due process and the presumption of innocence.

That PACE has felt compelled to explicitly condemn the persecution of Assange reflects a growing groundswell of support for the WikiLeaks founder in the lead-up to the first British extradition hearings on February 24.

The body, however, does not have any binding powers over its member-states. Its recommendations and statements can, and have been, ignored at will, with no consequences.

PACE oversees the European Court of Human Rights, which may be the final court of appeal for Assange, if all levels of the British judiciary rubber-stamp his extradition, as they have signalled they will do. Even that body, however, has no powers of coercion over any European state. The US and its allies, including Britain, have made clear that they are willing to flout international and domestic laws in their pursuit of Assange, as they did when launching the illegal 2003 invasion of Iraq, which was formally condemned by United Nations bodies.

Defenders of democratic rights will not condemn PACE's resolution. The record, however, demonstrates that Assange's freedom will not be secured through the deliberations of courts, parliaments or European assemblies. What is required is the

development of a mass political movement, fighting to block his extradition, as part of the struggle against the growing trend to authoritarianism and in defence of all democratic rights.

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/02/03/assa-f03.html>

UN rapporteur Nils Melzer exposes British government attempts to obstruct his defence of Assange

*Oscar Grenfell
World Socialist Web Site
5 February 2020*

At a meeting in London's St. Pancras New Church on Monday night, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer provided new information about the efforts of the British government and the establishment media to hinder his defence of imprisoned WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

Melzer delivered a powerful contribution at the event, organised by academic Deepa Driver and held under the banner of "Free the Truth." Other speakers were former British diplomat and whistleblower Craig Murray, Lisa Longstaff of Women Against Rape and Eva Joly, who previously served as an investigative magistrate and representative of the French Greens in the European parliament.

Melzer explained that since releasing his finding in May 2019 that Assange had been subjected to an unprecedented nine-year campaign of persecution by Britain, Sweden and the US, resulting in medically verifiable symptoms of "psychological torture," his inquiries and recommendations had been ignored. "States refused to investigate or engage in a dialogue about my findings, even to respond to the questions I am mandated by them to ask," he stated.

The UN official revealed that behind the scenes, British authorities had actively sought to undermine him.

Melzer said: "They went to see the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights to complain about me. They don't seem to realise that I am independent. I am appointed directly by the Human Rights Council. But the ambassador in Geneva seems to have told her that he is 'not happy' with the way I conduct my mandate. Incidentally, I heard they also told my employer in Glasgow that they were not too happy with how I conducted my mandate."

That the British government is simultaneously stonewalling Melzer's inquiries and apparently conducting a campaign against him underscores the flagrant illegality of the entire US-led vendetta against Assange.

Melzer is employed at the University of Glasgow as a professor of international law, independently of his role as a UN official. The only reason for the British authorities to contact the university would be to pressure it to act against Melzer over the principled position he has taken in the Assange case. Such conduct recalls the attacks by the British and American governments on UN experts who publicly condemned the lies about "weapons of mass destruction" in the lead-up to the illegal invasion of Iraq.

Melzer defiantly declared: "I refuse to be intimidated. I conduct the mandate that the United Nations has given to me according to the best of my morality and my judgement. It is a violation of my independence to try to circumvent official procedures and to try to undermine my credibility and standing with the United Nations and my employer. And I will certainly not back down."

The rapporteur noted that some critics had accused him of "overstepping the line" and claimed that the treatment of Assange had "nothing to do with torture." In reply, Melzer asked: "How does it have nothing to do with torture when a man exposes evidence of government war crimes and torture and no one is being prosecuted for it?"

His assessment that Assange had suffered torture was based on an extended consultation last year involving two medical experts, Melzer explained. The diagnosis was arrived at under the "Istanbul Protocol," the international standard for identifying symptoms of torture.

Assange, Melzer warned, was being "publicly destroyed before our eyes," in a "slow motion" operation intended to intimidate "everyone else in the world who could have the dangerous idea of copying WikiLeaks." If extradited to the US, he had no prospect of receiving a fair trial.

Melzer noted that while Assange faced 175 years imprisonment under US charges, the maximum sentences handed down to those convicted of war crimes in the former Yugoslavia was 40 years. Assange, however, had "not killed or harmed anybody," but had merely published true documents.

Melzer responded to claims that he had "lost" his "neutrality," asking: "**Am I supposed to be impartial between a torturer and the tortured?**" No. I am meant to be neutral and objective in investigating a case, and not to have any presumptions before I have investigated. But once I have found that someone has been tortured, of course I am not neutral. I will defend them."

It was not just the government that was seeking to undermine support for Assange. Melzer revealed he had "been asking the BBC for an interview for nine months." He had offered to appear on the "Hard Talk" program to discuss Assange's case, but had been rebuffed with the claim that it would not be "newsworthy."

At the same time, BBC reporters continued to slander Assange. One claimed last month that Assange "evaded justice" when he exercised his right under international law to seek political asylum in Ecuador's London embassy in 2012. Melzer asked: "In 1940, **Hannah Arendt, arrested for anti-state propaganda, successfully escaped the Gestapo and Vichy internment and received asylum in the US. Did she 'evade justice?'**" He recalled other cases of dissidents escaping persecution, including by seeking asylum in foreign embassies.

Melzer noted that these lies were part of a broader attempt to suppress discussion about the dire implications for democratic rights of Assange's threatened extradition. **A panel on the "Legal, Systemic and Reputational Implications of the Assange Case" had been scheduled at Chatham House on Tuesday. The prominent London policy institute cancelled the event, without providing a reason, forcing it to be moved to the Frontline Club.**

Melzer warned that the Assange case had revealed a broader assault on civil liberties. “As soon as establishment power is threatened, we do not have the rule of law,” he stated, concluding that it was “really urgent” to “strengthen our voice” in Assange’s defence.

Craig Murray delivered a contribution from the perspective of a whistleblower who had exposed the British Labour government’s collusion in US-sanctioned torture and extraordinary rendition operations in Uzbekistan.

He recounted the case of Clive Ponting, a British civil servant who publicly exposed the lies of the Thatcher government used to justify its aggression against Argentina in the Falklands War of 1982. Ponting was charged with violating the Official Secrets Act, but was acquitted by a jury of his peers. The British authorities had not prosecuted Murray in the early 2000s, the former ambassador said, for fear of a similar result.

Murray said that if he leaked government information now, however, he would be hauled before a secret court in a trial presided over only by a judge. Under draconian national security provisions, the media would be prohibited from reporting the case.

The attempted prosecution of Assange was even more extraordinary, given that he was a publisher and not a whistleblower. “What they are doing to Julian is the equivalent of prosecuting Lionel Barber, the editor of the *Financial Times*, for publishing what I leaked — it would be the death of journalism.”

Eva Joly warned that the US was seeking to apply its repressive domestic laws on a global scale. She stated: “Julian Assange must not be extradited and only a very massive mobilisation of ordinary people and of people from the law community can stop it because it has been programmed for years that he should be sent to the US.”

Lisa Longstaff reviewed the way in which false accusations of sexual misconduct in Sweden had been used to deprive Assange of his legal and democratic rights and tarnish his reputation. The concocted Swedish investigation had “nothing to do with justice for rape,” but was part of an attempt by the US and its allies to abolish the “freedom to report crimes by the state.”

Longstaff hailed Chelsea Manning, the courageous whistleblower who is imprisoned in the US for refusing to provide false testimony against Assange, calling her “one of the most principled people we know of.” She insisted that “we must do all in our power to get her free too.”

Assange’s father, John Shipton, thanked all of those in attendance and encouraged them to intensify the campaign for his son’s freedom.

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/02/05/melz-f05.html>

The Trials of Julian Assange (closed meeting at the Frontline Club)

Real Media
February 5, 2020

Businessman and activist Joe Corr  had been trying to organise a meeting with an invited audience to openly debate Julian Assange’s probable extradition to the United States. His plan was to hold the event at Chatham House where people could speak freely, and he approached establishment figures as well as campaigners so that all views could be heard in a balanced and fair way.

But the organisers say that in the week before the event was due to happen, despite a booking and deposit made last November, Chatham House cancelled the reservation without discussion. As a result, the meeting was hastily relocated to The Frontline Club in Paddington, but at the last minute the former head of MI6, Richard Dearlove, also pulled out.

The only establishment figure remaining, former foreign diplomat Claire Smith, wished to maintain Chatham House rules and requested her views were not shared, but the rest of the panel have all given their permission and this exclusive Real Media film presents highlights from their contributions along with interviews with the organiser, and Julian Assange’s biological father, John Shipton.

James Goodale, the former vice-president and general counsel at the New York Times (who won a court case the US administration over publication of the Pentagon Papers in 1971) spoke via Skype from America. Nils Melzer, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, spoke alongside former political commentator at *The Telegraph*, Peter Osborne, and former director at Reprieve, eminent human rights lawyer Clive Stafford Smith.

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Y5P820kjoc&feature=emb_logo

More info and campaigns at [Don’t Extradite Assange](#)

<https://realmedia.press/the-trials-of-julian-assange/>

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German TV Exposes the Lies That Entrapped Julian Assange

A major German TV network has aired an interview with the UN rapporteur on torture that reveals the invention of the Swedish “rape” case against Julian Assange.

Ray McGovern
Consortium News
February 6, 2020

Truth has broken through for those confused about how a publisher ended up in a maximum security prison in London with a one-way extradition ticket to court in the U.S. and the rest of his life behind bars.

One of the main German TV channels (ZDF) ran two prime-time segments on Wednesday night exposing authorities in Sweden for having “made up” the story about Julian Assange being a rapist.

Until last night most Germans, as well as other consumers of “major media” in Europe, had no idea of the trickery that enmeshed Assange in a spider-web almost

certainly designed by the U.S. and woven by accomplices in vassal states like Sweden, Britain and, eventually, Ecuador.

ZDF punctured that web by interviewing UN Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer. One ZDF “Heute Sendung” segment (in German) is especially telling from minute 13:00 to 15:30 . The second is ZDF “Heute Journal” (minute 25:49 to 30:19.)

Both ZDF programs show Melzer being interviewed, with minimal interruption or commentary, letting his findings speak for themselves about how allegations against Assange were “made up” and manipulated to hold him captive.

The particularly scurrilous allegation that led many, including initially Melzer, to believe Assange was a rapist — a tried and tested smear technique of covert action — was especially effective. The Swedes never formally charged him with rape — or with any crime, for that matter. ZDF exhibited some of the documents Melzer uncovered that show the sexual allegations were just as “invented” as the evidence for WMD before the attack on Iraq.

Melzer had previously admitted to having been so misled by media portrayals of Assange that he was initially reluctant to investigate Assange’s case. Here is what Melzer wrote last year in an op-ed marking the International Day in Support of Torture Victims, June 26.

No major media would print or post it. Medium.com posted it under the title “Demasking the Torture of Julian Assange.”

Excerpts:

“But surely, I found myself pleading, Assange must be a selfish narcissist, skateboarding through the Ecuadorian Embassy and smearing feces on the walls? Well, all I heard from Embassy staff is that the inevitable inconveniences of his accommodation at their offices were handled with mutual respect and consideration.

“This changed only after the election of President Moreno, when they were suddenly instructed to find smears against Assange and, when they didn’t, they were soon replaced. The President even took it upon himself to bless the world with his gossip, and to personally strip Assange of his asylum and citizenship without any due process of law.

“In the end it finally dawned on me that I had been blinded by propaganda, and that Assange had been systematically slandered to divert attention from the crimes he exposed.”

Melzer ended his op-ed with this somber warning: “... This is not only about protecting Assange, but about preventing a precedent likely to seal the fate of Western democracy. For once telling the truth has become a crime, while the powerful enjoy impunity, it will be too late to correct the course. We will have surrendered our voice to censorship and our fate to unrestrained tyranny.”

Melzer’s indefatigable efforts to expose what Assange has gone through, including “psychological torture,” met with some modest success in the days before the German ZDF aired their stories. Embedded in the linked article is by far [the best interview](#) of Melzer on Assange.

Opposition to extraditing Assange to the U.S. is becoming more widespread. Another straw in an Assange-favorable wind came last week when the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) called for Assange's immediate release, ending years of silence by such European institutions.

It remains, nonetheless, an uphill struggle to prompt the British to think back 800 years to the courage of the nobles who wrested the Magna Carta from King John.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He is co-creator of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

<https://consortiumnews.com/2020/02/06/ray-mcgovern-german-tv-exposes-the-lies-that-entrapped-julian-assange/>

130 prominent Germans appeal for Julian Assange's release

The WikiLeaks founder is being held in deteriorating conditions despite his poor health, his supporters said. The signatories include a former German vice-chancellor and a Nobel Prize winner.

*Deutsche Welle
2020-02-07*

More than 130 prominent figures in Germany from the world of art, politics, and the media signed an appeal on Thursday calling for Wikileaks founder Julian Assange to be released from prison in the UK. He is currently serving a 50-week sentence for skipping bail.

The letter's signatories include famous German investigative journalist Günther Wallraff, former Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel, and Austrian winner of the Nobel Prize in literature, Elfriede Jelinek.

It says that Assange, 48, is being held in "isolation and monitored under unnecessarily stressful conditions" in a British prison despite being in "critical health."

UN Special Rapporteur on torture, Nils Melzer, told DW that after meeting with Assange he believed that the activist exhibited "typical signs of psychological torture."

They also argue that Assange risks being deprived of his basic human rights if he is extradited to the United States when his sentence is over.

Assange famously sought refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy in London in 2012 when Swedish authorities were seeking to bring him to Stockholm to face rape allegations. Authorities in Sweden have since dropped the case due to the difficulties in prosecuting it.

After increasingly frustrating the Ecuadorian government with his actions, his asylum was withdrawn and he was forced to leave the embassy in April 2019.

He is wanted in the US for violating the Espionage Act, where he faces a life sentence for leaking classified US military documents. The British government has not yet said if it will extradite Assange, although it had previously vowed not to do so if he faced the death penalty.

<https://www.dw.com/en/prominent-germans-appeal-for-julian-assanges-release/a-52277571>

Opinion: I am Julian Assange

Prominent German figures are calling for WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to be released from prison in the UK. Many more should support this appeal, writes Marcel Fürstenau.

Marcel Fürstenau
Deutsche Welle
2020-02-07

Without Julian Assange, we would know far less about the US war in Afghanistan. Our picture of the conflict would have remained sanitized, and largely as political leaders would have wanted it to be. But since the 2010 Afghan War documents leak on WikiLeaks — an investigative platform founded by Assange — the world knows about the real inhumanity and duplicity surrounding the war. Indeed, thousands of classified military and intelligence documents were made public that year.

Journalists all over the world have hugely benefited from Assange's WikiLeaks platform since. It allows them to network and reveal the intransparent, illegal and at times even downright criminal activities of political and business elites. So it's really no wonder that high-ranking decision-makers fear this platform. And they're certainly entitled to make use of whichever fair, legal measures exist to fight such revelations — though the steps taken against WikiLeaks founder Assange in recent years are entirely disproportionate.

The tide has turned since Trump

When US President Barack Obama was in office, Assange feared severe repercussions for his involvement with WikiLeaks. Obama, after all, regarded him not as a champion of press freedom, but as a traitor. But luckily for him, the Obama administration did not take legal action, arguing that doing so would have similarly required taking The Guardian and The New York Times to court for their role in publishing excerpts of the leaks.

With US President Donald Trump's rise to power, however, the tide turned against Assange. In April 2019, he was officially charged and, in June that year, Trump demanded the United Kingdom extradite Assange. The extradition hearing will commence on February 24. But since his arrest, Assange has been in solitary confinement, with the UN Special Rapporteur on torture, Nils Melzer, telling DW that Assange shows "typical signs of psychological torture." The WikiLeaks founder, in other words, is in no state to adequately prepare for his hearing.

Scores of signatures

Melzer and a medical team previously visited Assange in jail in May 2019. Back then, they demanded that he be released immediately for both health and legal reasons. Eight months have passed since then but Assange's inhumane prison conditions still have not improved.

Thanks to the initiative of Germany's most famous investigative journalist Günter Wallraff, an appeal for Assange's release was published in German daily Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung on Thursday. It was signed by 130 prominent German figures, including former German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel, who on Thursday told reporters in Berlin that the United Kingdom ought to free Assange.

Gabriel said he initially hesitated to sign the appeal but changed his mind after a long discussion with Melzer. Gabriel is now convinced that Assange is being held for political reasons. Former German Interior Minister Gerhart Baum, who is old enough to have experienced Germany's Nazi period first-hand, even went so far as to argue that steps taken against Assange's amounted to a criminalization of press freedom.

Thank you for taking such a clear stand! And thank you to all those who already are and those who hopefully will support this appeal for Assange's release.

As a citizen and journalist it is high time for me to express my solidarity with this man, and declare: "I am Julian Assange."

<https://www.dw.com/en/opinion-i-am-julian-assange/a-52286292>

AB: 2020-02-09

Om Assange fälls är pressfriheten hotad

Att han är illa omtyckt får inte skymma principerna som står på spel

Karin Pettersson

Den 12 juli 2007 mejade amerikanska soldater i Apachehelikoptrar ner ett dussin personer på öppen gata i förorten New Baghdad i Irak. Bland de dödade fanns två Reuters-journalister, och två barn skadades svårt. Den amerikanska militären ägnade sedan tre år åt att ljuga om händelsen, de hävdade att slakten hade skett i självförsvar.

Filmen, "Collateral murder", har i dag setts 16 miljoner gånger på Youtube. På filmen ser man hur attacken kommer oprovokerat och hur soldaterna skrattar som om de spelade tv-spel.

Den person som såg till att videon publicerades är Wikileaksgrundaren Julian Assange som nu sitter i brittiskt fängelse. USA har begärt honom utlämnad, och om ett par veckor inleds rättegången. Utlämnas Assange riskerar han 175 års fängelse för spioneri och olaga dataintrång i en rättsprocess med omfattande konsekvenser inte bara för honom själv. I vågskålen ligger även viktiga principer för journalistiken.

Många har vittnat om Assanges vårdslöshet, narcissism och bristande omdöme när det gäller hanteringen av material och i relation till samarbetspartners. Sommaren 2010 häktades han i sin frånvaro i Stockholm, anklagad för våldtäkt på två kvinnor.

Efter komplicerade turer sökte Assange asyl på Ecuadors ambassad i London. Han ville inte åka tillbaka till Sverige för förhör eftersom han var orolig för att utlämnas till USA.

Våldtäktsanklagelserna mot Assange har lett till konspirationsteorier hos en USA-kritisk och konspiratorisk vänster, i Sverige och globalt. Kvinnorna har utmålats som CIA-agenter och satts på de anklagades bänk. Det är grundlösa uppgifter som kletar på dem som framför dem.

Jag är inte jurist och har svårt att förstå och värdera alla turer när det gäller den svenska förundersökningen, och hur processen kunde tillåtas pågå så länge. Den tidigare ordföranden för svenska advokatsamfundet, Anne Ramberg, har uttryckt sympati för Assanges oro för en utlämning, och i starka ordalag kritiserat det svenska rättsväsendet för sin hantering av fallet. I november förra året lades förundersökningen slutgiltigt ner.

Under en tid samarbetade Assange med ledande tidningar, som New York Times, The Guardian och Le Monde. Men samarbetet bröt samman, och många medarbetare lämnade också Wikileaks i protest.

Under åren på Ecuadors ambassad fortsatte Assange att publicera på egen hand [?!], och Wikileaks spelade en viktig roll i den amerikanska valrörelsen 2016, när organisationen publicerade läckt epostkonversation från Hillary Clintons kampanj. Läckorna överlappade med både Trumps och ryska intressen och fick stor uppmärksamhet.

Assange är illa omtyckt av många, ofta på goda grunder. Det bör dock inte skymma de värden och principer som nu står på spel.

För det första finns det vittnesmål om att han utsätts för tortyrliknande förhållanden i fängelset. I november förra året skrev 60 läkare ett öppet brev till den brittiska regeringen och krävde att Assange skulle flyttas från fängelset till ett sjukhus. De utgick från Assanges förvirrade uppträdande i rätten, och på uppgifter från FN:s särskilde rapportör för tortyrfrågor, Nils Melzer.

För det andra riskerar processen mot Assange att få långtgående konsekvenser för journalistik och pressfrihet.

De amerikanska anklagelserna mot Assange går ut på att han ska ha försökt övertala sina källor — bland annat visselblåsaren Chelsea Manning — att leverera mer material, att han ska ha hjälpt sina källor att dölja sin identitet, och för att ha publicerat material som hotar amerikanska säkerhetsintressen.

Som Guardians tidigare chefredaktör Alan Rusbridger skriver – de flesta riktiga journalister skulle ha gjort precis samma sak.

Lägg till detta följande: Assange är inte amerikansk medborgare och Wikileaks publiceringar har inte skett i USA. Ändå åtalas han för spioneri. Den internationella pressfrihetsorganisationen CPJ har varnat för konsekvenserna av detta: vilken journalist som helst, var som helst i världen, som publicerar material som USA anser borde vara hemligstämpelat kan åtalas för spioneri om Assange utlämnas och döms.

I Brasilien har president Bolsonaro inlett en process mot den Pulitzer-belönade journalisten Glenn Greenwald som var den som publicerade Edward Snowdens

avslöjanden. Liksom Assange anklagas Greenwald för att ha hjälpt en källa att dölja sina spår, vilket alltså är en vanlig och viktig journalistisk praktik.

Strategin hos allt mer auktoritära regimer som USA och Brasilien är att ge sig på "kontroversiella" journalister som Greenwald och Assange. Men när en ny rättspraxis sedan kommer på plats gäller de nya reglerna alla. Syftet är att avskräcka både visseblåsare och publicister, och öka handlingsutrymmet för makten att göra vad den vill utan insyn. Mycket ligger nu i domstolarnas händer, i Storbritannien och i Brasilien.

Anledningen till att Assange befann sig i Sverige sommaren 2010 var bland annat vårt historiskt starka skydd för press- och yttrandefrihet.

Oaktat Assanges karaktär är det viktigt att stå upp för de principer som nu står på spel.

<https://www.aftonbladet.se/kultur/a/EWgd4P/om-assange-falls-ar-pressfriheten-hotad>

Julian Assange, Sverige och kampen mot Trump

Snart avgör brittisk domstol om Julian Assange ska lämnas ut till USA. Över en natt 2010 gick han från hyllad hjälte till skurk. Donald Boström var med då och berättar här om sin bild av händelserna. Men även om den kamp mot Trump som nu paradoxalt åter kan göra Assange till ikon för pressfrihet.

*Donald Boström
Dagens Arena
9 februari 2020*

– Good morning, how was your night?

– Alright!

Julian Assange låg under mitt skrivbord och reste sig upp. Han sov och arbetade på mitt kontor i centrala Stockholm. Dag som natt satt han med datorer och krypterade telefoner och gjorde saker han aldrig yppade något om. Eftersom det inte fanns någon säng i närheten lade han sig på golvet de timmar han vilade från datorerna.

När en av kollegorna på kontoret undrade hur han kunde sova direkt på golvet under ett skrivbord, svarade Assange lakoniskt att det är inga problem, "as long as it is flat". Hotell var inte hans melodi, han föredrog enklare förhållanden där han hade bättre koll på säkerhet och övervakning. Men efter Wikileaks globala genombrott i april 2010 med det omtalade avslöjandet "Collateral Murder", där amerikanska soldater dödar oskyldiga civila i östra Bagdad från en Apache-helikopter, utgick jag personligen från att det var mer än en underrättelsetjänst som hade Julian Assange under uppsikt, var han än befann sig. Således även på vårt kontor på Riddargatan i Stockholm city denna heta augustimånad 2010.

De förbryllade kollegorna som kom tidigt på morgnarna och mötte en okänd uppenbarelse liggande under ett skrivbord utspisade honom med en frukostsandwich

från bageriet nere på gatan. Visst fanns där en fascination över att ha en jagad publicist i lokalerna, men samtidigt ruvade en oro hos kollegorna.

Tanken var att vi skulle starta en helt ny typ av journalistisk publikation. Med Wikileaks unika källmaterial som ingen spion i världshistorien tidigare hade kommit i närheten av öppnades dörren till nästa utvecklingssteg i medieevolutionen. Det var förstahandskällor direkt från politiska, militära, diplomatiska och ekonomiska toppfigurer världen över — deras egna ord på pränt. Ingen hemlighet var för stor eller liten för att läckas till Wikileaks.

“Bara om människor har korrekt information kan de fatta riktiga beslut”, var Wikileaks arbetshypotes. Frågan var hur det hela skulle utföras. Att hantera materialet på det sätt som hittills skett var inte aktuellt. Wikileaks strategi hade varit att släppa materialet obearbetat fritt på internet och låta dem som var intresserade själva gå igenom de hundratusentals dokumenten och tolka information som kunde vara nog så svår att dechiffrera. I den blivande publikationen skulle det vara annorlunda. Materialet skulle granskas, redigeras och skrivas begripligt på ett sätt så att inga enskilda människors säkerhet äventyrades. Det vill säga ett helt vanligt arbetssätt på en vanlig tidning med en vanlig redaktion. Skillnaden var att vi skulle ha ett källmaterial som ingen annan nyhetsredaktion i världen hade möjlighet att uppbringa.

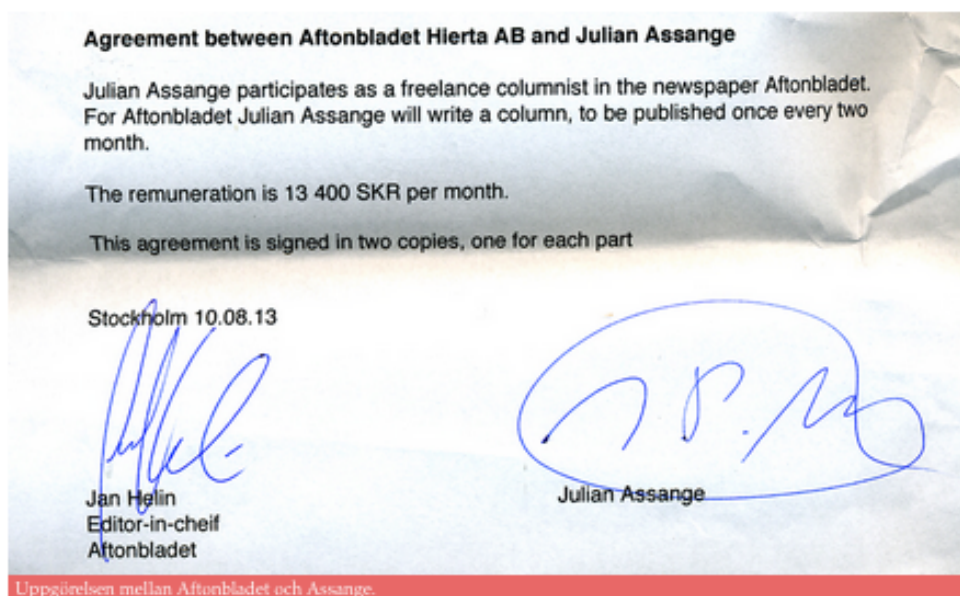
Stadgarna som skissades för verksamheten var enkla.

3. Målsättning/Syfte. Att tillgängliggöra uppgifter och dokument som är av intresse för allmänheten. Att främja internationell informationsfrihet för att fördjupa demokratin i samhället. Att stödja fristående och kritisk samhällsgranskande journalistik. Att fördjupa den offentliga debatten och öka medborgarnas kunskap om samhället.

En vällovlig paragraf, som emellertid aldrig antogs eftersom utvecklingen som bekant tog en annan vändning,

För att det formellt skulle fungera krävdes tre saker förutom journalistiskt kompetenta medarbetare:

- ansöka om uppehålls- och arbetstillstånd för Assange.
- ansöka om utgivarlicens för publikationen med Julian Assange som chefredaktör.
- bilda ett aktiebolag för att driva verksamheten under namnet Sunshine Press AB.



Uppgårelsen mellan Aftonbladet och Assange.

Under några timmar efter lunch var pappersarbetet överstökat. Assange hade lägligt nog fått ett uppdrag som kolumnist på Aftonbladet, som inte varit sent att tacka ja till erbjudandet att få cybervärldens megastjärna som fast medarbetare. Det betydde att Assange kunde visa för Migrationsverket att han hade både fast arbete och en regelbunden inkomst på 13 400 kronor i månaden.

Det demokratiska Sverige är ett bra land, kanske rent av det bästa i världen för den här sortens yttrande- och tryckfrihetsverksamhet. **Wikileaks servrar som härbärgerade den känsliga informationen stod av det skälet parkerade på lämpliga platser i Sverige.** Därför hade Assange redan varit här på försommaren 2010, och då också passat på att träffa ett antal svenska journalister för att diskutera samarbete och eventuell publikation.

Den 11 augusti 2010 återvände Assange till Sverige efter att blivit inbjuden av den socialdemokratiska Broderskapsrörelsen för att hålla seminarium i LO-borgen.

Wikileaks hade prisats som nyskapande hjältar och uppskattades av olika politiska riktningar som värdesatte öppenhet och yttrandefrihet. **Ryktet om det förestående broderskapsseminariet i Stockholm rönt därför inte oväntat stort internationellt intresse. Jag blev uppringd av en person, här kallad kvinna A, som ber mig att agera mediekoordinator i samband med Assanges Stockholmsbesök.**

Jag tackade ja till uppdraget eftersom jag sedan tidigare hade erfarenhet av att kommunicera med medier runt om i världen. Jag kunde då inte ana vad som komma skulle.

Någon dag senare ringer kvinna A igen och erbjuder Assange att låna hennes lägenhet under kommande vecka då hon själv är på resande fot. När Assange landar i Sverige den 11 augusti tar jag honom följaktligen till kvinna A:s lägenhet och överlämnar nyckel och portkod. **Kvinna A kommer hem en dag tidigare än avsett,** vilket leder till att de bor en tid tillsammans i lägenheten. **Under de kommande**

veckorna i Sverige bor Assange omväxlande hos kvinna A, på hotell, hos bekanta och på mitt kontor.

Det gick inte att ta miste på den Mick Jagger-effekt Assanges kändisskap hade uppnått. På nära håll kunde vi bevittna ett ömsesidigt utnyttjande som pågick mellan Julian Assange och de kvinnor som drogs till internetstjärnans lyskraft och attraherades av hans gränslöshet.

En av de kvinnor som förutom kvinna A fattat särskilt tycke för Assange var kvinna S, som infann sig vid seminariet i LO-borgen. Hon hade ringt kvinna A, som hon ännu inte träffat, och frågat om hon kunde hjälpa till. Efter seminariet är även kvinna S med på den lunch som avhålls på Bistro Boheme där seminariet sammanfattas av arrangörerna. Assange lämnar lunchen tidigare än oss andra med kvinna S för att se en film på Cosmonova. Relationen utvecklas, och Assange följer sedermera kvinna S hem för övernattnings, istället för hos kvinna A som han bor hos.

Vid ett tillfälle när jag menade att Assange gått över gränsen satt vi i kvällsmörkret i bilen på David Bagares gata och pratade allvar. Jag hänvisade till en specifik händelse kvällen före på en restaurang. Den bristande respekten för kvinnor var inte ok.

Förutom de moraliska argumenten var han jagad av ett antal underrättelse- och säkerhetstjänster som kunde notera hans svagheter. Jag påminde honom om några aktuella fall där vissa länders säkerhetstjänster framgångsrikt hade snärjt politiska motståndare med kvinnor, droger och sex. Assange höll inte med, han kunde bedöma de kvinnor han umgicks med, menade han. "Det är inte en svaghet, det är en styrka."

Parallellt med de mindre konstruktiva händelserna i Sverige utvecklades ett konstruktivt samarbete mellan Wikileaks och världsmedia. De största mediehusen öppnade sina sidor för de avslöjanden Wikileaks hade att komma med, där den nya trenden med leaks var en journalistisk våt dröm. Dokumenten och "the cables" från krigen i Irak och Afghanistan blev historiska. (The Afghanistan war logs, July 2010, the Iraq war logs, October 2010 and CableGate, November 2010). Vi kunde följa krigen minut för minut som ett tv-spel fast det var på riktigt. Världen hade aldrig tidigare skådat en sådan superautentisk medierapportering. Fact news i dess mest exakta betydelse. The Guardian, Der Spiegel, New York Times, Aftonbladet med flera befann sig i månader i den så kallade "bunkern" i London för att bearbeta materialet, som under gigantisk uppmärksamhet publicerades världen över.

Wikileaks stjärna steg mot zenit. Världsberömmelsen överträffade det mesta i samtiden och det fanns inte en regering eller säkerhetstjänst som inte darrade inför vad nästa avslöjande skulle bära med sig. Det fria ordet och fact news firade triumfer av sällan skådat slag.

Men dialektiken gjorde inget undantag för Julian Assange. Uppgång och fall balanserar på samma knivsegg. Och fiender till Assange och Wikileaks, stora som små, saknades sannerligen inte.

Slutet för Assange i Sverige stod klart när kvinna A ringde mig fredagen den 20 augusti och berättade att hon och den andra kvinnan avsåg att gå till polisen och berätta sin historia. Kvinnornas krav på Assange för att inte gå till polisen var att han skulle göra ett hiv-test. Efter ett tjugotal samtal fram och tillbaka mellan kvinnorna, mig och Assange — med inte så lite palaver — övertalades han att göra ett test och undslippa polisutredning. Telefonröran fick ett äntligen ett slut. Kvinna A messade över ett antal nummer till kliniker som jag kunde ringa för att beställa hiv-test för

Assanges räkning. Klockan var över fem på fredag eftermiddag och jag stod med min nioåriga dotter vid grönsakerna på Ica Kvantum i Solna centrum. Jag ställde ner matkorgen och började ringa runt till de kliniker kvinna A rekommenderat. Inget sjukhus eller klinik hade möjlighet att ta emot så sent på en fredag, de bad mig att återkomma på måndag. Något hivtest blev därmed aldrig av.

Fyra dagar efter vårt samtal i bilen på David Bagares gata anmäls Julian Assange för våldtäkt och sexuellt ofredande. I polisanmälan den 20 augusti 2010 står: "Dag som ovan inkom kvinna A till polisstation Klara med anledning av att hon vill anmäla en man för ofredande." Därefter följer en gärningsmannabeskrivning. Även kvinna S inkom till polisstationen samma dag med en anmälan, "kvinna S uppgav att hon blivit våldtagen i sitt hem på morgonen tisdagen den 17 augusti genom att en man haft samlag med henne mot hennes vilja. Se sep. förhör".

Det sista som händer innan allt brakar loss är att kvinna A ringer mig igen på lördag förmiddag den 21 augusti och berättar att de varit hos polisen och berättat sin historia och att Assange nu är polisanmäld. Jag ser ut genom fönstret, ser det kommande scenariot framför mig och säger till kvinna A att "ok, då vet jag exakt vad som kommer att stå på löpsedlarna imorgon".

Den gissningen var inte så avancerad. Expressens Niklas Svensson ska enligt uppgift ha fått tipset från en polisläcka, sittande på middag på Harpsund med statsminister Fredrik Reinfeldt. Svensson kastar sig enligt samma uppgiftslämnare i en taxi för att sätta tänderna i skandalen.

Assanges förtroende rasade över en natt, från hyllad hjälte och stjärna till asshole. En person som använt Wikileaks plattform för egna syften. Om det var hela Sverige enigt, från höger till vänster, uppifrån och ner. Wikileaks anhängare i Storbritannien och USA hade dock svårare att förstå den bilden. De trodde fortsatt att omvärlden såg en hjälte som lurats i en fälla. Medan stödet för Assange i det närmaste var uttraderat i Sverige var det klart som korvspad i USA att det var CIA som låg bakom komplotten mot Assange, en honungsfälla där CIA skickat fram några kvinnor med korta kjolar och fått bytet att gå i fällan. En stor del av den amerikanska och internationella vänstern med Michael Moore, John Pilger, Bianca Jagger, Noam Chomsky och andra var aktiva för att bilda opinion till stöd för Julian Assange. Mannen som visat sig beredd att våga avslöja den globala maktens hemligheter och offra sig själv på sanningens altare, måste självklart vara offer för den amerikanska underrättelsetjänsten.

Efter att i princip haft daglig kontakt med de inblandade under den perioden gör jag en annan bedömning och menar, tvärtemot den amerikanska vänstern, att det inte var CIA som låg bakom med någon "honey trap". Däremot var CIA naturligtvis inte sena att utnyttja situationen. Och jag delar chefsåklagare Eva Finns bedömning att det inte heller är fråga om våldtäkt. Varför jag gör den bedömningen tänkte jag berätta under rättegången, den rättegång som nu aldrig kommer att bli av, och har därför så här långt avböjt att uttala mig i media om detaljer i fallet.

Kvinna A intervjuades i Aftonbladet om saken, med den paradoxen att intervjun nästan kom att uppfattas som positiv för Assange när hon beskrev Assange som varken "våldsam eller hotfull". Med tillägget att han har "taskig kvinnosyn och kan inte ta ett nej".

När de konfidentiella förhörsprotokollen läcker från polisen ser jag att kvinna S gjorde sin anmälan redan kl 16.11 på fredagen den 20 augusti, och kvinna A, 16.31 samma

dag hos polisen i Klara. Det innebar att de redan hade varit hos polisen och gjort sin anmälan medan jag stått vid Icas grönsaksdisk och ringt hiv-kliniker. Därtill berättade kvinna A för mig att hon själv inte hade något "case" mot Julian Assange, hon skulle bara följa med för att stötta kvinna S när hon gick till polisen. I dokumenten framgår att även kvinna A, i motsats till vad hon sagt, också hade ett case mot Assange. Det hela började bli förbryllande. Inte minst förbryllande var det att kvinna A, dagen efter det ofredande hon utsatts för, tog sig an att arrangera en kräftskiva till Julians ära, som hon sa, när vi bjöds in.

När jag vid midnatt lämnade kräftskivan och tog adjö satt kvinna A och Julian Assange intill varandra. Med på kräftskivan fanns ett par från Piratpartiet hos vilka Assange skulle bo fortsättningsvis, vilket kvinna A nu ställde in. Hon vände sig till mig när jag tog adjö och sa att "Julian sover hos mig i natt".

Att Assange har en dålig kvinnosyn är vi många som skriver under på. Exempelen är många där han betett sig respektlöst i sitt förhållande till kvinnor. Chefsåklagare Eva Finné såg ändå inte att det handlade om brottsliga handlingar i det som anmälts och lade ner åtalet. I ett uttalande sa Finné att detta inte betydde att hon inte trodde på kvinnan i fråga, men att hon efter att ha läst förhören inte kunde hitta något brottsligt. Kvinnornas advokat Claes Borgström var av motsatt åsikt och begärde överprövning av ärendet.

Överåklagare Marianne Ny gick på Borgströms linje mot chefsåklagare Eva Finné och öppnade fallet igen. Mitt huvudråd till Assange var då att stanna i Sverige och genomföra den juridiska processen, och jag gav honom numret till advokat Leif Silbersky. Assange träffade Silbersky, och senare även åklagaren, för samtal och förhör. Silbersky var i vanlig ordning ute i media och frågade: "Varför bekräftade åklagaren Assanges identitet för journalister? Det är inte normalt." Därtill exponerade Expressens löpsedel Assange på bild och bekräftade med krigsrubriker identiteten för allmänheten på en person som endast var misstänkt, "Wikileaks Julian Assange jagas misstänkt för våldtäkt i Sverige". Jouråklagare Maria Häljebo Kjellstrand följde upp och slog fast att "det är våldtäkt, bekräftar Maria Häljebo Kjellstrand för Expressen". "Det är inte meningen att en person som är anhållen i sin frånvaro ska få kännedom om det. Då kan ju han eller hon fly", menade Silbersky.

De två kvinnorna är under ett enormt tryck från media. De jagas av en vidrig internetmobb och det utvecklades två "jaktlag" som representerar människans mest primitiva sidor. Det ena jaktlaget hatade och hotade kvinnorna och tar heder och ära av dem på ett chockartat sätt som med all sannolikhet passerade gränsen för vad som är lagligt. Det andra jaktlaget hetsade mot Assange med liknande metoder.

Under de kommande fem veckorna väntar Assange i Sverige på vidare utredning, men behöver till sist resa vidare till London. Jag råder honom att kontakta åklagaren för tillstånd att lämna landet. Åklagaren beviljar utan dröjsmål Assanges önskan att lämna Sverige.

Han kommer aldrig tillbaka.

Nästan på dagen en månad efter att polisanmälan gjorts mot Assange kommer avslaget på en enkel rad, från Migrationsverkets arbetstillståndsenhet till kontorsadressen på Riddargatan 17d den 18 oktober.

"Migrationsverket beslutar att -- avslå din ansökan om uppehålls- och arbetstillstånd."

Den som är konspiratoriskt lagd anar naturligtvis ett samband mellan Migrationsverkets avslag och de amerikanska kraven på Sverige i fallet Assange. Att USA varit i kontakt med Sverige på hög nivå med krav i frågan var vid den tiden klarlagt. **Men avslaget berodde inte på något konspirerande från främmande makt utan på ett administrativt misstag från vår sida. Ansökan måste skickas in från det land han kom ifrån.** Vi satt på mitt kontor i det land han ansökte till, vilket per automatik medför avslag.

Assange blir internationellt efterlyst under hösten 2010 och tar sin tillflykt till norra England och den eleganta gården Ellingham Hall, med 650 hektar mark. Där får Assange mot en borgensöverenskommelse med brittiska staten röra sig med fotboja över ägorna.

Vi träffas en sista gång, den 31 januari 2011 på Ellingham Hall. Efter en tågresa från London mot Ipswich, avstigning vid stationen Diss, blir jag upphämtad för vidare färd till den mansion som ägs av den kända tv-journalisten Vaughan Smith. Medan jag studerar vinerna runt oss på hyllorna, pågår diskussionerna om bland annat den hemliga informationen som finns tillgänglig om Irak. I synnerhet den om norra kurdiska regionen och kurdiska medier som av det skälet önskar ha samarbete med Wikileaks. Något sådant samarbete blir emellertid aldrig av.

Varje gång vi därefter har kontakt, via ombud, per telefon och eller via ett krypterat chattprogram uppmanar jag honom att komma tillbaka till Sverige och genomföra den rättsliga processen. Hur det än gick skulle han vara en fri man efter det. Om han inte gjorde det skulle han aldrig bli fri. Att många tunga juridiska bedömare menade att fallet kommer läggas ner, eller högst ge dagsböter så fort det får prövas i domstol, hjälpte inte att få Assange att komma till Sverige. Vid den tidpunkten hade inte USA formulerat någon idé om brottsliga gärningar inom ramen för Wikileaks. **Men Assange ansåg att det inte gick att resa till Sverige, utan menade att han hade upprepade underrättelser från säker källa som hävdade att Sverige kommer att lämna ut honom till USA. Han valde att tro på den informationen framför mina och andras argument om motsatsen.**

Assange hade förvisso rätt i att Sverige tidigare har lämnat ut personer till CIA i strid med gällande lagstiftning. Argumenten varför det inte skulle ske denna gång och med just Assange lyssnade han inte på. Självklart ville USA lägga vantarna på Assange och få honom inom lås och bom. Tills vidare hade de fångat in, dömt och låst in Wikileaks viktigaste uppgiftslämnare, den då 30-åriga Bradley Manning, idag Chelsea Manning. Assange fick en ny våg av kritik för att ha utnyttjat och låtit Chelsea Manning ta straffet för uppgifter han själv gjort karriär på. Vad gjorde Assange för Manning nu? Ingenting, menade kritikerna.

När hans medarbetare från London åter kom till mitt kontor i Stockholm undrade de på nytt hur diskussionerna om Assange gick i Sverige, var solidaritetsgrupperna fanns, och hur många demonstrationer det hade varit till stöd för Julian Assange. De levde fortfarande i föreställningen att en orättvist behandlad hjälte ägde ett starkt stöd i Sverige, en fängslad Robin Hood som stod på de svagas sida och älskades av folket.

Trots våra försök att beskriva verkligheten hade de svårt att ta in att Wikileaks-grundaren vid den tidpunkten var död i svenska folkets ögon. Det är först i samband med utdelningen av Right Livelihood Award till Edward Snowden som Sarah Harrison, en av Assanges närmaste medarbetare, i minglet berättar för mig att hon

börjar förstå läget. Sverige och Assange befann sig på olika planeter och därför fungerade aldrig deras kommunikation eller mediestrategi i den svenska kontexten.

Jag fick i uppdrag av magasinet Filter att intervjua Julian Assange om allt. Ställa de frågor som alla undrade över och ville ha svar på. Assange och hans team ansåg Filter vara en intressant publikation och vår kommunikation om intervjun kunde ta sin början. I december 2012 lämnade jag över 50 frågor till teamet i London. Personliga, politiska, kritiska frågor, framtid och historia. Det skulle bli den stora 40-sidiga intervjun där Assange är en reflekterande människa som svarar och tänker även på de svåra frågorna, och ger de intresserade läsarna de intressanta svaren. Men Assange ville inte prata om det gamla, utan istället fokusera på att attackera den svenska rättsstaten som fått sitt internationella rykte skamfilat efter sitt sätt att hantera fallet Assange.

Varför åkte inte åklagaren över till London och gjorde sitt jobb och förhörde honom där på plats? Det hade svenska åklagare gjort ett antal gånger tidigare i viktiga rättsfall. Varför inte nu? Frågorna kring åklagaren Marianne Nys sätt att hantera Assange fick många jurister, advokater, domare, liberaler och yttrandefrihetsförespråkare att inte bara höja på ögonbrynen, utan också samla till möten, protestera, skriva debattartiklar och formera ett slags demokratisk opposition mot det svenska rättsväsendets förflackning, och därmed i praktiken ge sitt stöd för Assange. Huvudkritiken var "lack of initiative to complete inquiries". Åklagarmyndighetens agerande är en viktig anledning till att utredningen i flera år stod helt still. Under tiden har minnen blivit blekare och bevisläget försämrats. Varken kvinnorna eller Assange har kunnat gå vidare med sina liv.

Anne Ramberg, tidigare generalsekreterare för Advokatsamfundet skriver i The Indicter, Monthly European review on geopolitical & human rights issues: "Jag är rädd att behandlingen av Assange har skadat det svenska rättssystemets rykte."

Julian Assange hade rätt i sin kritik av svenskt rättsväsende — men var inte intresserad av mina övriga frågor. Jag ringde till Mattias Göransson på Filter och meddelande att Assange inte ville göra den intervjun som jag ville, och jag inte ville göra den intervju som Assange ville. Vi lade ner idén.

Assange var inte benägen att följa någons råd. Det var naturligtvis inte bara jag som gav honom råd om hur han skulle agera i förhållandet till Sverige, rättsprocessen och medierna, det fanns en lång rad andra som agerade rådgivare. Assanges advokater har alla brottats med problemet. Assange lämnade Leif Silbersky som inte ville göra som han ville. Därefter ringde Assange när jag var på landet. "We have a situation, jag måste byta advokat, Björn Hurtig som ersatt Silbersky är inte tillräcklig smart, har du förslag på andra namn?"

Den berömda brittiska människorättsadvokaten Gareth Peirce tog sig an Assanges fall och ringde mig bekymrad för att ventilerade några frågeställningar. Hennes erfarenheter var desamma som vi övriga hade. Jennifer Robinson i London, Thomas Olsson i Stockholm med flera jurister och advokater har alla suckat när Assange inte följt deras råd. Någon sa att han är den vassaste "hackaren" i världen, men när han tror att han är "superior" inom alla andra områden som media eller juridik sätter han krokben för sig själv.

I juni 2012 bryter Assange under dramatiska former sin borgensöverenskommelse och lämnar Ellingham Hall och tar sin tillflykt till Ecuadors ambassad i London.

Instängd under sju års tid på Ecuadors ambassad lever Assange under svåra förhållanden som tär hårt på kropp och själ. En person nära honom säger oroligt efter ett besök att han tror att Assange kommer dö på ambassaden.

I augusti 2015 preskriberas två av de misstänkta brotten — sexuellt ofredande och olaga tvång. Den misstänkta våldtäkten skulle preskriberas om ytterligare fem år efter det. Och när den svenska åklagaren i maj 2017 slutligen beslutar att lägga ned den internationella arresteringsordern och förundersökningen i fallet Assange tror många att Assange kan gå ut på gatorna som en fri man. Men de brittiska myndigheterna meddelar omedelbart motsatsen.

Även när våldtäktsanklagelsen skulle preskriberas var Assange ändå inte fri. Då väntar matchen mot än starkare krafter, USA och Storbritannien.

“The arrest of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange is now a ‘priority’ for the US, the attorney general, Jeff Sessions, has said. Hours later it was reported by CNN that authorities have prepared charges against Assange.”

Kanske var det Julian Assanges rockstjärnestatus sensommaren 2010 som blev början till slutet, i kombination med starka krafter som sökte oskadliggöra honom. Enligt Assange själv hade NSA (National Security Agency i USA) satt ett hundratal personer på att försöka knäcka hans koder, och CIA jobbade på sin kant. En så kallad Federal Grand Jury i USA har under ett antal år lagt sina pannor i djupa veck för att formulera möjliga åtalpunkter mot Assange.

När Julian Assange lämnade Sverige för att flyga till London försvann för all framtid den incheckade resväskan med datorer och hårddiskar.

Från den utsikt och detaljerad information jag hade under händelserna hösten 2010 under Assanges vistelse i Sverige konstaterade jag att verkligheten har fler nyanser än debatten har klarat av att beskriva. Jag såg väsentliga delar av händelseförloppet där det hände och när det hände. Därför är två av mina slutsatser att det inte var en ”honungsfälla” från CIA som satte Julian Assange i klistret, och att det inte heller handlade om våldtäkt.

I januari 2018 beviljades Assange medborgarskap i Ecuador, men redan i april året efter upphäver Ecuadors nye president, Lenín Moreno, Assanges asyl. Under dramatiska former arresterades han och bars ut från ambassaden av brittisk polis.

Det problematiska i den här historien är att det som Wikileaks de facto avslöjade, dokumenterade amerikanska övergrepp och krigsbrott, är avfört från diskussionen. Debatten har endast fokuserat på budbärarensandel. Oavsett graden av motbjudandeandel och personlig aversion mot Assange gäller den rättssäkerhet vi alla förlitar oss på i vår demokratiska del av världen även för Julian Assange.

I november 2019 lades förundersökningen mot den våldtäktsanklagade Wikileaksgrundaren ner.

“Vid en samlad bedömning, avsett det som kommit fram i utredningen, gör jag bedömningen att bevisen inte räcker för att väcka åtal”, sade åklagaren Eva-Marie Persson.

Det vill säga samma bedömning som chefsåklagare Eva Finné gjorde för nio år sedan. Fler än en jurist i omvärlden har reagerat över den famösa svenska rättsskandalen.

Med USA:s 18 åtalpunkter mot Assange har Donald Trump nu konverterat fallet från att handla om övergrepp mot kvinnor, till en demokratisk, politisk och humanitär fråga, inte minst för media och journalister.

De stora amerikanska medierna som New York Times, Washington Post, NBC, CNN med flera har insett att de måste försvara Assange trots att de egentligen inte vill associeras med Wikileaks typ av journalistik. Donald Trumps administration kommer enligt First Amendment, ha svårt att göra skillnad på traditionell form av fri journalism och Wikileaks.

Ett problem som Donald Trump försöker lösa genom att runda grundlagen och kalla Assangefallet för "Special Administrative Measures" och därmed inte omfattas av First Amendment.

Men det är inget som lugnar amerikanska media. New York Times skriver:

Genom kringgå grundlagen i Assangefallet kan det bli den mall som åklagare kan göra varje undersökande reporter sårbar för åtal och fängelse.

Trump's antipressretorik har redan uppmuntrat auktoritära regimer att åtala och fängsla journalister. Brasiliens president Jair Bolsonaro har börjat att experimentera med liknande antimediemetoder vilka anses vara direkt korrelerade med Trump-administrationen. Det finns en oro att Trumps attacker på media kommer sprida sig som ett virus över världen, skriver New York Times.

Håller Donald Trump därmed på att skapa den yttrandefrihetsmartyr som paradoxalt nog kan bli Assanges räddning?

Den obefintliga opinion som Assanges medarbetare frågade efter börjar nu resa sig som en fågel Fenix. De känslomässiga aktivisterna med humanitära argument möter nu de mer linjära personligheterna som värnar rättssäkerheten i en gemensam diskussion till försvar för rättssäkerheten och Assange.

– Stödet för Assange ökar trots demoniseringen av honom, säger Philip Adams som formulerat petitionen "Bring Julian Assange Home" som har tagits upp till behandling i det australienska parlamentet.

– Om Assange utlämnas till USA i strid med nationella som internationella lagar är det ett stort bakslag för demokratin och mediernas frihet som vi känner den idag, säger Adams.

19 ledamöter från fem partier i den parlamentariska gruppen driver petitionen, Centre Alliance Party, Nationals (ett högerparti), The Green party, Labor, och Independent. Det är flagranta brott mot Assanges mänskliga rättigheter och Istanbulprotokollet. För det första har han inte begått något brott, för det andra har han publicerat de amerikanska krigsbrotten i allmänhetens intresse, och för det tredje bryter USA mot First Amendment i sin konstitution, menar Adams.



Brev från Assange, där SOS är skrivet i morse-kod, på baksidan av brevet, ovanför fångens nummer (... — ...) vilket betyder SOS.

Assange, som avtjänat sitt 12 månaders fängelsestraff för att ha brutit mot borgen, skulle enligt brittisk lag ha släppts den 23 september 2019. På amerikansk order satt han fängslad i isoleringscell 23 timmar om dygnet under nio månader, i väntan på att bli utlämnad till USA där han riskerar upp till 175 års fängelse för spioneri.

Anne Ramberg skriver i The Indicter:

Avslöjandena om övergrepp i USA var nödvändiga och särskilt viktiga. Skulle vi utlämna någon till Hitlers Tyskland som har avslöjat förekomsten av koncentrationsläger och folkmord, oavsett hur informationen erhöles? Jag tror inte det.

– Efter nio år ser jag tyvärr inga intentioner till en rättvis rättegång, säger Assanges far John Shipton till mig i telefon från Sydney. Det ser ut att bli "a showtrial", ett spel för gallerierna.

FN:s särskilde rapportör för tortyrfrågor, Nils Melzer, menar att Assange i Belshamfängelset uppvisar typiska tecken på långvarig psykologisk tortyr. John Shipton bekräftar att hans son har drogats med bland annat lugnande medel och har utsatts för så kallad "hot box" (ett uppvärmt rum/box, en form av tortyr som används för att straffa eller tvinga en person att samarbeta, enligt Wikipedia), inte fått ta del av sina juridiska dokument, och mindre former av trakasserier som att hålla inne läsglasögon i veckor.

Advokat Greg Barns i Melbourne, som arbetat med fallet, frågar sig varför en icke dömd fånge utsätts för en sådan exempellös hård och grym behandling i ett högriskfängelse.

– Behandlingen av Julian Assange av de brittiska fängelsemyndigheterna är djupt oroande. Jag känner inte till något annat fall där en fånge som helt klart kräver ordentlig hälsovård inte bara förnekas det, utan tvärtom placeras i förhållanden som är skadlig för hans hälsa, säger Barns.

När jag läser brevet från "Long Term and High Security Prison Group, Wakefield" som besvarar frågor angående Assanges förhållanden i fängelset, beskrivs Assange de facto som en brottsling som väntar på sitt straff, före vare sig rättegång eller dom. Där beskrivs "offenders", förbrytare, som "awaiting their sentences", väntar på sina straff. Saken verkar redan klar innan den har börjat.

Efter en hearing i Belshamfängelset skriver doktor Barbara Lavalley som nu verkar för Assange frigivning, i sin Medical Report on Political Prisoner Julian Paul Assange, december 2019:

Julian Assange är med på videoskärmen, han klarar inte att säga sitt namn och födelsedatum. Med möda kan han slutligen bekräfta sitt namn, vilket domaren var tvungen att upprepa.

Jag såg en man som inte var förmögen att delta i sitt eget försvar.

Domare Vanessa tilltalar Julian Assange. Han uttrycker sig med svårigheter, kämpar för att artikulera, snubblar över sina ord. Jag tvingas titta bort, generad av hans uppenbara nöd.

FN:s rapportör, Nils Melzer, menar att medias ointresse för att beskriva Assangefallet beror på att man helt enkelt inte tror att det Assange utsätts för kan vara sant. Melzer trodde det inte själv innan han i sin roll som FN-rapportör fick uppdrag att granska situationen.

Julian Assanges bror, Gabriel Barber-Shipton, skriver i ett brev till Australiens premiärminister att han fick hålla tillbaka tårarna efter att ha besökt sin bror i Belmarshfängelset "när jag insåg att jag förmodligen aldrig skulle se honom igen".

I slutet på januari i år släpptes Assange ur isoleringen efter nio månader. Delvis som en följd av medfångarnas protester där tre petitioner framförts till fängelseledningen mot behandlingen av Assange.

– Förhållandet i fängelset är lite bättre nu, han har fått tillbaka sina läsglasögon, och juridiska papper, och han mår bättre nu än när jag såg honom för sju veckor sedan, säger Assange far John Shipton och fortsätter:

–Han kan fortfarande vara briljant och blixtra till korta stunder med sina beautifully flashes som bara han kan. Men det är en avrättning i slowmotion världen bevittnar, och det är medvetet, inte omedvetet.

Den 24 februari inträder nästa akt i fallet. Då inleds den hearing i London som ska avgöra om Julian Assange ska bli en fri man eller utlämnas till USA.

Essän är en utökad och uppdaterad version av en tidigare publicerad artikel.

https://www.dagensarena.se/essa/julian-assange-sverige-och-kampen-mot-trump/?fbclid=IwAR0OMt4-KB7epD-QtfTT-nRjiipirgsrj21mfk_IPneack0OuzU05ZIRCo

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2020-02-09
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Donald Boström har alltså publicerat en lång essä i Dagens Arena idag. Stora delar av artikeln är publicerad tidigare. De nya avsnitten handlar mest om att Assange riskerar att bli en martyr för pressfriheten

Citat:

"....det är en avrättning i slowmotion världen bevittnar, och det är medvetet, inte omedvetet", avslutar Boström sin essä. Så sant.

Ibland är Donald Boström befriande klarsynt. Han delar tex Eva Finnés uppfattning om att Assange inte begått någon våldtäkt. Sina argument var han beredd att utveckla i en eventuell rättegång, som emellertid aldrig blev av. De argumenten hade jag velat höra. DB visar också tydligt på Anna A:s dubbelspel under upprepade telefonsamtal, när hon på fredag eftermiddag, 20 augusti 2010, döljer att hon och Sofia redan varit hos polisen.

DB är också klar över åklagarmyndighetens negativa roll:

Citat:

"Åklagarmyndighetens agerande är en viktig anledning till att utredningen i flera år stod helt still. Under tiden har minnen blivit blekare och bevisläget försämrats. Varken kvinnorna eller Assange har kunnat gå vidare med sina liv."

DB är mån om att framhålla att han givit Assange goda råd. Jag är inte säker på att de alltid var så goda. DB skriver:

Citat:

"Varje gång vi därefter har kontakt, via ombud, per telefon och eller via ett krypterat chattprogram uppmanar jag honom att komma tillbaka till Sverige och genomföra den rättsliga processen. Hur det än gick skulle han vara en fri man efter det. Om han inte gjorde det skulle han aldrig bli fri..... Vid den tidpunkten hade inte USA formulerat någon idé om brottsliga gärningar inom ramen för Wikileaks. Men Assange ansåg att det inte gick att resa till Sverige, utan menade att han hade upprepade underrättelser från säker källa som hävdade att Sverige kommer att lämna ut honom till USA. Han valde att tro på den informationen framför mina och andras argument om motsatsen".

Det gjorde Assange nog rätt i. Faktum är ju att det fanns ett "sealed indictment" från en Grand Jury i Virginia redan vintern 2010/2011. Det verkar Boström känna till eftersom han skriver:

Citat:

"En så kallad Federal Grand Jury i USA har under ett antal år lagt sina pannor i djupa veck för att formulera möjliga åtalpunkter mot Assange".

De hade inte bara lagt pannorna i djupa veck utan även åstadkommit ett "sealed indictment". Det verkar därför fullt möjligt att Sverige skulle fått mottaga en begäran om utlämning så snart Assange rest till Sverige. Boström var beredd att ta den risken men inte Assange.

Nu drar det ihop sig till förhandling om utlämning av Assange till USA, efter ett decenniums förspel. Vedervärdigt.

<https://www.dagensarena.se/essa/juli...pen-mot-trump/>

<https://www.flashback.org/t1275257p7490>

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What Is Happening to Assange Will Happen to the Rest of Us

The publication of classified documents is not yet a crime in the United States. If Assange is extradited and convicted, it will become one.

Chris Hedges

Truthdig

February 10, 2020

David Morales, the indicted owner of the Spanish private security firm Undercover Global, is being investigated by Spain's high court for allegedly providing the CIA with audio and video recordings of the meetings WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange had with his attorneys and other visitors when the publisher was in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London. The security firm also reportedly photographed the passports of all of Assange's visitors. It is accused of taking visitors' phones, which were not permitted in the embassy, and opening them, presumably in an effort to intercept calls. It reportedly stole data from laptops, electronic tablets and USB sticks, all required to be left at the embassy reception area. It allegedly compiled detailed reports on all of Assange's meetings and conversations with visitors. **The firm even is said to have planned to steal the diaper of a baby — brought to visit Assange — to perform a DNA test to establish whether the infant was a secret son of Assange.** UC Global, apparently at the behest of the CIA, also allegedly spied on Ecuadorian diplomats who worked in the London embassy.

The probe by the court, the Audiencia Nacional, into the activities of UC Global, along with leaked videos, statements, documents and reports published by the Spanish newspaper El País as well as the Italian newspaper La Repubblica, offers a window into the new global security state. **Here the rule of law is irrelevant.** Here privacy and attorney-client privilege do not exist. Here people live under 24-hour-a-day surveillance. Here all who attempt to expose the crimes of tyrannical power will be hunted down, kidnapped, imprisoned and broken. This global security state is a

terrifying melding of the corporate and the public. And what it has done to Assange it will soon do to the rest of us.

The publication of classified documents is not yet a crime in the United States. If Assange is extradited and convicted, it will become one. Assange is not an American citizen. WikiLeaks, which he founded, is not a U.S.-based publication. The extradition of Assange would mean the end of journalistic investigations into the inner workings of power. It would cement into place a terrifying global, corporate tyranny under which borders, nationality and law mean nothing. Once such a legal precedent is set, any publication that publishes classified material, from The New York Times to an alternative website, will be prosecuted and silenced.

The flagrant defiance of law and international protocols in the persecution of Assange is legion. In April 2019, Ecuadorian President Lenín Moreno capriciously terminated Assange's right of asylum at the London embassy, where he spent seven years, despite Assange's status as a political refugee. Moreno authorized British police to enter the embassy — diplomatically sanctioned sovereign territory — to arrest a naturalized citizen of Ecuador. (Assange retains his Australian citizenship.) The British police seized Assange, who has never committed a crime, and the British government keeps him imprisoned, ostensibly for a bail violation.

Assange is being held in the notorious high-security HM Prison Belmarsh. He has spent much of his time in isolation, is often heavily sedated and has been denied medical treatment for a variety of physical ailments. His lawyers say they are routinely denied access to their client. Nils Melzer, the United Nations' special rapporteur on torture who examined Assange with two physicians, said Assange has undergone prolonged psychological torture. Melzer has criticized what he calls the "judicial persecution" of Assange by Britain, the United States, Ecuador and Sweden, which prolonged an investigation into a sexual assault case in an effort to extradite Assange to Sweden. Assange said the case was a pretext to extradite him to the United States. Once Assange was arrested by British police the sexual assault case was dropped.

Melzer says Assange would face a politicized show trial in the United States if he were extradited to face 17 charges under the Espionage Act for his role in publishing classified military and diplomatic cables, documents and videos that exposed U.S. war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. Each of the counts carries a potential sentence of 10 years, and an additional charge that Assange conspired to hack into a government computer has a maximum sentence of five years. A hearing to determine whether he will be extradited to the United States starts Feb. 24 at London's Woolwich Crown Court. It is scheduled to last about a week and then resume May 18, for three weeks more.

WikiLeaks released U.S. military war logs from Afghanistan and Iraq, a cache of 250,000 diplomatic cables and 800 Guantanamo Bay detainee assessment briefs along with the 2007 "Collateral Murder" video, in which U.S. helicopter pilots banter as they gun down civilians, including children and two Reuters journalists, in a Baghdad street. The material was given to WikiLeaks in 2010 by Chelsea Manning, then Bradley Manning, a low-ranking intelligence specialist in the U.S. Army. Assange has been accused by an enraged U.S. intelligence community of causing "one of the largest compromises of classified information in the history of the United States." Manning was convicted of espionage charges in August 2013 and sentenced to 35 years in a military prison. She was granted clemency in January 2017 by President Barack Obama. Manning was ordered back to prison last year after refusing to testify before a

grand jury in the WikiLeaks case, and she remains behind bars. **No one was ever charged for the war crimes WikiLeaks documented.**

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

Assange earned the enmity of the Democratic Party establishment by publishing 70,000 hacked emails belonging to the Democratic National Committee 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 to the Clinton Foundation by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, two of the major funders of Islamic State. 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 Donald Trump was the Republican nominee. It exposed Clinton's advance knowledge of questions in a primary debate. It exposed Clinton as the principal 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 and Republican leaders are united in their crusade to extradite and sentence Assange. The Democratic Party, which has attempted to blame Russia for its election loss to Trump, charges that the Podesta emails were obtained by Russian government hackers. However, **James Comey, the former FBI director, has conceded that the emails were probably delivered to WikiLeaks by an intermediary, and** Assange has said the emails were not provided by "state actors."

WikiLeaks has done more than any other news organization to expose the abuses of power and crimes of the American empire. 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 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. (The Snowden leaks also revealed that Assange was on a U.S. "manhunt target list.")

The inquiry by the Spanish court is the result of a criminal complaint filed by Assange, who accuses Morales and UC Global of violating his privacy and client-attorney confidentiality rights. The WikiLeaks founder also says the firm is guilty of misappropriation, bribery and money laundering.

Morales, according to El País, "stated both verbally and in writing to a number of his employees that, despite having been hired by the government of then-Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa, he also worked 'for the Americans,' to whom he allegedly sent documents, videos and audios of the meetings that the Australian activist held in the embassy."

“Despite the fact that the Spanish firm — which is headquartered in the southern city of Jerez de la Frontera — was hired by Senain, the Ecuadorian intelligence services, Morales called on his employees several times to keep his relationship with the US intelligence services a secret,” the paper reported.

“The owner of UC Global S. L. ordered a meeting between the head of the Ecuadorian secret service, Rommy Vallejo, and Assange to be spied on, at a time when they were planning the exit of Assange from the Ecuadorian embassy using a diplomatic passport in order to take him to another country,” according to El País. “This initiative was eventually rejected by Assange on the basis that he considered it to be ‘a defeat,’ that would fuel conspiracy theories, according to sources close to the company consulted by this newspaper. Morales called on his employees to keep his relationship with the US intelligence services a secret.”

The Vallejo-Assange meeting, which included Assange’s lawyers, took place Dec. 21, 2017. The security firm made audio and video recordings through microphones and cameras installed in the embassy. **The CIA was immediately made aware of the plan,** perhaps through an “external streaming access point” installed in the embassy, according to El País. The next day the United States issued an international arrest warrant for Assange.

Microphones were implanted in fire extinguishers and a women’s restroom where Assange’s lawyers would cloister themselves with their client in an effort to avoid being recorded. **The windows in the embassy were given a treatment that provided better audio quality** for the laser microphones that the CIA was using from exterior locations, the paper reported.

When Moreno was elected to the presidency in Ecuador, replacing Rafael Correa, who had granted Assange asylum in the embassy, **an intense campaign was launched to force the publisher from the embassy. It included daily harassment, cutoff of internet access and the termination of nearly all visits.**

UC Global, which provides personal security for casino magnate Sheldon Adelson and protection for his company Las Vegas Sands, apparently used Adelson, a friend of President Trump and one of the largest donors to the Republican Party, to lobby the Trump administration and then-CIA Director Mike Pompeo to make Assange a priority target.

La Repubblica, like El País, obtained important files, recordings and other information stemming from the UC Global surveillance at the embassy. They include photos of Assange in the embassy and recordings of conversations he had with doctors, journalists, politicians, celebrities and members of his legal team.

“The videos and audio recordings accessed by the Repubblica reveal the extreme violations of privacy that Julian Assange, the WikiLeaks journalists, lawyers, doctors and reporters were subjected to inside the embassy, and represent a shocking case study of the impossibility of protecting journalistic sources and materials in such a hostile environment,” the Italian newspaper wrote. “This espionage operation is particularly shocking if we consider that Assange was protected by asylum, and if we consider that the information gathered will be used by the United States to support his extradition and put him in prison for the crimes for which he is currently charged and for which he risks 175 years in prison: the

publication of secret US government documents revealing war crimes and torture, from Afghanistan to Iraq to Guantanamo.”

Chris Hedges writes a regular column for Truthdig.com. Hedges graduated from Harvard Divinity School and was for nearly two decades a foreign correspondent for The New York Times. He is the author of many books, including: War Is A Force That Gives Us Meaning, What Every Person Should Know About War, and American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America. His most recent book is Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle.

<https://www.commondreams.org/views/2020/02/10/what-happening-assange-will-happen-rest-us>

Julian Assange Wins 2020 Gary Webb Freedom of the Press Award

Imprisoned WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange has been awarded Consortium News’ 2020 Gary Webb Freedom of the Press Award for courage in the face of an unprecedented attack on press freedom.

Joe Lauria
Consortium News
February 10, 2020

Julian Assange, the imprisoned and maligned publisher of WikiLeaks, has been awarded the 2020 Gary Webb Freedom of the Press Award by the board of the Consortium for Independent Journalism, publishers of Consortium News.

Assange is incarcerated in a maximum security prison in London awaiting a hearing later this month on an extradition request by the United States. He has been charged on 17 counts under the U.S. Espionage Act of possessing and publishing classified material that revealed prima facie evidence of U.S. war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq.

For practicing the highest order of journalism—revealing crimes of the state—Assange faces 175 years in a U.S. prison – a life sentence for the 48-year old Australian.

Assange, whose life has been endangered in harsh prison conditions, has become an international symbol of the threat to press freedom. He is the first journalist to be charged under the Espionage Act for possession and dissemination of state secrets.

The late Robert Parry.

Robert Parry, the late founder and editor of Consortium News, was a staunch defender of Assange’s rights. In 2010, he wrote: “Though American journalists may understandably want to find some protective cover by pretending that Julian Assange is not like us, the reality is — whether we like it or not — we are all Julian Assange.”

The award is named after journalist Gary Webb whose life was cut short after the mainstream press vilified him for accurate reports about a CIA operation that flooded urban areas of the U.S. with cocaine from Nicaragua.

Journalist and filmmaker John Pilger, a member of the Consortium News board, said: "Having been close to Julian Assange through much of his struggle against corrupt power, I had no hesitation in voting for him for the Gary Webb prize. While Gary was a tragedy at the end, Julian must be a triumph."

A History of Scoops

Assange launched WikiLeaks in Dec. 2006. Among its first revelations were files alleging corruption by former Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi; the U.S. Army manual for soldiers at Guantanamo Bay and registers of U.S. military equipment in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In January 2008, WikiLeaks released "United Nations Confidential Reports" that "expose matters from allegations of hundreds of European peace-keepers sexually abusing refugee girls to generals in Peru using Swiss bank accounts to engage in multi-million dollar frauds against the UN."

WikiLeaks' first major release came on April 5, 2010 with the publication of the Collateral Murder video, providing evidence of a U.S. war crime in Iraq. It was leaked by U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning, who was arrested and charged on May 26, 2010 under the Espionage Act.

With Manning in jail, WikiLeaks published more of her leaked material. The Afghan War Diaries were released on July 25, 2010, which revealed the suppression of civilian casualty figures, the existence of an elite U.S.-led death squad and the covert role of Pakistan in the conflict. Assange partnered with The New York Times, Der Spiegel and The Guardian in publishing the Afghan leaks.

On Nov. 28, 2010, the first of Manning's U.S. Diplomatic Cables were released. They helped spark a revolt in Tunisia that spread into the so-called Arab Spring, revealed Saudi intentions towards Iran and exposed spying on the UN secretary general and other diplomats.

Over the next few years WikiLeaks revealed embarrassing documents on Turkey, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Russia, the Sony Corporation, and secret details of the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

WikiLeaks in 2011 pioneered an anonymous online "drop box" for whistleblowers to deposit documents without their identities being known, even to WikiLeaks. The organization carefully authenticates every document it receives and has a perfect record of accuracy. Major news organizations like The Wall Street Journal, The Guardian and CNN **have copied WikiLeaks in creating their own anonymous drop boxes.**

In 2016, WikiLeaks published leaked emails from the Democratic National Convention and Hillary Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta that exposed DNC efforts to derail the primary candidacy of Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Hillary Clinton's role in the destruction of Libya and a pay-to-play scheme at the Clinton Foundation.

During the Trump administration, WikiLeaks published in March 2017 secret CIA documents that exposed "the entire hacking capacity of the CIA," which the agency had lost control of. WikiLeaks avoided "the distribution of 'armed' cyber-weapons." But the documents it published revealed how the agency can remotely gain control of a citizen's television set and showed that the CIA can plant doctored

fingerprints into a cyber-attack to falsely blame an adversary. The Vault 7 release led then CIA Director Mike Pompeo to label WikiLeaks a “non-state hostile intelligence service.”

Over the past decade, WikiLeaks publications have spurred countless news reports and academic papers around the world, and have been used in numerous court cases promoting human rights.

Assange's Arrest

A month after the Afghan War Diaries were published two women went to the police in Sweden to ask if Assange could be tested for sexually transmitted disease after having unprotected relations with both of them. One of the women later texted that she had been “railroaded” by police into making a formal complaint about rape and refused to sign her statement. The next day Sweden’s chief prosecutor dismissed the allegations. She said: “I don’t think there is reason to suspect that he has committed rape.”

After Swedish authorities told him he was free to go, Assange returned to London when an extradition request was issued by a prosecutor, not a judge, and he was arrested in December 2010. This came after Swedish police had altered and signed the statement of one of the women who had refused to sign, in a way that permitted the case to be re-opened, according to a UN special rapporteur’s investigation. Nils Melzer, the rapporteur on torture, said:

“I speak fluent Swedish and was thus able to read all of the original documents. I could hardly believe my eyes: According to the testimony of the woman in question, a rape had never even taken place at all. And not only that: The woman’s testimony was later changed by the Stockholm police without her involvement in order to somehow make it sound like a possible rape. I have all the documents in my possession, the emails, the text messages.”

While still in the police station, she wrote a text message to a friend saying that she didn’t want to incriminate Assange, that she just wanted him to take an HIV test, but the police were apparently interested in «getting their hands on him.» The police wrote down her statement and immediately informed public prosecutors. ... two hours later, a headline appeared on the front page of Expressen, a Swedish tabloid, saying that Julian Assange was suspected of having committed two rapes.”

After he exhausted his appeals in British courts to fight extradition to Sweden, Assange sought and received political asylum from the government of Ecuador in its London embassy on June 19, 2012. Assange and his lawyers said at the time they feared onward extradition from Sweden to the U.S. to face charges for publishing classified material.

The former foreign minister of Ecuador on why his country gave Assange asylum:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3ZX2_FRfe0&feature=emb_logo

Assange continued running WikiLeaks from inside the embassy. Despite needing medical care, British authorities said he would be arrested if he left the embassy and re-entered British territory. In February 2016 a UN panel ruled that Assange was being “arbitrarily detained” in the embassy.

A change in government in Ecuador in May 2017 led to the eventual revocation of Assange's asylum without due process and in likely violation of Ecuadorian national law and the 1954 United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees. The convention stipulates that no asylee can be expelled to a territory "where his life or freedom would be threatened."

Assange was eventually dragged out of the embassy by British police on April 11, 2019. His fears of extradition to the U.S. were realized when the U.S. indicted him on 17 charges under the Espionage Act and one charge of computer intrusion.

Imprisoned in the high security Belmarsh Prison with terrorists and other violent criminals, Assange has had restricted access to visitors, including with his lawyers. Nils Melzer, the U.N. special rapporteur on torture, visited Assange in his cell and reported that he was suffering from psychological torture.

Assange faces an extradition hearing at Woolwich Crown Court that begins the week of Feb. 24 and will continue in May. (Consortium News will be in London to provide extensive coverage in print and video.)

In a normal case, Assange's indictment would be thrown out after it was revealed that the prosecuting government was spying on Assange's privileged conversations with his attorneys in the Ecuador Embassy.

Both U.S. indictments against Assange spell out the exact work of investigative reporting. The indictment on intrusion alleges that Assange helped Manning gain access to a government computer, which the indictment acknowledges Manning had security clearances to legally access.

What the indictment alleges is that Assange egged Manning on for more information and tried to help her, unsuccessfully, to sign in under an administrative user name to help her do what every reporter must do, hide their sources' identity. The second indictment likewise accused Assange of practicing journalism by encouraging his source to provide classified documents.

In his 2010 article Parry said in his investigative reporting he did the exact things Assange had done, even encouraging his sources to commit a crime if it could prevent a larger crime from occurring. He wrote:

"The process for reporters obtaining classified information about crimes of state most often involves a journalist persuading some government official to break the law either by turning over classified documents or at least by talking about the secret information. There is almost always some level of 'conspiracy' between reporter and source. ... In most cases, I played some role — either large or small — in locating the classified information or convincing some government official to divulge some secrets. More often than not, I was the instigator of these 'conspiracies.'"

At the time Parry wrote his article, the Obama administration had empaneled a grand jury to consider charging Assange under the Espionage Act for publishing leaked secrets, which Parry defended as the core work of investigative journalism. Ultimately, then Attorney General Eric Holder decided against indictment, because of what the administration called its **"New York Times problem."**

That was an acknowledgement that Assange was a journalist and that prosecuting him for doing what the Times and other big media also do would open them up to

prosecution as well. The First Amendment prevailed until the Trump administration brushed aside the very same problem and charged Assange with espionage.

The 1917 Espionage Act, derived from the 1889 British Official Secrets Act, outlaws any unauthorized possession and/or dissemination of classified information. Journalists have for decades possessed and published state secrets without consequence. This is what makes Assange's case an unprecedented assault on freedom of the press and the First Amendment.

Recognition of Threat to the Press

At the time of his arrest, even long time critics of Assange acknowledged the threat to press freedom it posed. In an editorial, The New York Times wrote:

"The new indictment ... is a marked escalation in the effort to prosecute Mr. Assange, one that could have a chilling effect on American journalism as it has been practiced for generations. It is aimed straight at the heart of the First Amendment."

"The new charges focus on receiving and publishing classified material from a government source. That is something journalists do all the time. ... This is what the First Amendment is designed to protect: the ability of publishers to provide the public with the truth."

The Times praised Assange's work:

"Mr. Assange shared much of the material at issue with The New York Times and other news organizations. The resulting stories demonstrated why the protections afforded the press have served the American public so well; they shed important light on the American war effort in Iraq, revealing how the United States turned a blind eye to the torture of prisoners by Iraqi forces and how extensively Iran had meddled in the conflict."

The New Yorker's Masha Gessen, wrote: "The use of the Espionage Act to prosecute Assange is an attack on the First Amendment. ... It stands to reason that an Administration that considers the press an 'enemy of the people' would launch this attack. **In attacking the media, it is attacking the public.**"

MSNBC's Rachel Maddow, the Democratic Party booster, who probably had more influence than any commentator in drumming up the Russiagate conspiracy theory and Assange's alleged role in it, launched into an astounding defense of the imprisoned publisher. On her program she said:

"The Justice Department today, the Trump administration today, just put every journalistic institution in this country on Julian Assange's side of the ledger. On his side of the fight. Which, I know, is unimaginable. But that is because the government is now trying to assert this brand new right to criminally prosecute people for publishing secret stuff, and newspapers and magazines and investigative journalists and all sorts of different entities publish secret stuff all the time. That is the bread and butter of what we do."

Victim of Disinformation Campaign

Assange has been the victim of an effective, **mass disinformation campaign, planned as long ago as March 8, 2008 when a secret, 32-page document from the Cyber**

Counterintelligence Assessment branch of the Pentagon described in detail the importance of destroying the “feeling of trust that is WikiLeaks’ center of gravity.”

The document said: “This would be achieved with threats of exposure and criminal prosecution and an unrelenting assault on reputation.”

“It was as if they planned a war on a single human being and on the very principle of freedom of speech,” Pilger said in 2018....

As a result, a number of falsehoods about Assange’s story are deeply entrenched in the media and the public, which are resistant to correction with facts.

1. Assange is not a journalist. Most establishment journalists do not consider Assange to be one of them. First, he is completely a product of the Internet Age, a medium as revolutionary as the printing press, radio and television. His journalism is of a different type than traditional reporting.

Second, **WikiLeaks publishes entire documents, rather than reporting extensively on them.** In the past newspapers, such as The New York Times, published several pages in print editions of major documents, such as the top secret Pentagon Papers and today provide whole documents online.

Assange is not simply a clerk receiving documents and posting them online without studying any of them. He has engaged in their authentication and has a profound understanding of their contents and newsworthiness. Assange has given countless interviews and speeches, authored three books, edited and co-written two others, and written dozens of articles. **Throughout he has displayed a deep understanding of geopolitics and the internal affairs of numerous nations.**

Most importantly, Assange has had an adversarial relationship with power, something that is waning in establishment media. Because of that increasingly cozy relationship between journalism and power Assange has scooped major media, **perhaps engendering a degree of professional jealousy.** The U.S. government must insist he is not a journalist, making it easier to apply espionage charges to him.

His role as a journalist was affirmed by the numerous awards he has won, including The Economist’s New Media Award (2008); Amnesty International’s UK Media Award (2009); the Sam Adams Associates for Integrity in Intelligence award (2010); the Martha Gellhorn Prize for Journalism (2011, which Parry won in 2017); the Walkley Award for Most Outstanding Contribution to Journalism (2011, Australia’s Pulitzer Prize); the Voltaire Award for Free Speech (2011); the International Piero Passetti Journalism Prize of the National Union of Italian Journalists (2011); the Jose Couso Press Freedom Award (2011); the Yoko Ono Lennon Courage Award for the Arts (2013) and the Galizia Prize for Journalists, Whistleblowers & Defenders of the Right to Information (2019).

In 2010, the New York Daily News listed WikiLeaks first among websites “that could totally change the news.” No less of an authority than the founder of this site, one of America’s best investigative reporters, said, “Journalists are all Julian Assange.”

And Parry gave this warning to establishment journalists: “By shunning WikiLeaks as some deviant journalistic hybrid, mainstream U.S. news outlets may breathe easier now but may find themselves caught up in a new legal precedent that could be applied to them later.”

2. Assange was “charged” with rape. This might be the most frequent falsehood uttered about Assange, even mistakenly by Assange supporters. **No rape or any other charges were ever filed by Swedish authorities. The case was dropped three times, but the “rape” smear persists.** Stefania Maurizi, a reporter for La Repubblica in Italy, obtained documents that showed British authorities pressured the Swedish chief prosecutor not to come to London to interview him in the embassy.

In a report on the German ZDF TV network last week documents were produced by Melzer showing the rape allegations were “invented” by Swedish police. “Why would a person be subject to nine years of a preliminary investigation for rape without charges ever having been filed?” he recently told the Swiss newspaper Republik. “Just imagine being accused of rape for nine-and-a-half years by an entire state apparatus and by the media without ever being given the chance to defend yourself because no charges had ever been filed.”

Many persist in believing that Assange is a “coward” who fled to the Ecuadorian embassy to escape the rape “charges” when he voluntarily went to the police station in Sweden. His fear was being extradited to the U.S. via Sweden.

3. Assange was charged with endangering U.S. informants. Much was made in the Espionage Act indictment of Assange allegedly revealing the names of U.S. informants and endangering their lives. **At the top of the indictment are listed all the U.S. statutes prosecutors say Assange violated. Nowhere among them is revealing the identity of informants. That’s because, though it may be unethical, there is no law against it.**

In fact, as Australian mainstream journalist Mark Davis revealed in a talk, webcast by CN Live!, **it was Assange and not his mainstream media partners who worked through the night to redact the names of many informants** before the Afghan War Diaries were released in July, 2010.

Davis, who was in the “bunker” at The Guardian in London working on the documents, said it was only when two Guardian journalists in a book revealed the secret password to the entire trove of documents, endangering informants named in them, that Assange released the full archive to alert those in danger. The Guardian denies this saying WikiLeaks told them the password it used in its book would expire within hours. In any event, there is no evidence that any informant named has been harmed.

4. Assange hacked secret U.S. databases. Assange was arrested at age 20 for hacking but was released on good behavior. The label “hacker” has followed him ever since even though Assange is not being charged as a “hacker” but for helping Manning hide her identity while accessing classified material she had clearance to access, which Parry said is standard journalistic practice.

5. Assange was charged with interfering with the 2016 U.S. election. One of the most widely mistaken beliefs is that Assange interfered in the U.S. election with Russian help in order to get Donald Trump elected. **All of the U.S. charges against Assange**

stem from 2010 and have nothing to do with the 2016 election, another misguided belief.

In the 2017 film *Risk*, by filmmaker Laura Poitras, Assange is filmed on the phone in early 2016 saying WikiLeaks had obtained emails on Hillary Clinton **and “we hope to get something on Trump.”** As Maurizi has written for Consortium News, WikiLeaks did obtain Trump documents but discovered they had already been published.

Kristinn Hrafnsson, WikiLeaks editor-in-chief, told CN Live! that had WikiLeaks had damaging information on Trump, they certainly would have published it, especially before an election when voters need to be informed about the candidates.

There is zero evidence that WikiLeaks had material on Trump and suppressed it, another widely believed falsehood. Assange favored neither candidate and before the election said the choice between the candidates was like choosing “cholera or gonorrhea.”

Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s report alleges that Assange communicated online with Russian GRU defense intelligence agents posing as “Guccifer 2.0” to obtain leaked Democratic Party emails. Even if it were true that Guccifer 2.0 was a cover for Russian intelligence, **Mueller offers no evidence that Assange would be aware of that.**

And even if it were the Russians who provided the material to Assange, the emails were accurate, meaning it is irrelevant who the source of the leak was. The Wall Street Journal’s and other major media’s anonymous drop boxes prove that. They don’t need or want to know the source if newsworthy documents are authenticated.

If a foreign power inserted fabricated emails into a U.S. presidential campaign, that would be sabotage through disinformation. But that’s not what happened. The emails were information, not disinformation.

What Really Happened

The truth is that a vindictive U.S. government was exposed with clear evidence of committing war crimes, meddling in other nations’ internal affairs and spying on adversaries, allies and citizens alike and in response imprisoned and charged the journalist who revealed this wrongdoing. It is an attack on press freedom usually associated with the most aggressive totalitarian regimes, going to the core of how the West defines itself: as a democracy that upholds the right to criticize government or authoritarianism that crushes dissent.

“The really horrifying thing about this case is the lawlessness that has developed: The powerful can kill without fear of punishment and journalism is transformed into espionage,” said Melzer. **“It is becoming a crime to tell the truth.”**

Melzer told the Republik: “Imagine a dark room. Suddenly, someone shines a light on the elephant in the room — on war criminals, on corruption. Assange is the man with the spotlight. The governments are briefly in shock, but then they turn the spotlight around with accusations of rape. It is a classic maneuver when it comes to manipulating public opinion. The elephant once again disappears into the darkness, behind the spotlight. And Assange becomes the focus of attention instead, and we start talking about whether Assange is skateboarding in the embassy or whether he is

feeding his cat correctly. **Suddenly, we all know that he is a rapist, a hacker, a spy and a narcissist. But the abuses and war crimes he uncovered fade into the darkness."**

A plaque in honor of Assange's award, reads: "For bravery in the face of a grave threat to Freedom of the Press and for journalistic accomplishments in revealing crimes of the state."

The Gary Webb Award is the third prize Assange has won while in prison, and the first from the United States. Recognition of the threat his case poses to press freedom grows.

Past winners of the Gary Webb Freedom of the Press Award are Sam Parry (2016), who created Consortium News' website in 1995, and filmmaker Oliver Stone (2017).

History of the Award

About the origin of the award, Robert Parry wrote: The award is named in honor of investigative reporter Gary Webb who in 1996 courageously revived interest in one of the darkest scandals of the 1980s, the Reagan administration's tolerance of cocaine trafficking by the CIA-organized Nicaraguan Contra rebels who were fighting to overthrow Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government.

The Contra-Cocaine scandal was originally exposed by Associated Press reporters Robert Parry and Brian Barger in 1985, but **the major U.S. newspapers accepted the Reagan administration's denials and treated the story as a "conspiracy theory."**

So, when Webb revived the story in 1996 for The San Jose Mercury News and described how some of the Contra cocaine fueled the spread of crack across urban America, **the major newspapers again rallied to the defense of the Contras and the Reagan administration's legacy.**

The assault on Webb was led by The New York Times, The Washington Post and The Los Angeles Times — and was so ferocious that Webb's editors at the Mercury News sacrificed him to protect their own careers. Webb found himself cast out from the profession that he loved.

It didn't even matter that an **internal CIA investigation by Inspector General Frederick Hitz confirmed, in 1998, that the CIA was aware of the Contra cocaine trafficking but had put its goal of ousting the Sandinistas ahead of any responsibility to expose the Contra criminality.**

Because of the false impression that Webb had manufactured a fake story, he remained unemployable in mainstream journalism. In 2004, with his life in tatters and his financial resources spent, Webb took his own life, a tragic casualty in the difficult fight for a truly free press in America, a press that doesn't just rubber stamp government propaganda and accept official lies as truth.

Joe Lauria is editor-in-chief of Consortium News and a former correspondent for The Wall Street Journal, Boston Globe, Sunday Times of London and numerous other newspapers. He can be reached at joelauria@consortiumnews.com and followed on Twitter @unjoe .

<https://consortiumnews.com/2020/02/10/julian-assange-wins-2020-gary-webb-freedom-of-the-press-award/>

Jeremy Corbyn praises Julian Assange and calls for extradition to US to be halted

PM refuses to comment on looming case - but agrees extradition treaty between the two countries is 'unbalanced'

*Rob Merrick
The Independent
2020-02-12*

Jeremy Corbyn has called for the extradition of Julian Assange to the US to be halted, praising the Wikileaks founder for exposing US “war crimes”.

Boris Johnson refused to comment on the case, which will begin this month – but surprised the Commons by agreeing the extradition treaty between the two countries is “unbalanced”.

The Labour leader’s call came as he also demanded to know whether Anne Sacoolas, who drove the car that killed teenager Harry Dunn, is being “shielded” because she was a CIA spy.

On Mr Assange, who faces up to 175 years in a US jail if convicted, Mr Corbyn backed MPs on the Council of Europe who have warned the extradition “sets a dangerous precedent for journalists”.

The one-sided arrangements would be “laid bare” when the courts decide whether he should be sent to the US on “charges of espionage for exposure of war crimes, the murder of civilians and large-scale corruption”, he said.

“Will the prime minister agree with the parliamentary report that’s going to the Council of Europe that this extradition should be opposed and the rights of journalists and whistleblowers upheld for the good of all of us,” Mr Corbyn demanded.

In response, the prime minister said: “I’m not going to mention any individual cases but it’s obvious that the rights of journalists and whistleblowers should be upheld and this government will continue to do that.”

Mr Assange, who is being held in London’s Belmarsh prison, has been indicted on 18 charges – 17 under the Espionage Act – for conspiracy to receive, obtain and disclose classified diplomatic and military documents.

Among Wikileaks’ revelations was video footage from a 2007 US Apache helicopter attack in Baghdad that killed at least nine men, including a Reuters news photographer and his driver.

The MPs’ report backs the recommendation of the UN special rapporteur on torture who called last year for the extradition to the US to be blocked.

On the claim that Ms Sacoolas “is in fact a CIA operative”, Mr Corbyn claimed: “Now we know the foreign secretary [Dominic Raab] misled the Dunn family, who are being denied justice by the US government, will the prime minister commit to his removal from office tomorrow in his reshuffle?”

Mr Johnson replied: "The Foreign Office has been told Anne Sacoolas was notified to the UK government as a spouse with no official role.

"We will continue without fear or favour to seek justice for Harry Dunn and his family and continue to seek the extradition of Anne Sacoolas from the United States."

Mr Corbyn protested: "This lopsided treaty means the US can request extradition in circumstances that Britain cannot."

The prime minister acknowledged: "To be frank, I think [Mr Corbyn] has a point in his characterisation of our extradition arrangements with the United States and I do think there are elements of that relationship that are imbalanced. I certainly think it is worth looking at."

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/jeremy-corbyn-julian-assange-extradition-us-wikileaks-war-crimes-a9331376.html>

Australian MP to visit Julian Assange after tabling historic petition in parliament

*John McEvoy
The Canary
12 February 2020*

Australian MP Andrew Wilkie has announced that he will travel to London this week to visit WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange in Belmarsh prison. On 10 February, Wilkie also tabled a "massive petition" in defence of Assange in Australia's parliament.

The independent MP said the purpose of his visit is: "...to check on Julian's health and welfare, to see firsthand the circumstances of his incarceration, and to reassure Julian that although he doesn't have the support of the Australian Government, he certainly does have the support of a great many people right around the world, especially here in Australia."

The Australian government came under international pressure after over 100 medical doctors wrote to the prime minister and foreign secretary to express serious concerns about Assange's health.

Wilkie continued: "If [the extradition request] does go ahead, not only would he face 175 years in prison, but the precedent would be set for all Australians, and particularly for journalists, that they are at risk of being extradited to any country they offend."

Assange's extradition hearings will begin on Monday 24 February, and are expected to conclude around June.

Historic petition

On 10 February, Wilkie also tabled one of the largest petitions in Australian parliamentary history.

The petition, which was signed by over 270,000 people worldwide, read: "If we allow Julian Assange (multi-awarded journalist) who is not a USA citizen and who was not

in the USA when he published news to be extradited to the USA to face 175 years imprisonment and possible execution, then we no longer live in a democratic society.”



Andrew Wilkie MP 
@WilkieMP



The Bring Julian Assange Home Parl Group welcomed @Aus4Assange to Canberra, who delivered the ‘free Julian Assange before it’s too late’ petition, which I will table in the HOR next week. The petition has over 270K signatures and is growing everyday #auspol #politas #FreeAssange



♡ 541 01:31 - 6 Feb 2020



And speaking to parliament, Wilkie added: “That the perpetrator of those war crimes, America, is now seeking to extradite Mr Assange to face 17 counts of espionage and one of hacking is unjust in the extreme and arguably illegal under British law.”

As his website explains, Wilkie resigned “from the Office of National Assessments (ONA) on 11 March 2003 in protest over the Iraq war”, becoming “the only serving intelligence official in Australia, the UK and US to resign publicly before the invasion”.

The distance between Australia’s parliament in Canberra and Belmarsh is some 17,000km, while the distance between the UK’s parliament and Belmarsh is some 17 km. **There seems to be no evidence of any sitting UK MP visiting Assange this year.**

Featured image via [screengrab/60MinutesAustralia](https://www.screengrab.com/60MinutesAustralia)

<https://www.thecanary.co/global/world-news/2020/02/12/australian-mp-to-visit-julian-assange-after-tabling-historic-petition-in-parliament/>

Rank-and-file teachers in Sydney adopt resolution defending Assange and Manning

By the Socialist Equality Party (Australia)
World Socialist Web Site
12 February 2020

A meeting of rank-and-file teachers, representing schools across the north-west working-class suburbs of Sydney, adopted a resolution on Monday calling for the freedom of Australian citizen and WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange, as well as imprisoned American whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

The meeting was the first General Meeting of the Hills Association of the New South Wales Teachers Federation (NSWTF), the union covering public primary and secondary teachers in Australia's largest state. The Hills Association is attended by representatives from schools in the north-west region of Sydney, which have some 1,330 financial union members.

The resolution in defence of Assange and Manning was moved by longstanding Socialist Equality Party (SEP) member and teacher Erika Laslett, who is also a member of the Committee For Public Education (CFPE). It was passed unanimously by the 13 delegates present.

The resolution reads:

That this meeting of teachers opposes the ongoing persecution of journalist publisher and founder of WikiLeaks, Julian Assange and courageous whistleblower, Chelsea Manning. The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Nils Melzer, warns specifically that "Assange's continued exposure to arbitrariness and abuse may soon end up costing his life."

We insist that the federal Morrison government uses its diplomatic powers to organise the safe return of Assange to Australia. We resolve to send this resolution to other schools and workplaces.

In seconding Laslett's motion, one teacher stated: "This is not about one man. This is part of a wider attack on journalism and the public's right to information." He cited the raids carried out by the Australian Federal Police on the Sydney offices of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on June 5, 2019. **The raid was part of the move by the Morrison government — emulating the US attempt to prosecute Assange —** toward charging whistleblowers and ABC journalists for their exposure of the involvement of Australian troops in extrajudicial killings and other violations of international law in Afghanistan.

A similar resolution was passed last year by teachers and support staff at Footscray City College, a working-class high school in western Melbourne. According to NSWTF policy, the resolution of the Hills Association should now be presented to the union's State Council.

The passage of the motion is a significant development, less than two weeks before legal hearings begin in London on February 24 to decide on the US application to extradite Julian Assange and put him on trial to face charges of espionage. The WikiLeaks founder faces the threat of a life sentence of up to 175 years, for publishing truthful information about the criminal operations of the American state and military.

The resolution is the outcome of the initiative of the CFPE, acting independently of the trade union apparatus. Like the establishment political parties and official media, the unions are maintaining a complicit silence on the persecution of Assange.

The trade unions in Australia are closely tied to the Australian Labor Party (ALP), which held government in 2010 and completely supported the US attempt to silence

and destroy WikiLeaks and Assange with false allegations, slanders and state repression. Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard outrageously labelled WikiLeaks' courageous publication of the leaks made by Chelsea Manning, which exposed rampant US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, as "illegal activity."

The overriding concern of Labor, and the Coalition governments that have followed it, has been to suppress any information that fuels political opposition to the US-Australia military alliance. This includes Australian involvement in the illegal wars and global spying operations exposed by whistleblowers, such as Manning and Edward Snowden.

The trade unions have lined up behind the Labor and Coalition governments. **Not a single serious action has been taken by any union, or the national Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), to force the Australian government to end its collaboration with the US and British authorities, and use its diplomatic and legal powers to secure the freedom of a persecuted Australian journalist.**

The leadership of the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA), which represents journalists and media workers, has passed resolutions opposing any extradition of Assange to the US but has not called a single stop-work meeting, let alone proposed strike action throughout the media industry, over the immense assault on freedom of speech taking place. **The various state-based teacher unions have not even passed resolutions, despite the broad defence of Assange and democratic rights among educators.**

Workers have to take matters into their own hands if fundamental democratic rights are going to be protected. The Australian parliamentary establishment will only fulfil its obligations to Assange if it feels compelled to do so, out of fear of a mass movement of the working class in Australia and internationally.

All workers who defend Assange, Manning and freedom of speech should seek to organise workplace meetings, at both unionised and non-union sites, and move resolutions similar to that passed by the Sydney teachers.

The SEP urges workers to organise delegations from your workplace to attend the rallies being held in Sydney on February 22, Melbourne and Wellington, New Zealand on February 23, and Brisbane on February 29.

The political aim of these rallies is to develop the independent mobilisation of the working class. Assange's legal fight against the threat of extradition will be difficult and, most likely, extend over several years. Support must be built throughout the working class for political demonstrations, strikes and boycotts to demand his freedom, and freedom for Chelsea Manning and all other class-war prisoners, who are being persecuted for standing up for the truth and democratic rights.

Free Assange! Free Manning! No to extradition!

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/02/12/nswt-f12.html>

'Burned At The Stake' — The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Demolishes The Fake Claims Targeting Julian Assange

Media Lens

13 February 2020

On the face of it, the task seems almost hopeless. As Tolstoy wrote: 'The power of the government is maintained by public opinion, and with this power the government, by means of its organs — **its officials, law courts, schools, churches, even the press — can always maintain the public opinion which they need.**' (Leo Tolstoy, 'Writings on Non-Violence and Civil Disobedience,' New Society Publishers, 1987, p.111)

Last December, we witnessed the awesome capacity of state-corporate power to manipulate public opinion and undermine a democratic election with a ruthless propaganda campaign smearing Jeremy Corbyn, a passionate anti-racist. The campaign depicted Corbyn, not just as an anti-semitic, but as someone who might 'reopen Auschwitz'. The truth wasn't just distorted, it was reversed.

Israeli-born academic and author Jamie Stern-Weiner has commented: 'No mainstream reporter ever investigated whether the allegations against Labour were true.

'Where journalists did not reflexively endorse the accusations against Labour, they were content to uncritically relay them alongside the party's response.

'Accusations by Jewish communal figures or anti-Corbyn MPs were considered inherently significant, whether or not they were accompanied by supporting evidence.'

Careful, credible analysis that made a nonsense of the claims here, here and here was simply ignored.

Vested interests may appear to hold all the cards — they work hard to give that impression — but this is only an appearance. The very fact that they work so relentlessly to shape public opinion indicates the precarious nature of their dominance.

The problem is inherent, structural — a 'democratic' society that subordinates the needs of the many to the needs of the few is a society based on lies. Propaganda obfuscating those lies can be disseminated endlessly, day and night, but it will always be vulnerable to individuals and groups with genuine expertise motivated by genuine concern for others. As the Buddhist sage Je Gampopa commented:

'Even a single virtuous act overcomes many evils... a small good action can overcome a great wrong; it is highly efficient.' (Gampopa, 'Gems of Dharma, Jewels of Freedom,' Altea, 1994, p.135)

Following in the footsteps of senior UN officials like Denis Halliday, Hans von Sponeck and Scott Ritter — who, between them, demolished many of the deceptions 'justifying' the genocidal 1990s US-UK sanctions regime in Iraq and the 2003 war of aggression on Iraq — consider the 'highly efficient' comments made to the Swiss magazine, *Republik*, by Nils Melzer on Julian Assange:

'Four democratic countries joined forces — the U.S., Ecuador, Sweden and the UK — to leverage their power to portray one man as a monster so that he could later be

burned at the stake without any outcry. The case is a huge scandal and represents the failure of Western rule of law. If Julian Assange is convicted, it will be a death sentence for freedom of the press.'

The problem for the propaganda system targeting Assange is that **Melzer is not just someone blogging on the internet; he is the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture. In addition, he is a professor of international law at the University of Glasgow and holds the Human Rights Chair at the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights in Switzerland**, where he has been teaching since 2009, including as the Swiss Chair of International Humanitarian Law (2011–2013). Melzer even speaks fluent Swedish. In other words, it is hard to imagine anyone better qualified to comment on the Assange case.

Melzer describes how, on August 20, 2010, a headline appeared on the front page of Expressen, a leading Swedish tabloid, declaring that Julian Assange was suspected of having committed two rapes. Melzer describes his reaction on investigating these claims:

'I speak fluent Swedish and was thus able to read all of the original documents. I could hardly believe my eyes: According to the testimony of the woman in question, a rape had never even taken place at all. And not only that: The woman's testimony was later changed by the Stockholm police without her involvement in order to somehow make it sound like a possible rape. I have all the documents in my possession, the emails, the text messages.'

The order of events is extraordinary and outrageous:

'A woman walks into a police station. She doesn't want to file a complaint but wants to demand an HIV test. The police then decide that this could be a case of rape and a matter for public prosecutors. The woman refuses to go along with that version of events and then goes home and writes a friend that it wasn't her intention, but the police want to "get their hands on" Assange. Two hours later, the case is in the newspaper. As we know today, public prosecutors leaked it to the press — and they did so without even inviting Assange to make a statement. And the second woman, who had allegedly been raped according to the Aug. 20 headline, was only questioned on Aug. 21.'

As Melzer says, this behaviour demonstrated the 'willful malevolence of the authorities'. Melzer leaves no doubt about the real significance of the rape claims:

'Imagine a dark room. Suddenly, someone shines a light on the elephant in the room — on war criminals, on corruption. Assange is the man with the spotlight. The governments are briefly in shock, but then they turn the spotlight around with accusations of rape. It is a classic maneuver when it comes to manipulating public opinion. The elephant once again disappears into the darkness, behind the spotlight. **And Assange becomes the focus of attention instead, and we start talking about whether Assange is skateboarding in the embassy or whether he is feeding his cat correctly.**'

The goal:

'A show trial is to be used to make an example of Julian Assange. The point is to intimidate other journalists. Intimidation, by the way, is one of the primary purposes

for the use of torture around the world. The message to all of us is: This is what will happen to you if you emulate the Wikileaks model.'

It is very much to Melzer's credit that he admits that he was himself initially taken in by the propaganda campaign. He reveals that, in December 2018, he was asked by Assange's lawyers to intervene. He declined:

'I was overloaded with other petitions and wasn't really familiar with the case. My impression, largely influenced by the media, was also colored by the prejudice that Julian Assange was somehow guilty and that he wanted to manipulate me.'

After Assange's lawyers made a second request in March 2019, Melzer felt that that 'my professional integrity demanded that I at least take a look at the material'. The result:

'It quickly became clear to me that something was wrong.'

With unprecedented clarity, Melzer unpacks the meaning of the many bizarre twists and turns in the political persecution of Assange. Was it true, as so many journalists claim, that Assange sought asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy to evade Swedish justice? Melzer comments:

'The [Assange] lawyers say that during the nearly seven years in which Assange lived in the Ecuadorian Embassy, they made over 30 offers to arrange for Assange to visit Sweden — in exchange for a guarantee that he would not be extradited to the U.S. The Swedes declined to provide such a guarantee by arguing that the U.S. had not made a formal request for extradition.'

Was this standard practice?

'Such diplomatic assurances are a routine international practice... I say this on the strength of all of my experience behind the scenes of standard international practice: If a country refuses to provide such a diplomatic assurance, then all doubts about the good intentions of the country in question are justified. Why shouldn't Sweden provide such assurances? From a legal perspective, after all, the U.S. has absolutely nothing to do with Swedish sex offense proceedings.'

Melzer was asked if it was normal, or legally acceptable, for Swedish authorities to travel abroad for such an interrogation:

'For exactly these kinds of judiciary issues, there is a cooperation treaty between the United Kingdom and Sweden, which foresees that Swedish officials can travel to the UK, or vice versa, to conduct interrogations or that such questioning can take place via video link. During the period of time in question, such questioning between Sweden and England took place in 44 other cases. It was only in Julian Assange's case that Sweden insisted that it was essential for him to appear in person.'

Melzer's conclusion:

'From my perspective, Sweden very clearly acted in bad faith. Had they acted in good faith, there would have been no reason to refuse to answer my questions. The same holds true for the British: Following my visit to Assange in May 2019, they took six months to answer me – in a single-page letter, which was primarily limited to rejecting all accusations of torture and all inconsistencies in the legal proceedings. If

you're going to play games like that, then what's the point of my mandate? I am the Special Rapporteur on Torture for the United Nations. I have a mandate to ask clear questions and to demand answers.'

He adds:

'There is only a single explanation for everything — for the refusal to grant diplomatic assurances, for the refusal to question him in London: They wanted to apprehend him so they could extradite him to the U.S. The number of breaches of law that accumulated in Sweden within just a few weeks during the preliminary criminal investigation is simply grotesque.'

The media version was rather different. In 2012, the Guardian's Laura Barton wrote of Assange and the Ecuadorian embassy:

'Poor Julian. It can't be easy to be confined to one building, no matter how prestigious the postcode... And so we decided to assemble a collection of items that Assange might be missing, and deliver them.'

A photograph showed an unsmiling Barton delivering a Guardian hamper to their *bete noire* at the Ecuadorian embassy:

'We packed our hamper with a selection of edible items not native to Ecuador — Kellogg's cornflakes fortified with vitamin D to compensate for the lack of sunlight in Assange's life, a jar of Vegemite (as an antipodean, Julian was likely to spurn Marmite), a packet of chocolate-chip cookies, and a punnet of clementines.

'Recalling that Bill Keller, editor of the New York Times, once remarked upon Assange's questionable hygiene and the fact he wore "filthy white socks" we added three pairs of crisp, white sports socks and a shower gel in the "feelgood fragrance of eucalyptus and citrus oils" that promised to be both "revitalizing" and "refreshing."'

We have documented many similar examples of **this relentless, ferocious and frankly weird corporate media mockery of Assange** [here](#) and [here](#).

Assange is currently being held in London's Belmarsh prison prior to a hearing that will determine if he is to be extradited to the US. He has already served a 50-week sentence for skipping bail. Melzer comments on this sentence:

'It is obvious that what we are dealing with here is political persecution. In Britain, bail violations seldom lead to prison sentences — they are generally subject only to fines. Assange, by contrast, was sentenced in summary proceedings to 50 weeks in a maximum-security prison — clearly a disproportionate penalty that had only a single purpose: Holding Assange long enough for the U.S. to prepare their espionage case against him.'

A US grand jury has indicted Assange on 18 charges — 17 of which fall under the US Espionage Act — around conspiracy to receive, obtain and disclose classified diplomatic and military documents. Melzer explains why Assange has no chance of receiving justice in the US:

'He will not receive a trial consistent with the rule of law. That's another reason why his extradition shouldn't be allowed. Assange will receive a trial-by-jury in Alexandria, Virginia — the notorious "Espionage Court" where the U.S. tries all

national security cases. The choice of location is not by coincidence, because the jury members must be chosen in proportion to the local population, and 85 percent of Alexandria residents work in the national security community — at the CIA, the NSA, the Defense Department and the State Department. When people are tried for harming national security in front of a jury like that, the verdict is clear from the very beginning. The cases are always tried in front of the same judge behind closed doors and on the strength of classified evidence. Nobody has ever been acquitted there in a case like that. The result being that most defendants reach a settlement, in which they admit to partial guilt so as to receive a milder sentence.'

Meanwhile, Assange's physical condition has continued to deteriorate:

'I visited Assange in his cell in London in May 2019 together with two experienced, widely respected doctors who are specialized in the forensic and psychological examination of torture victims. The diagnosis arrived at by the two doctors was clear: Julian Assange displays the typical symptoms of psychological torture. If he doesn't receive protection soon, a rapid deterioration of his health is likely, and death could be one outcome.'

Melzer's conclusions are utterly damning:

'We have to stop believing that there was really an interest in leading an investigation into a sexual offense. What Wikileaks did is a threat to the political elite in the U.S., Britain, France and Russia in equal measure. Wikileaks publishes secret state information – they are opposed to classification. And in a world, even in so-called mature democracies, where secrecy has become rampant, that is seen as a fundamental threat.'

He adds:

'We give countries power and delegate it to governments – but in return, they must be held accountable for how they exercise that power. If we don't demand that they be held accountable, we will lose our rights sooner or later. Humans are not democratic by their nature. Power corrupts if it is not monitored. Corruption is the result if we do not insist that power be monitored.'

His final thoughts are an urgent warning to us all:

'I have seen lots of horrors and violence and have seen how quickly peaceful countries like Yugoslavia or Rwanda can transform into infernos. At the roots of such developments are always a lack of transparency and unbridled political or economic power combined with the naivete, indifference and malleability of the population. Suddenly, that which always happened to the other – unpunished torture, rape, expulsion and murder – can just as easily happen to us or our children. And nobody will care. I can promise you that.'

We tweeted the Guardian editor and a number of key Guardian journalists who have commented on Assange:

'For the first time, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Nils Melzer, speaks in detail about the explosive findings of his investigation into the case of Julian Assange. Please read and comment @KathViner @MarinaHyde @suzanne_moore @GeorgeMonbiot @HadleyFreeman @OwenJones84'

We also tweeted:

‘As @NilsMelzer says, a failure to respond to his findings indicates a lack of good faith. Please respond @KathViner @MarinaHyde @suzanne_moore @GeorgeMonbiot @HadleyFreeman @OwenJones84’

We also wrote to Ash Sarkar, contributing editor at Novara Media, who described Assange on Twitter as ‘a definite creep, a probable rapist, a conspiracist whackjob’:

‘Hi @AyoCaesar, will you please respond to these comments from @NilsMelzer, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, on attempts to portray Julian Assange ‘as a monster so that he could later be burned at the stake without any outcry’? @novaramedia @AaronBastani’

We received no answer from any of the journalists contacted (to be fair to Monbiot and Jones, having blocked us on Twitter for sending them polite, rational challenges, they may not have seen our tweet).

Despite the credibility and integrity of the source, and the obvious newsworthiness of the issue, **our ProQuest database search finds that Nils Melzer and his comments published in *Republik* on 31 January have not been mentioned in any US or UK media outlet.**

DE

<https://www.medialens.org/2020/burned-at-the-stake-the-un-special-rapporteur-on-torture-demolishes-the-fake-claims-targeting-julian-assange/>

Australian media maintains an unconscionable blackout on the case of Julian Assange

*James Cogan
World Socialist Web Site
17 February 2020*

In one week, on February 24, Australian citizen and WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange faces the beginning of extradition hearings in London that will decide whether he is rendered to the United States to stand trial on multiple charges of espionage.

The significance and historic implications of the Assange case are undeniable. The charges levelled against him all stem from the publication of whistleblower leaks in 2010–2011 which exposed that American and allied forces in Iraq and Afghanistan carried out the indiscriminate murder of civilians, as well as torture and other human rights abuses. Other leaked information revealed numerous diplomatic intrigues by American embassies to prop up or install pro-US regimes.

The document were not only published by WikiLeaks, but by some of the major newspapers around the world, which openly advertised that they were its “partners” in ensuring that the damning exposures of great power war crimes and conspiracies reached the largest global audience.

In other words, if Assange is extradited and convicted in the US for espionage, it will establish an ominous precedent that could be used to prosecute the editors and journalists of publications ranging from the Guardian, to Le Monde and Der Spiegel, to the Sydney Morning Herald. Going forward, it would set a precedent for the prosecution of the staff of any media organisation that publishes leaked classified American government documents and applications for their extradition to the US from whatever country they live and hold citizenship.

Within the media profession, these facts are well-known and have been widely discussed. After Assange was dragged from the Ecuadorian embassy in April 2019 — in violation of his rights of political asylum — and charged by the Trump administration, editorials and comments were published internationally expressing concern and acknowledging that his case has ominous implications for journalism and freedom of speech.

It is unconscionable that what can only be described as **an almost total media blackout is taking place on the Assange case on the eve of the extradition hearings**. Developments that are inherently in the public interest are being flagrantly censored.

The Australian media is a particularly graphic example of this censorship, as Assange is an Australian citizen, a member of the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, and, in 2011, WikiLeaks was bestowed the profession's Walkley Award for "Most Outstanding Contribution to Journalism."

Listed below are just some of the developments over the last several weeks that have not been reported in any serious fashion — let alone made the subject of probing commentary and investigation — by the print, radio and television media in Australia, including both corporate-owned media and the state-owned Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and Special Broadcasting Service (SBS).

- The US Department of Justice has asserted in court filing that because Assange is an Australian citizen, he cannot raise as a defence for WikiLeaks' publication of leaks the US Constitution's first amendment protection of freedom of speech.
- Other US court documents indicate that Assange will be detained under "Special Administrative Measures" if he is extradited. Designed to "break" alleged terrorists so they plead guilty, SAMs prisoners are held in virtual total isolation in high security facilities ahead of their trials. They are denied access to news or communication with anyone but lawyers and vetted visitors. All communication, including with lawyers, is monitored. His legal representatives would be banned from relaying anything said by Assange, or even talking about the conditions he faces. The treatment was described in a 2017 report as "the darkest corner of the US federal prison system."
- Nils Melzer, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, gave an extended interview to the Swiss publication *Republik*, published on January 31. Melzer systematically reviewed the false allegations that Assange had committed sexual offences in Sweden, the way in which he had been psychologically tortured and the significance of the US extradition. Melzer was not interviewed by Australia media or his *Republik* interview republished in any publication.
- On January 31, a group of German parliamentarians nominated Assange, along with whistleblowers' Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden, for the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize. The nomination letter stated: "We feel that Assange, Manning and Snowden

have to be recognized for their ‘unprecedented contributions to the pursuit of peace and their immense personal sacrifices to promote peace for all.’ With the unveiling of US war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq and the global surveillance program of the US secret services, the three have ‘exposed the architecture of war and strengthened the architecture of peace.’”

- Last week, a petition signed by close to 300,000 people calling on the Australian government to intervene on Assange’s behalf was tabled in the lower of parliament. Prime Minister Scott Morrison and opposition Labor Party leader Anthony Albanese were not questioned by the media over their position on Assange’s extradition trial, the conditions under which he is held in London’s Belmarsh Prison or the broad implications for the media and free speech.

Other newsworthy issues could be cited that are being subjected to media censorship, not least the fact that demonstrations have been called in Australian cities and towns over the coming week to condemn the extradition trial and demand Assange’s freedom.

There is no innocent explanation for the silence. **The obvious conclusion is that a decision has been taken by the management and editorial boards of various media organisations that the Assange case will not be reported.** There is every reason to believe that such a decision has been taken in consultation with the Morrison government and various intelligence and police agencies.

Everything is being done to 1) prevent public support for Assange; and 2) protect the political establishment from public scrutiny and outrage over its collaboration with the US administration in the persecution of an Australian citizen and courageous publisher.

Many journalists and media professionals are deeply alarmed about the prosecution of Assange and the sweeping assault on freedom of speech that it constitutes. It is well past time for them to take matters into their own hands and act.

Media professionals should be at the forefront of fighting for a broad political movement demanding the rejection of the US extradition and the immediate and unconditional freedom of Assange, Manning and all other persecuted journalists and whistleblowers. They know what is at stake. The Assange precedent has already been brought to Australia in the form of police raids on ABC offices in Sydney last year and the threatened prosecution of ABC journalists over the publication of whistleblower leaks exposing Australian military atrocities in Afghanistan.

Meetings should be convened by the staff of every media organisation and resolutions adopted opposing Assange’s extradition — as teachers have done — and insisting that his case is accurately and honestly reported. The US charges against him are unacceptable and a threat to fundamental democratic rights.

Journalists often talk of their professional commitment to “speak truth to power.” The Coalition and Labor parties must be held to account for aiding and abetting the vendetta against one of their colleagues.

We urge journalists and media staff to take part in the rallies that have been called by Socialist Equality Party in Sydney on February 22, Melbourne on February 23 and

Brisbane on February 29, and the other protest actions taking place around the country.

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/02/17/auas-f17.html>

‘Conscience-free journalism is great career choice’: Guardian mocked over failure to mention Assange in ‘press freedom’ article

RT

17 Feb. 2020

The Guardian newspaper has been mercilessly ridiculed on social media after it failed to highlight the plight of journalist Julian Assange in a piece on Amal Clooney’s plans to “combat media repression globally.”

The outlet’s diplomatic editor Patrick Wintour published an article on Monday focused on the ‘Report on the Use of Targeted Sanctions to Protect Journalists,’ a document drafted by prominent human rights barrister, Amal Clooney.

Clooney, who represented the WikiLeaks co-founder during Swedish extradition proceedings against him in 2015, has suggested that the UK introduce a law that targets sanctions against individuals, including ministers, who abuse human rights such as freedom of expression.

Wintour reports that “The aim is to target anyone throwing journalists in jail, or shutting down the internet,” without even a brief mention of Assange. The journalist is currently holed up in Britain’s notorious Belmarsh Prison awaiting his UK court hearing on US extradition in what has been widely criticized as the American government suppressing press freedom.

The failure to highlight Assange’s case triggered widespread ridicule on social media. Mark Curtis, a journalist and historian, sarcastically suggested that “congratulations” were in order for The Guardian for publishing “a whole article on global media suppression without mentioning the phrase ‘Julian Assange’.”

Another person hit out at the paper for not mentioning the journalist’s imprisonment, saying Assange was “locked up at the behest of the US because he exposed war crimes,” while another joked: “Conscience-free journalism is a great career choice for so many like him [Wintour].”

There were those that also slammed Clooney over the banning of Russian media from her first ‘Media Freedom conference.’

Assange is facing 175 years in prison on 18 charges, including conspiring to hack US government computers and violating an espionage law for publishing sensitive leaked documents detailing potential American war crimes in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

<https://www.rt.com/uk/481019-assange-guardian-press-freedom/>

Why Did Twitter Just "Lockdown" WikiLeaks Account?

*Tyler Durden
ZeroHedge
17 Feb. 2020*

Just hours after a secret meeting with Silicon Valley tech giants to discuss censorship of "misinformation" surrounding coronavirus, and just days before Julian Assange's extradition hearings are set to continue, Kristin Hrafnsson - a WikiLeaks' journalist - reports that the WikiLeaks' Twitter account has been locked-down...

It is not the first time Twitter has -- allegedly -- acted to suppress WikiLeaks voice.

As The Washington Examiner noted as far back at 2016, Twitter lit up in late July with allegations that it tried to suppress news that secret-leaking website Wikileaks exposed thousands of emails obtained from the servers of the Democratic National Committee.

Friday afternoon, users noted, "#DNCLeaks" was trending, with more than 250,000 tweets about it on the platform. By Friday evening, it vanished completely from the site's "trending" bar for at least 20 minutes. It returned as "#DNCLeak" after users erupted, though it was too late to quell their rage.

In a message on Twitter, Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey said in response to the allegation, "False," though users were quick to express their skepticism. And we are sure it's just a coincidence that WikiLeaks account has been locked-down again this time.

<https://www.zerohedge.com/technology/why-did-twitter-just-lockdown-wikileaks-account>

Andrew Wilkie and George Christensen in London to visit Julian Assange, as Jeremy Corbyn says UK view on extradition is shifting

*ABC News (Australia)
Samantha Hawley
17 Feb. 2020*

British Opposition Leader Jeremy Corbyn says he is surprised over what he sees as a shift in the British Government's position on Julian Assange and the UK's "unbalanced" extradition relationship with the United States.

Mr Corbyn made the comments after a meeting with Australian independent MP Andrew Wilkie, who is in London on a privately funded trip to visit the WikiLeaks founder in prison.

The Labour leader told the ABC that British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's answers to House of Commons questions about the extradition deal the UK had with the US last Wednesday (local time) were unexpected.

"He accepted that it is an unbalanced treaty and it is not a fair one, therefore I think that is a big change by the British Government," Mr Corbyn said.

In the House, Mr Corbyn had argued that the UK had a "one-sided extradition treaty" with the US and asked Mr Johnson to commit to an "equal and balanced" future relationship.

"I do think that there are elements of that relationship that are unbalanced and I certainly think it is worth looking at," Mr Johnson replied.

Mr Corbyn said he thought this could be partly linked to a high-profile battle underway between the US and UK after Washington rejected a request for the extradition of an American citizen who fled Britain after allegedly causing the death of a teenage motorcyclist.

He said it was also unexpected that Mr Johnson did not argue against him when he questioned whether it was right that someone should be deported for exposing the truth.

"The Prime Minister did not challenge my assertions on this, but seems to me to understand that there is a principle here that somebody who opens up and tells the truth, as Julian Assange has done, should not face deportation to the United States," Mr Corbyn said.

Assange 'abandoned by Australian Government'

Mr Wilkie plans to visit Assange in Belmarsh Prison on Tuesday afternoon (local time), along with Queensland federal MP George Christensen, who is also in London.

"I want to convey a message to Julian that although he has been abandoned by the Australian Government, although he seems to have no support from the British Government or the US Government, he does in fact have a lot of support from millions of people right around the world," Mr Wilkie told the ABC.

Mr Wilkie described the case against Assange as scandalous.

"Let's not forget the substantive issue here, and that's that an Australian citizen has publicised a range of important information in the public interest, including hard evidence of US war crimes, and his reward for doing that is facing extradition," he said.

Ahead of the visit to the prison, Mr Christensen said he wanted to check on Assange's welfare to inform the Government back home.

"For me to be a bit parochial, he's a North Queenslander, he is someone who is facing potentially the rest of his life behind bars for simply wanting to publish and publishing the truth," Mr Christensen said.

"That is wrong, that is morally and ethically wrong, and you've got to be in these fights if you believe in free speech and free press."

Assange's father John Shipton will facilitate the meeting at the high-security Belmarsh Prison in south-west London.

Mr Shipton moved to London three months ago to be closer to his son and to support and lobby on behalf of the 48-year-old.

There is a strong resemblance between the 75-year old and his son.

"I think the family gathering together and coming to see Julian will help him through this crisis and show people that Julian is not isolated, to show that family is everything.

"Without family you can't defend yourself against the oppressions or winds of fate blowing in the wrong direction."

Mr Shipton said he believed his son would not survive if he was jailed in the US.

"They didn't go through 10 years of persecution to take him over there and put him in a feather bed," he said.

Crunch time approaching for Assange

In less than a week's time, Assange will face the legal might of the United States Government, which will argue for his extradition in a court near Belmarsh Prison, where he has been incarcerated since last year.

His own legal team say if the Americans succeed, he will not receive a fair trial and will be jailed for up to 175 years.

The WikiLeaks founder is facing 18 charges — 17 under the espionage act — for conspiracy to receive, obtain and disclose classified information.

Much of the information related to the US prosecution of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Who can forget that shocking image of American attack helicopters gunning down Iraqi civilians and journalists in the streets in Iraq?" Mr Wilkie said.

"This stuff matters. We should not be persecuting Julian Assange."

Conservative British MP Bob Seely disagreed. He argued publishing the information was a crime.

"If you don't want to do the time, don't do the crime," he told the ABC outside the UK Parliament in Westminster.

Mr Seely's grievance also relates to the alleged manipulation of the 2016 US presidential election.

Donald Trump, who praised WikiLeaks 141 times, now has 'no opinion' on Julian Assange. Donald Trump mentioned WikiLeaks 141 times before the 2016 election. Now his Justice Department is pressing charges. In that year, WikiLeaks obtained and released emails and other documents from the Clinton presidential campaign.

"It was pretty obvious reading the indictments put down by [former special counsel for the US Department of Justice] Robert Mueller that WikiLeaks was used wittingly or unwittingly, knowingly or not, as a vehicle by which the Russians hacked into the Democratic Congress servers and stole lots of information," Mr Seely said. "I think Assange has been a useful idiot for people to attack liberal democracies."

The extradition hearing will last a month in total, but the trial will be split, with one week to begin on January 24 and the remaining proceedings taking place in May.

Defence lawyers for Assange have told preliminary hearings most of the witnesses they wish to call will give evidence anonymously, although the US counsel has already indicated they will argue to have them struck off.

For now, Mr Shipton will continue to call London home.

"Julian's circumstance is dire," he said.

"It's very awkward to speak about it. It just upsets me."

"The best thing is to take each day as it comes and work as well and as hard as you can on ensuring that your children aren't oppressed and aren't persecuted to death."

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-02-18/julian-assange-and-us-extradition-deal-view-changing-in-uk/11974080>

Doctors For Assange Ratchet Up Pressure

Consortium News
February 17, 2020

Doctors for Assange have launched a new campaign to get proper medical treatment for the imprisoned WikiLeaks journalist by publishing a letter in Britain's leading medical journal.

Ahead of Julian Assange's upcoming extradition hearing on February 24, a letter by a group of doctors representing 117 physicians and psychologists from 18 nations calls for an end to the psychological torture and medical neglect of Julian Assange. Published in the pre-eminent medical journal *The Lancet*, the letter expresses concern over Julian Assange's fitness for his legal proceedings while suffering the effects of ongoing psychological torture.

Doctors for Assange put out the following statement on Monday:

Ahead of Julian Assange's US Extradition Hearing, Doctors' Letter Published in *The Lancet*

Authors demand an end to the torture & medical neglect of Julian Assange, intensifying pressure on Australian and UK governments.

[http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30383-4/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30383-4/fulltext)

A copy of the letter has been sent to the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Marise Payne. **This follows the doctors' earlier letter of December 16 2019, calling on Minister Payne to bring Julian Assange home to Australia for urgent medical care.** A copy has also been sent to the UK Government, which the doctors accuse of violating Julian Assange's human right to health. In a covering note to Marise Payne

the doctors urged the Minister to “act decisively now” to remove Mr Assange from Belmarsh prison, before it is too late.

The Lancet letter affirms the alarm raised by UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Nils Melzer, and several specialists in the field, that Mr. Assange is in a dire state of health due to the effects of prolonged psychological torture in both the Ecuadorian embassy and Belmarsh Prison, where he has been arbitrarily detained according to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

“Should Assange die in a UK prison, as the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture has warned”, the letter states, “he will have effectively been tortured to death. Much of that torture will have taken place in a prison medical ward, on doctors’ watch. The medical profession cannot afford to stand silently by, on the wrong side of torture and the wrong side of history, while such a travesty unfolds”.

The letter continues, “We condemn the torture of Assange. We condemn the denial of his fundamental right to appropriate healthcare. We condemn the violations of his right to doctor-patient confidentiality. Politics cannot be allowed to interfere with the right to health and the practice of medicine. In the experience of UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Nils Melzer, the scale of state interference is without precedent.

“Since doctors first began assessing Mr. Assange in the Ecuadorian Embassy in 2015, expert medical opinion and doctors’ urgent recommendations have been consistently ignored.

“This politicisation of foundational medical principles is of grave concern to us, as it carries implications beyond the case of Julian Assange. Abuse by politically motivated medical neglect sets a dangerous precedent, ultimately undermining our profession’s impartiality, commitment to health for all, and obligation to do no harm. Our appeals are simple: we are calling upon governments to end the torture of Mr. Assange and ensure his access to the best available healthcare, before it is too late. Our request to others is this: please join us.” <https://doctorsassange.org>

<https://consortiumnews.com/2020/02/17/doctors-for-assange-ratchet-up-pressure/>

End torture and medical neglect of Julian Assange

*Stephen Frost, Lissa Johnson, Jill Stein and William Frost on behalf of 117 signatories
The Lancet Journal
March 7, 2020*

On Nov 22, 2019, we, a group of more than 60 medical doctors, wrote to the UK Home Secretary to express our serious concerns about the physical and mental health of Julian Assange.¹ In our letter,¹ we documented a history of denial of access to health care and prolonged psychological torture. We requested that Assange be transferred from Belmarsh prison to a university teaching hospital for medical assessment and treatment. Faced with evidence of untreated and ongoing torture, we also raised the question as to Assange's fitness to participate in US extradition proceedings.

Having received no substantive response from the UK Government, neither to our first letter¹ nor to our follow-up letter,²

we wrote to the Australian Government, requesting that it intervene to protect the health of its citizen.³

To date, regrettably, no reply has been forthcoming. Meanwhile, many more doctors from around the world have joined us in our call. Our group currently numbers 117 doctors, representing 18 countries.

The case of Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, is multifaceted. It relates to law, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, journalism, publishing, and politics. It also clearly relates to medicine. The case highlights several concerning aspects that warrant the medical profession's close attention and concerted action.

We were prompted to act following the harrowing eyewitness accounts of former UK diplomat Craig Murray and investigative journalist John Pilger, who described Assange's deteriorated state at a case management hearing on Oct 21, 2019.^{4, 5} Assange had appeared at the hearing pale, underweight, aged and limping, and he had visibly struggled to recall basic information, focus his thoughts, and articulate his words. At the end of the hearing, he "told district judge Vanessa Baraitser that he had not understood what had happened in court".⁶

We drafted a letter to the UK Home Secretary, which quickly gathered more than 60 signatures from medical doctors from Australia, Austria, Germany, Italy, Norway, Poland, Sri Lanka, Sweden, the UK, and the USA, concluding: "It is our opinion that Mr Assange requires urgent expert medical assessment of both his physical and psychological state of health. Any medical treatment indicated should be administered in a properly equipped and expertly staffed university teaching hospital (tertiary care). Were such urgent assessment and treatment not to take place, we have real concerns, on the evidence currently available, that Mr Assange could die in prison. The medical situation is thereby urgent. There is no time to lose."¹

On May 31, 2019, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Nils Melzer, reported on his May 9, 2019, visit to Assange in Belmarsh, accompanied by two medical experts: "Mr Assange showed all symptoms typical for prolonged exposure to psychological torture, including extreme stress, chronic anxiety and intense psychological trauma."⁷ On Nov 1, 2019, Melzer warned, "Mr. Assange's continued exposure to arbitrariness and abuse may soon end up costing his life".⁸ Examples of the mandated communications from the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture to governments are provided in the [appendix](#).

Such warnings and Assange's presentation at the October hearing should not perhaps have come as a surprise. Assange had, after all, prior to his detention in Belmarsh prison in conditions amounting to solitary confinement, spent almost 7 years restricted to a few rooms in the Ecuadorian embassy in London. Here, he had been deprived of fresh air, sunlight, the ability to move and exercise freely, and access to adequate medical care. Indeed, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention had held the confinement to amount to "arbitrary deprivation of liberty".⁹

The UK Government refused to grant Assange safe passage to a hospital, despite requests from doctors who had been able to visit him in the embassy.¹⁰ **There was also a climate of fear surrounding the provision of health care in the embassy.** A medical practitioner who visited Assange at the embassy documented what a colleague of Assange reported: "[T]here had been many difficulties in finding medical practitioners who were willing to examine Mr Assange in the Embassy. The reasons given were uncertainty over whether medical insurance would cover the Ecuadorian

Embassy (a foreign jurisdiction); whether the association with Mr Assange could harm their livelihood or draw unwanted attention to them and their families; and discomfort regarding exposing this association when entering the Embassy. One medical practitioner expressed concern to one of the interviewees after the police took notes of his name and the fact that he was visiting Mr Assange. One medical practitioner wrote that he agreed to produce a medical report only on condition that his name not be made available to the wider public, fearing repercussions.”¹¹

Disturbingly, it seems that this environment of insecurity and intimidation, further compromising the medical care available to Assange, was by design. Assange was the subject of a 24/7 covert surveillance operation inside the embassy, as the emergence of secret video and audio recordings has shown.¹² He was surveilled in private and with visitors, including family, friends, journalists, lawyers, and doctors. Not only were his rights to privacy, personal life, legal privilege, and freedom of speech violated, but so, too, was his right to doctor–patient confidentiality.

We condemn the torture of Assange. We condemn the denial of his fundamental right to appropriate health care. We condemn the climate of fear surrounding the provision of health care to him. We condemn the violations of his right to doctor–patient confidentiality. Politics cannot be allowed to interfere with the right to health and the practice of medicine. In the experience of the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, the scale of state interference is without precedent: “In 20 years of work with victims of war, violence and political persecution I have never seen a group of democratic states ganging up to deliberately isolate, demonise and abuse a single individual for such a long time and with so little regard for human dignity and the rule of law.”⁷

We invite fellow doctors to join us as signatories to our letters to add further voice to our calls. Since doctors first began assessing Assange in the Ecuadorian embassy in 2015, expert medical opinion and doctors' urgent recommendations have been consistently ignored. Even as the world's designated authorities on arbitrary detention, torture, and human rights added their calls to doctors' warnings, governments have sidelined medical ethics, medical authority, and the human right to health. This politicisation of foundational medical principles is of grave concern to us, as it carries implications beyond the case of Assange. Abuse by politically motivated medical neglect sets a dangerous precedent, whereby the medical profession can be manipulated as a political tool, ultimately undermining our profession's impartiality, commitment to health for all, and obligation to do no harm.

Should Assange die in a UK prison, as the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture has warned, he will effectively have been tortured to death. Much of that torture will have taken place in a prison medical ward, on doctors' watch. The medical profession cannot afford to stand silently by, on the wrong side of torture and the wrong side of history, while such a travesty unfolds.

In the interests of defending medical ethics, medical authority, and the human right to health, and taking a stand against torture, together we can challenge and raise awareness of the abuses detailed in our letters. Our appeals are simple: we are calling upon governments to end the torture of Assange and ensure his access to the best available health care before it is too late. Our request to others is this: please join us. We are members of Doctors for Assange. We declare no competing interests.

Signatories of this letter are listed in the [appendix](#).

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Julian Assange Must Be Freed, Not Betrayed

When Julian Assange steps into Woolwich Crown Court on Feb. 24, true journalism will be the only crime on trial, writes John Pilger.

*John Pilger
Consortium News
February 17, 2020*

This Saturday, there will be a march from Australia House in London to Parliament Square, the centre of British democracy. People will carry pictures of the Australian publisher and journalist Julian Assange who, on Feb. 24, faces a court that will decide whether or not he is to be extradited to the United States and a living death.

I know Australia House well. As an Australian myself, I used to go there in my early days in London to read the newspapers from home. Opened by King George V over a century ago, its vastness of marble and stone, chandeliers and solemn portraits, imported from Australia when Australian soldiers were dying in the slaughter of the First World War, have ensured its landmark as an imperial pile of monumental servility.

As one of the oldest “diplomatic missions” in the United Kingdom, this relic of empire provides a pleasurable sinecure for Antipodean politicians: a “mate” rewarded or a troublemaker exiled.

Known as High Commissioner, the equivalent of an ambassador, the current beneficiary is George Brandis, who as Attorney General tried to water down Australia’s Race Discrimination Act and approved raids on whistleblowers who had revealed the truth about Australia’s illegal spying on East Timor during negotiations for the carve-up of that impoverished country’s oil and gas.

This led to the prosecution of whistleblowers Bernard Collaery and “Witness K”, on bogus charges. Like Julian Assange, they are to be silenced in a Kafkaesque trial and put away.

Australia House is the ideal starting point for Saturday’s march.

Serving the Great Game

“I confess,” wrote Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India, in 1898, “that countries are pieces on a chessboard upon which is being played out a great game for the domination of the world.””

We Australians have been in the service of the Great Game for a very long time. Having devastated our Indigenous people in an invasion and a war of attrition that continues to this day, we have spilt blood for our imperial masters in China, Africa,

Russia, the Middle East, Europe and Asia. No imperial adventure against those with whom we have no quarrel has escaped our dedication.

Deception has been a feature. When Prime Minister Robert Menzies sent Australian soldiers to Vietnam in the 1960s, he described them as a training team, requested by a beleaguered government in Saigon. It was a lie. A senior official of the Department of External Affairs wrote secretly that “although we have stressed the fact publicly that our assistance was given in response to an invitation by the government of South Vietnam”, **the order came from Washington.**

Two versions. The lie for us, the truth for them. As many as four million people died in the Vietnam war.

When Indonesia invaded East Timor in 1975, the Australian Ambassador, Richard Woolcott, secretly urged the government in Canberra to “act in a way which would be designed to minimise the public impact in Australia and show private understanding to Indonesia.” In other words, to lie. He alluded to the beckoning spoils of oil and gas in the Timor Sea which, boasted Foreign Minister Gareth Evans, were worth “zillions”.

In the genocide that followed, at least 200,000 East Timorese died. Australia recognised, almost alone, the legitimacy of the occupation.

When Prime Minister John Howard sent Australian special forces to invade Iraq with America and Britain in 2003, he — like George W. Bush and Tony Blair — lied that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. More than a million people died in Iraq.

WikiLeaks was not the first to call out the pattern of criminal lying in democracies that remain every bit as rapacious as in Lord Curzon’s day. The achievement of the remarkable publishing organisation founded by Julian Assange has been to provide the proof.

True Lies Exposed

WikiLeaks has informed us how illegal wars are fabricated, how governments are overthrown and violence is used in our name, how we are spied upon through our phones and screens. The true lies of presidents, ambassadors, political candidates, generals, proxies, political fraudsters have been exposed. One by one, these would-be emperors have realised they have no clothes.

It has been an unprecedented public service; above all, it is authentic journalism, whose value can be judged by the degree of apoplexy of the corrupt and their apologists.

For example, in 2016, WikiLeaks published the leaked emails of Hillary Clinton’s campaign manager John Podesta, which revealed a direct connection between Clinton, the foundation she shares with her husband and the funding of organised jihadism in the Middle East — terrorism.

One email disclosed that Islamic State (ISIS) was bankrolled by the governments of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, from which Clinton accepted huge “donations”. Moreover, as U.S. Secretary of State, she approved the world’s biggest ever arms sale to her

Saudi benefactors, worth more than \$80 billion. Thanks to her, U.S. arms sales to the world — for use in stricken countries like Yemen — doubled.

Revealed by WikiLeaks and published in The New York Times, the Podesta emails triggered a vituperative campaign against editor-in-chief Julian Assange, bereft of evidence. He was an “agent of Russia working to elect Trump”; the nonsensical “Russiagate” followed. **That WikiLeaks had also published more than 800,000 frequently damning documents from Russia was ignored.**

On an Australian Broadcasting Corporation programme, Four Corners, in 2017, Clinton was interviewed by Sarah Ferguson, who began: “No one could fail to be moved by the pain on your face at [the moment of Donald Trump’s inauguration] ... Do you remember how visceral it was for you?”

Having established Clinton’s visceral suffering, the fawning Ferguson described “Russia’s role” and the “damage done personally to you” by Julian Assange.

Clinton replied, “He [Assange] is very clearly a tool of Russian intelligence. And he has done their bidding.”

Ferguson said to Clinton, “Lots of people, including in Australia, think that Assange is a martyr of free speech and freedom of information. How would you describe him?”

Again, Clinton was allowed to defame Assange — a “nihilist” in the service of “dictators” — while Ferguson assured her interviewee she was “the icon of your generation”.

There was no mention of a leaked document, revealed by WikiLeaks, called Libya Tick Tock, prepared for Hillary Clinton, which described her as the central figure driving the destruction of the Libyan state in 2011. This resulted in 40,000 deaths, the arrival of ISIS in North Africa and the European refugee and migrant crisis.

The Only Crime on Trial

For me, this episode of Clinton’s interview — and there are many others – vividly illustrates the division between false and true journalism. On Feb. 24, when Julian Assange steps into Woolwich Crown Court, true journalism will be the only crime on trial.

I am sometimes asked why I have championed Assange. For one thing, I like and I admire him. He is a friend with astonishing courage; and he has a finely honed, wicked sense of humour. **He is the diametric opposite of the character invented and then assassinated by his enemies.**

As a reporter in places of upheaval all over the world, I have learned to compare the evidence I have witnessed with the words and actions of those with power. In this way, it is possible to get a sense of how our world is controlled and divided and manipulated, how language and debate are distorted to produce the propaganda of false consciousness.

When we speak about dictatorships, we call this brainwashing: the conquest of minds. **It is a truth we rarely apply to our own societies,** regardless of the trail of blood that leads back to us and which never dries.

WikiLeaks has exposed this. That is why Assange is in a maximum security prison in London facing concocted political charges in America, and why he has shamed so many of those paid to keep the record straight. Watch these journalists now look for cover as it dawns on them that the American fascists who have come for Assange may come for them, not least those on The Guardian who collaborated with WikiLeaks and won prizes and secured lucrative book and Hollywood deals based on his work, before turning on him.

In 2011, David Leigh, The Guardian's "investigations editor", told journalism students at City University in London that Assange was "quite deranged". When a puzzled student asked why, Leigh replied, "Because he doesn't understand the parameters of conventional journalism".

But it's precisely because he did understand that the "parameters" of the media often shielded vested and political interests and had nothing to do with transparency that the idea of WikiLeaks was so appealing to many people, especially the young, rightly cynical about the so-called "mainstream".

Leigh mocked the very idea that, once extradited, Assange would end up "wearing an orange jumpsuit". These were things, he said, "that he and his lawyer are saying in order to feed his paranoia".

The current U.S. charges against Assange centre on the Afghan Logs and Iraq Logs, which The Guardian published and Leigh worked on, and on the Collateral Murder video showing an American helicopter crew gunning down civilians and celebrating the crime. For this journalism, Assange faces 17 charges of "espionage" which carry prison sentences totalling 175 years.

Whether or not his prison uniform will be an "orange jumpsuit", **U.S. court files seen by Assange's lawyers reveal that, once extradited, Assange will be subject to Special Administrative Measures, known as SAMS.** A 2017 report by Yale University Law School and the Center for Constitutional Rights described SAMS as "the darkest corner of the US federal prison system" combining "the brutality and isolation of maximum security units with additional restrictions that **deny individuals almost any connection to the human world ... The net effect is to shield this form of torture from any real public scrutiny.**"

That Assange has been right all along, and getting him to Sweden was a fraud to cover an American plan to "render" him, is finally becoming clear to many who swallowed the incessant scuttlebutt of character assassination. "I speak fluent Swedish and was able to read all the original documents," Nils Melzer, the United Nations Rapporteur on Torture, said recently, "I could hardly believe my eyes. According to the testimony of the woman in question, a rape had never taken place at all. And not only that: the woman's testimony was later changed by the Stockholm Police without her involvement in order to somehow make it sound like a possible rape. I have all the documents in my possession, the emails, the text messages."

Keir Starmer is currently running for election as leader of the Labour Party in Britain. Between 2008 and 2013, he was Director of Public Prosecutions and responsible for the Crown Prosecution Service. According to Freedom of Information searches by the Italian journalist Stefania Maurizi, Sweden tried to drop the Assange case in 2011, but a CPS official in London told the Swedish prosecutor not to treat it as "just another extradition".

In 2012, she received an email from the CPS: **“Don’t you dare get cold feet!!!” Other CPS emails were either deleted or redacted. Why? Keir Starmer needs to say why.**

At the forefront of Saturday’s march will be John Shipton, Julian’s father, whose indefatigable support for his son is the antithesis of the collusion and cruelty of the governments of Australia, our homeland.

The roll call of shame begins with Julia Gillard, the Australian Labor prime minister who, in 2010, wanted to criminalise WikiLeaks, arrest Assange and cancel his passport — until the Australian Federal Police pointed out that no law allowed this and that Assange had committed no crime.

While falsely claiming to give him consular assistance in London, **it was the Gillard government’s shocking abandonment of its citizen that led to Ecuador granting political asylum to Assange in its London embassy.**

In a subsequent speech before the U.S. Congress, Gillard, a favourite of the US embassy in Canberra, broke records for sycophancy (according to the website Honest History) as she declared, over and over again, the fidelity of America’s “mates Down Under”.

Today, while Assange waits in his cell, Gillard travels the world, promoting herself as a feminist concerned about “human rights”, often in tandem with that other right-on feminist Hillary Clinton.

The truth is that Australia could have rescued Julian Assange and can still rescue him.

In 2010, I arranged to meet a prominent Liberal (Conservative) Member of Parliament, Malcolm Turnbull. As a young barrister in the 1980s, Turnbull had successfully fought the British Government’s attempts to prevent the publication of the book, *Spycatcher*, whose author Peter Wright, a spy, had exposed Britain’s “deep state”.

We talked about his famous victory for free speech and publishing and I described the miscarriage of justice awaiting Assange — the fraud of his arrest in Sweden and its connection with an American indictment that tore up the U.S. Constitution and the rule of international law.

Turnbull appeared to show genuine interest and an aide took extensive notes. I asked him to deliver a letter to the Australian government from Gareth Peirce, the renowned British human rights lawyer who represents Assange.

In the letter, Peirce wrote, “Given the extent of the public discussion, frequently on the basis of entirely false assumptions... it is very hard to attempt to preserve for [Julian Assange] any presumption of innocence. Mr. Assange has now hanging over him not one but two Damocles swords, of potential extradition to two different jurisdictions in turn for two different alleged crimes, neither of which are crimes in his own country, and that his personal safety has become at risk in circumstances that are highly politically charged.”

Turnbull promised to deliver the letter, follow it through and let me know. I subsequently wrote to him several times, waited and heard nothing.

In 2018, John Shipton wrote a deeply moving letter to the then prime minister of Australia asking him to exercise the diplomatic power at his government’s disposal

and bring Julian home. He wrote that he feared that if Julian was not rescued, there would be a tragedy and his son would die in prison. **He received no reply. The prime minister was Malcolm Turnbull.**

Last year, when the current prime minister, Scott Morrison, a former public relations man, was asked about Assange, he replied in his customary way, "He should face the music!"

When Saturday's march reaches the Houses of Parliament, said to be "the Mother of Parliaments", Morrison and Gillard and Turnbull and all those who have betrayed Julian Assange should be called out; history and decency will not forget them or those who remain silent now.

And if there is any sense of justice left in the land of Magna Carta, the travesty that is the case against this heroic Australian must be thrown out. Or beware, all of us.

The march on Saturday, Feb. 22 begins at Australia House in Aldwych, London WC2B 4LA, at 12.30 p.m.: assemble at 11.30 a.m.

John Pilger is an Australian-British journalist and filmmaker based in London. Pilger's Web site is: www.johnpilger.com. In 2017, the British Library announced a John Pilger Archive of all his written and filmed work. The British Film Institute includes his 1979 film, "Year Zero: the Silent Death of Cambodia," among the 10 most important documentaries of the 20th century. Some of his previous contributions to Consortium News can be found here.

<https://consortiumnews.com/2020/02/17/john-pilger-julian-assange-must-be-freed-not-betrayed/>

Julian Assange: Australian MPs call on UK to block US extradition

Politicians from WikiLeaks founder's home country have flown to UK to visit him in jail

*Ben Quinn
The Guardian
18 Feb. 2020*

Boris Johnson should block attempts to extradite Julian Assange to the US, say two Australian MPs who visited the Wikileaks founder in prison, describing him afterwards as "a man under enormous pressure" and whose health and mental health had deteriorated.

George Christensen, a Liberal National MP for the ruling party in Australia told a press conference outside the gates of Belmarsh prison that he knew of information, which would come to light during the start of the extradition hearing next week, that would make people in Australia "sit up and worry".

He said: "I think that now is the time that the government that I am a part of needs to be standing up and saying to the UK and the US: 'Enough is enough leave that bloke alone and let him come home.'"

Andrew Wilkie, an independent federal MP and the co-chair of the Bring Julian Assange Home parliamentary group, who joined Christensen in London, told a press conference in London on Tuesday morning that the extradition of Assange, who has been charged by the US with conspiring to hack into a secret Pentagon computer network, would set a dangerous precedent.

"This will establish a precedent that if you are a journalist who does anything that offends any government in the world then you face the very real prospect of being extradited to that country," he said. "This is a political case and what is at stake is not just the life of Julian Assange. It is about the future of journalism."

Wilkie said that Assange had "done the right thing" by publishing secret video in 2010 showing US air crew falsely claiming to have encountered a fire in Baghdad and then laughing at the dead after launching an airstrike that killed a dozen people, including two Iraqis working for the Reuters news agency.

Speaking after he and Christensen had spent a half an hour with Assange, who they said had asked about his family and had been worried about the impact of Australia's bushfires, he said: "He faces charges of espionage and computer hacking. If he is convicted of those charges he faces up to 175 years in prison, in a US federal prison. It's a life sentence and could almost be said to be a death sentence. Why wouldn't you be in there feeling under enormous pressure. That helps to explain why he is in the state that he is."

Assange is no longer being kept in solitary confinement and his health is improving, WikiLeaks said on Tuesday. WikiLeaks spokesperson Kristinn Hrafnsson said he had been moved from solitary confinement in the medical wing to a different part of the prison with 40 other inmates after complaints from his legal team and prisoners, who had petitioned the governor.

Christensen said he had sent a letter to Johnson in which he noted that the prime minister had recently admitted that Britain's extradition treaty with the US was "imbalanced" following the rejection of an extradition request for Anne Sacoolas, the woman accused of causing the death of motorcyclist Harry Dunn.

Christensen said: "I am a big fan of Trump, I am a big fan of Bojo [Boris Johnson] but I'll tell you what I value more: free speech," he said. "There are a lot of Australians on the right and left who think that Julian Assange is a rat bag, that I am a rat bag, but that he should be brought home."

"I hope that Boris Johnson withdraws this case that is before the courts," he said. "There is a problem here ... What if it was a British journalist or an outspoken British citizen who went on holiday to another country that has an extradition treaty with China, and China wanted to extradite that British citizen?"

John McDonnell, the shadow chancellor, is expected to visit Assange in prison on Wednesday. The first part of the hearing next week at Woolwich crown court will cover arguments that the extradition is politically motivated and an abuse of process. A decision is unlikely to be handed down for several months - and even then, it is likely the losing side would appeal.

The Australian MPs' appearance in London before the start of an extradition hearing next week came as a letter by a group of doctors representing 117 physicians and

psychologists from 18 nations called for an end to what they described as “the psychological torture and medical neglect of Julian Assange”.

The letter, which was published in the medical journal the Lancet and has also been sent to the Australian foreign affairs minister, Marise Payne, expresses concern over Assange’s fitness to take part in the legal proceedings.

The letter, which echoes the concerns raised by the UN special rapporteur on torture, Nils Melzer, on Assange’s health, adds: “Should Assange die in a UK prison, as the UN special rapporteur on torture has warned, he will have effectively been tortured to death.

“Much of that torture will have taken place in a prison medical ward, on doctors’ watch. The medical profession cannot afford to stand silently by, on the wrong side of torture and the wrong side of history, while such a travesty unfolds.”

Assange’s father, John Shipton, told the BBC’s Victoria Derbyshire programme on Tuesday: “The ceaseless anxiety that Julian’s been under for now 10 years, it has had a profoundly deleterious effect. I can’t speculate on to his state of mind, but I imagine that he will be really worried because being sent to the United States is a death sentence.”

Assange is being held in Belmarsh prison in south-east London.

A US grand jury has indicted him on 18 charges – 17 of which fall under the Espionage Act – around conspiracy to receive, obtaining and disclosing classified diplomatic and military documents.

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/feb/18/julian-assange-australian-mps-uk-boris-johnson-block-us-extradition>

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Support grows for New Zealand rallies to free Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning

*Tom Peters
World Socialist Web Site
18 February 2020*

The Socialist Equality Group (SEG) has found growing support in New Zealand for WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and whistleblower Chelsea Manning, despite a media blackout on any news about these courageous individuals. They have been persecuted for the past decade for exposing US war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq, and government corruption and gangsterism throughout the world. Assange is in prison in the UK awaiting trial for extradition to the US, while Manning has been re-imprisoned in the US in an attempt to force her to testify against Assange.

The SEG is holding a rally in Cuba Street, Wellington on Sunday, February 23 at 3:00 p.m. as part of international demonstrations to demand freedom for Assange and Manning. The group Free Assange NZ is holding further rallies on February 24 at midday outside parliament in Wellington, and in Auckland outside the UK consulate. The Socialist Equality Party (Australia) has called several rallies (details below).

Sunday's event will be addressed by SEG members Tom Peters and John Braddock, as well as Free Assange NZ's Alex Hills. Last year, Hills memorably denounced the UK government and media hypocrisy at a World Press Freedom Day event in Wellington.

Speaking to the World Socialist Web Site, Hills said many people know little about WikiLeaks, but "when you start to talk to them, the encouraging thing is that the truth does convince, and soon enough you've got someone on your side."

In 2018, her group started an international movement called Candles4Assange with a vigil on Assange's birthday. **For Assange's 48th birthday last year, there were events in 62 cities in 25 countries.** Free Assange NZ also gathered more than 2,000 signatures for a petition urging the Labour Party-Greens-NZ First government "to provide Julian Assange with permanent political asylum in New Zealand." Parliament refused to even discuss the petition.

Hills told the WSWS, "I have volunteered for the Greens in my past. I wouldn't do that again after their atrocious reaction to the asylum petition." She added that "MPs are becoming increasingly disconnected from the people" and successive governments had integrated New Zealand more closely into the US war machine. Hills had personally approached Green MP Jan Logie, Labour MP Paul Eagle and opposition National Party MP Nicola Young, all of whom refused to support Assange. Logie echoed the "Russiagate" smear — lies peddled by the US intelligence agencies that WikiLeaks worked with Russia in 2016 to obtain leaks exposing former US presidential candidate Hillary Clinton's ties to Wall Street banks and the Democratic Party's sabotage of Bernie Sanders' campaign for the nomination.

Hills had also contacted the protest group Peace Action Wellington, which includes anarchists, but "they didn't seem to want to know" about the campaign to free Assange.

The media's hostility to Assange was linked to its embrace of US warmongering, Hills said. She noted that when the 2003 invasion of Iraq was revealed to have been based on lies about "weapons of mass destruction," this was "front page news." Today, however, there is silence about WikiLeaks' publication of emails from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) casting serious doubt on allegations that the Assad regime carried out gas attacks in Syria — claims used to justify US military intervention.

Urging people to join the upcoming protests, Hills said: "The precedent that's being set is that war criminals can continue in the parliaments and elsewhere, that we're in a situation where money rules and corporates rule. That can't be the future, we can't hand that to our children."

The WSWS also spoke with Charlene, part of Free Assange NZ in Auckland. She described the "Collateral Murder" video released by WikiLeaks as "the biggest visual horror" from the war in Iraq. It shows innocent people, including journalists, being massacred from a US helicopter gunship. "There needs to be someone held accountable, because if we don't have that then the people lose their power," she said.

"I worry for my children about what the future will hold if they get Julian over to the US. First and foremost, that we'll never see Julian again, and that's horrendous, and that we would lose such a fabulous mind, such a humanitarian. But then the flow-on effect is that journalism, as we know it, would be shut down. The future looks very

bleak if those who have a passion for telling the truth are unable to do so and they're punished for it."

Speaking about the media's demonisation of Assange, **Charlene said: "I've stood on the corner by TVNZ's building and I told a woman off who walked past and called him a rapist. I won't stand for it.** They're lying, or they don't know anything. We have to be strong and we have to be unwavering in standing up for him." The Swedish rape allegations against Assange, the basis for a years-long smear campaign, have been completely discredited.

David, a Wellington barista, told the WWSW he was supporting the protest because "I think Assange and Manning and Edward Snowden are very brave, and the fact that the Socialist Equality Group is putting such a focus on this is brilliant."

He denounced the media for failing to discuss "the crimes that have been committed" by the US in the Middle East. Instead, "they're talking about somebody revealing those crimes, and then smattering him with the image of being treasonous. It's so backward, and it's contrary to the founding principles on which America was based: transparency, accountability, speaking out against injustices. The people have the right to know how their leaders are acting and behaving."

"The media are owned by large corporations in alignment with those in power and their ideology is harmonious," David said. "They don't want to disrupt the system that keeps them so well-financed."

Bernie, a transport worker in Wellington, said he fears for Assange's safety and "that they might degrade him so much mentally, to make him crumble, to break a person down and disintegrate their life all for the sake of power and control."

Bernie compared the treatment of Assange with the Saudi Arabian regime's murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. The brutal killing "was very downplayed [by the Trump administration]. Its reaction was quite shockingly insipid, like it didn't really matter what happened because he said things that the Saudi government didn't like."

Speaking of Washington's "endless warmongering," he said: "There's a broader assault on human rights and also trying to normalise violence in a way that will make us desensitised to anything that happens in the future." People should join the protests "because they don't want to live in a world that tortures people for their political views," he said.

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/02/18/asnz-f18.html>

Jailed Wikileaks founder Assange's health improving -- spokesman

Andrew MacAskill & Sarah Young
Reuters
18 Feb. 2020

LONDON - Jailed WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange is no longer being kept in solitary confinement and his health is improving, his spokesman Kristinn Hrafnsson told reporters on Tuesday.

Assange, 48, is in Belmarsh high-security prison in London, fighting an extradition request from the United States where he faces 18 counts including conspiring to hack government computers and violating an espionage law. He could spend decades in prison if convicted.

His supporters had expressed concern about the state of his health after he appeared confused during a court hearing in October, struggling to recall his age and name and saying he was unable to think properly.

Assange was moved from solitary confinement in the medical wing to a different part of the prison with 40 other inmates after his legal team and prisoners complained that his treatment was unfair, Hrafnsson said.

"I saw him about 10 days ago -- he has improved thanks to the pressure from his legal team, the general public, and amazingly, **actually from other inmates in Belmarsh Prison to get him out of isolation**," Hrafnsson said ahead of an extradition hearing that starts next week.

Australian-born Assange made global headlines in early 2010 when WikiLeaks published a classified U.S. military video showing a 2007 attack by Apache helicopters in Baghdad that killed a dozen people, including two Reuters news staff.

WikiLeaks later angered the United States by publishing caches of leaked military documents and diplomatic cables.

Assange has consistently presented himself as a champion of free speech being persecuted for exposing abuses of power. But his critics paint him as a dangerous figure complicit in Russian efforts to undermine the West.

He fled to the Ecuadorean embassy in London in 2012 to avoid extradition to Sweden, where he was wanted for questioning about allegations of sex crimes which have since been dropped. He spent seven years holed up in the embassy until Ecuador decided to stop giving him refuge and he was dragged out last May.

Earlier, a group of doctors representing 117 physicians and psychologists from 18 nations called in a letter for an end to what they described as "the psychological torture and medical neglect of Julian Assange".

His father, John Shipton, said Assange's long confinement indoors had damaged his health and feared that sending his son to the US would be akin to a "death sentence".

"His situation is dire, he has had nine years of ceaseless psychological torture where false accusations are constantly being made," he told reporters.

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-britain-assange/wikileaks-founder-assanges-health-improving-in-prison-spokesman-idUKKBN20C19O?rpc=401&>

The dumbwaiter defense

James C. Goodale
Columbia Journalism Review
Feb. 18, 2020

EARLIER THIS MONTH, a Brazilian judge stopped the prosecution of Glenn Greenwald under Brazil's hacking laws. The case against Greenwald, a journalist for

The Intercept, was apparently modeled on the indictment of Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, under United States hacking laws. Both cases are examples of governments using hacking laws to stifle political speech — and we should expect more of the same.

The public tends to think of Assange's case as a massive First Amendment attack under the Espionage Act, for passing on leaks from a whistleblower and former Army intelligence analyst named Chelsea Manning. Assange, however, was also charged with breaking US hacking laws for allegedly agreeing with Manning to crack a password to a government computer network. The case against Assange is flimsy—as is the one against Greenwald. **Both cases are based on the same theory, first advanced by Mike Pompeo and the Justice Department, and rooted in a case known as Bartnicki.**

Bartnicki v. Vopper, decided by the Supreme Court in 2001, ruled that if stolen documents are delivered to journalists — in the Bartnicki case, to a radio station — they can be published (or broadcast), as long as the journalists received them passively and did not participate in their theft. The case did not attempt to answer what happens if journalists actively pursue sources for leaks.

Recently, the Justice Department has moved to fill the hole left open by Bartnicki—that is, how much journalists can do to pursue a leak. **The assertion is essentially that a journalist can never actively seek the release of classified documents. This is what the Assange and Greenwald cases are really about.**

In Greenwald's case, a hacker delivered him unsolicited information, which revealed that a Brazilian judge was in cahoots with the incumbent government to imprison Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a former Brazilian president, to stop him from running again. Greenwald published the information and was later indicted for participating in the hack. Greenwald had moved from being a passive receiver of information to being slightly more active, as its distributor. He moved from being a dumbwaiter who doesn't talk to sources to a journalist who does.

Assange had many more conversations with Manning than Greenwald had with his source. After Manning dumped her leaks — classified information on US actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, mostly — on Wikileaks, Assange encouraged Manning to obtain more information because, he said, “curious eyes never run dry in my experience.” That is standard journalistic behavior, as reporters encourage their sources to provide them more information on a daily basis. Surely, such encouragement is protected by the First Amendment. If Neil Sheehan, a reporter for the New York Times, had not persistently encouraged Daniel Ellsberg, a military analyst, to leak the Pentagon Papers, they would likely have never seen the light of day. (I led the Times lawyers in that case.)

The US government also alleges that Assange had a conversation with Manning about cracking a password to conceal Manning's identity while he obtained classified military documents. As described in Assange's indictment, however, the conversation was incomplete, and it will be surprising if the government manages to prove that Assange directly and materially assisted Manning in cracking the password. Because of the acute First Amendment implications of the case, Assange's direct and material assistance should be required before stripping away First Amendment protection for Assange's news gathering activities.

The US government has, for all practical purposes, admitted that it has a weak case against Assange for hacking. In May 2019, a grand jury in Virginia indicted Assange under the Espionage Act, and federal prosecutors subpoenaed Manning, ostensibly, to fill in the blanks of the alleged password cracking conspiracy. Manning has now been in jail for most of the past eleven months for refusing to testify. She says she never will. Meanwhile, Assange is imprisoned in the United Kingdom with an extradition hearing scheduled for the end of this month. The hacking charge, it seems, was trumped up against him in order to prompt his extradition.

The hacking charge against Assange also provides the US government with a PR line that makes Assange sound like just another hacker rather than a champion of free speech. The Justice Department, you may recall, first unsealed its indictment of Assange for hacking and only later did it amend the indictment to include charges under the Espionage Act. It is not untoward to suggest that the order of the release of these indictments was part of a PR strategy to get the public on the government's side before getting to the Espionage Act's more controversial charges.

In any event, we can expect that governments worldwide will attempt to follow the example of the US and Brazil. Conversations between sources and reporters will be scrutinized to determine whether reporters crossed **some imaginary line between passive receipt of information and active pursuit of it**. Further, governments may use anti-hacking statutes to cover their tracks, allowing them to easily confuse the public and courts with laws that are vague and full of technical gibberish.

The end game will be for governments, particularly authoritarian ones, to control the flow of information. **In 2017, the US government classified 49 million documents.** Governments cannot plug leaks of documents at that magnitude —they can only put a finger in the dike. And they can scare the hell out of journalists.

James C. Goodale is the former Vice Chairman and General Counsel of the New York Times.

<https://www.cjr.org/opinion/greenwald-intercept-assange-manning-wikileaks.php>

Läkare: Behandlingen av Assange är tortyr

Julian Assange utsätts för tortyr i det brittiska fängelse där han sitter. Det menar över hundra läkare och psykologer från 18 länder i ett öppet brev i tidskriften The Lancet. "Vi fördömer tortyren av Assange. Vi fördömer att han förvägras sin grundläggande rätt till lämplig sjukvård", heter det i brevet.

Wikileaksgrundaren sitter fängslad i Storbritannien i väntan på att förhandlingar ska inledas med USA nästa vecka. Han kan bli utlämnad till USA för att ha avslöjat försvarshemligheter och riskerar att dömas till 175 år i amerikanskt fängelse.

Julian Assange greps av brittisk polis i april i fjol efter att ha tillbringat nästan sju år på Ecuadors ambassad i London. Dit tog han sin tillflykt för att undvika utlämning till Sverige, där han sedan 2011 misstänktes för flera sexualbrott. Samtliga svenska fall har preskriberats eller lagts ner.

Sedan i maj avtjänar han ett nästan ett år långt fängelsestraff för brott mot brittiska borgensregler.

Nils Melzer, FN:s särskilda sändebud för tortyr, har tidigare varnat att Assange visar symptom som tyder på att han har utsatts för psykologisk tortyr.

Förra året flyttades han tillfälligt till en vårdavdelning på grund av dålig hälsa. Hans hälsotillstånd har dessutom tvingat domstolen i London att flera gånger ställa in planerade förhör med honom.

I ett liknande upprop i höstas varnade läkare att Assanges hälsa är så dålig att han riskerar att dö i fängelset.

Jaqueline Balcer Bednarska
SVT
18 februari 2020

<https://www.svt.se/nyheter/utrikes/lakare-behandlingen-av-assange-ar-tortyr-1>

Australian MPs In 'No Doubt' Julian Assange Is a 'Political Prisoner' After Visiting Him in Belmarsh

Mohamed Elmaazi
Sputnik
19.02.2020

Two Australian MPs who have visited Julian Assange in Belmarsh maximum security prison say that there is no way the WikiLeaks publisher can receive a fair trial in the US, and that it is "madness" that he is being detained in the first place for engaging in what they characterise as legitimate journalistic practices.

- Aussie MPs declare Julian Assange a "political prisoner".
- WikiLeaks publisher is being targeted as revenge for revealing US "war crimes".
- Prosecution condemned as a "threat" to free speech and a free press.
- Assange is confined to his cell 20+ hours a day, despite being removed from solitary.

Australian MPs Andrew Wilkie and George Christensen visited Julian Assange in the UK, in Belmarsh prison, on 18 February 2020, and have been left in "absolutely no doubt" that the WikiLeaks founder is a "political prisoner". The two MPs co-chair the Bring Julian Assange Home parliamentary group and travelled to the UK to check on Assange's well-being as well as lobby for his release.

"The US is determined to extradite Assange to get even" Mr Wilkie argued at the gates of Belmarsh, adding that "the solution" to bringing Assange's incarceration to an end "must be political". He called the idea that the UK was even considering having a court case "madness" rather than simply telling the administration of Donald Trump to "back off".

Assange faces 175 years in prison for his role in publishing classified US documents revealing “hard evidence of war crimes”, as Mr Wilkie put it, committed by US-led forces in Iraq, Afghanistan and US-occupied Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Mr Wilkie was an officer in the Australian infantry for over two decades before he became an intelligence analyst working for the Australian prime minister and cabinet office. He resigned just before the illegal US/UK-led 2003 invasion of Iraq and blew the whistle over "fraudulent" claims being made by the Australian government in defence of that war.

“It is completely and utterly unacceptable” for Assange to be facing espionage charges in the US for his role in revealing war crimes committed by the US, Mr Wilkie contended.

“Julian reminded me that **we met at a book event in Melbourne not long after I resigned and before he set up WikiLeaks**”, Mr Wilke said. He confirmed that his experience as a “whistleblower” in 2003 informed his “special interest” for Assange and his support for WikiLeaks. “We’re peas in a pod in that we both believe misconduct should be publicised, that the public has a right to know when governments do wrong in our name.”

“I do not know that there is a way that Julian fairly and justly could ever be imprisoned, could ever be extradited” Mr Christensen, of the right-wing National Party, said. The self-proclaimed “big fan” of US president Donald Trump and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson re-iterated comments he made during a press conference earlier in the day that despite his affection for the two world-leaders he is a “bigger fan” of democracy and free speech.

“He’s one of ours.. He's not a Brit, he's not an American, and he should be returned home”, Mr Christensen concluded.

Assange Remains Under "A Lot of Pressure"

A victory for Assange was declared on 24 January when prison authorities moved him from solitary confinement in the medical wing of the maximum security prison to a populated area with 40 – 50 inmates. However, the two MPs said that Assange told them he was nonetheless being confined to his cell for more than 20 hours a day, which Mr Wilkie considered to be 'effectively solitary confinement'.

The MPs made clear that while they are not medical experts it is nonetheless evident that the award-winning journalist and editor was under “a lot of pressure”. They added that they had no reason to doubt the conclusions of UN torture expert Professor Nils Melzer.

Melzer, and two other renowned medical experts in examining torture victims, concluded that Assange exhibited symptoms of prolonged exposure to “psychological torture”. He has also argued that the behaviour of the UK, Swedish and US governments in this case is undermining democracy and the Rule of Law.

A Growing Movement in Assange's Favour

Mr Wilkie concluded his thoughts by saying that momentum was beginning to build in Australia as **exemplified by the growing membership of the Bring Julian Assange parliamentary group and the recent intervention by the former PM Kevin Rudd,**

He expects that more parliamentarians will join the call for their government to intervene on behalf of the imprisoned publisher after Mr Wilkie and Mr Christensen report back their findings.

Assange's lawyers have long complained that they are being denied proper access to their client by prison authorities. As a result, they say Assange is unable to properly prepare for his defence in what is a very complicated case. Judge Venessa Baraitser has repeatedly refused to intervene on Assange's behalf despite being provided the precedent of another judge doing so with the same prison authorities at Belmarsh.

Barrister Jen Robinson told the press on the morning of 18 February that until recently they couldn't even hand papers to their client, and that his laptop – which prison authorities reportedly provided to him after months of delays – is unsuitable for his needs.

The substantive extradition hearings begin on 24 February and will last for one week, during which time both the state and the defence will present their case. The hearings will then pause until 20 April when they are expected to restart for a further three weeks. Assange's lawyers estimate that the whole process may end up taking a number of years, if appeals up to the Supreme Court are factored in.

<https://sputniknews.com/uk/202002191078345970-australian-mps-in-no-doubt-julian-assange-is-a-political-prisoner-after-visiting-him-in-belmarsh/>

German politicians and cultural professionals demand release of Julian Assange

*Peter Schwarz
World Socialist Web Site
19 February 2020*

German-speaking politicians, cultural workers and journalists have published a joint appeal, "Release Julian Assange from prison," which supports the demand "for the immediate release of Julian Assange, on medical grounds as well on the basis of the rule of law." **The 130 initial signatories have now been joined by 22,000 other supporters.**

The appeal expresses "great concern for the life of the journalist and founder of Wikileaks" and quotes the findings of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, Nils Melzer, saying, Assange showed "all the symptoms typical of victims of prolonged psychological torture." The appeal also refers to the open letter from more than 60 medical doctors, who demand "Assange be transferred to a university hospital, as his state of health is now considered life-threatening."

"It is obvious that Julian Assange cannot recuperate under the current conditions of detention, nor can he prepare for his extradition proceedings, which are scheduled to begin on February 24, 2020," the appeal says. "Both constitute serious violations of

fundamental principles of human rights and the rule of law, making a fair trial impossible and exposing Julian Assange to considerable suffering and health risks.”

The appeal goes on to say, “We remind the German media that Assange is one of their own and that the defence of press freedom is a fundamental tenet of democracy. Notwithstanding the allegations levelled against Assange, we urge the United Kingdom, on the human rights and medical grounds outlined above, to release Julian Assange from custody immediately so that he can recover under expert medical supervision and exercise his fundamental rights without hindrance. We also call on the German Government to make representations to the British Government to this effect.”

Among the first signatories of the appeal are nine former federal ministers from the ranks of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Free Democratic Party (FDP) and the Greens, including former Vice-Chancellor, Economics and Foreign Affairs Minister and SPD Chairman Sigmar Gabriel, former Justice Ministers Herta Däubler-Gmelin (SPD), Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger (FDP) and Katarina Barley (SPD) and former Environment Minister Jürgen Trittin (Greens). The former president of the Bundestag, Wolfgang Thierse (SPD), has also signed the appeal.

Among the numerous cultural professionals who support the appeal are the directors Claus Peymann, Volker Schlöndorff, Milo Rau and Frank Castorf, the actor Rolf Becker, writers Sibylle Berg, Daniela Dahn, Eugen Ruge and Uwe Timm, cabaret artists Volker Pispers and Georg Schramm, musicians Igor Levit and Wolfgang Niedecken, the philosopher Richard David Precht, publishers Reinhold Neven DuMont and Jakob Augstein, and the former West Deutsche Rundfunk (WDR) director Fritz Pleitgen.

The PEN Centre Germany, Reporters Without Borders, the German Journalists Union in Verdi and the Whistleblower Network e.V. are also among the first signatories of the appeal.

It was initiated by investigative journalist Günter Wallraff, who has made a name for himself since the 1960s with his social and socio-political reportage. On February 6, Wallraff, Gabriel, former Interior Minister Gerhart Baum (FDP) and the Left Party Member of Parliament Sevim Dağdelen jointly presented the appeal to the media at the Federal Press Conference.

The publication of the joint appeal for the liberation of Assange is part of a change in the public presentation of the case in Germany. Up to now, the media had reported only sporadically on the case and, above all, repeated the false accusations and slander against the journalist.

This has changed in the last two weeks. For the first time, many media outlets have provided critical information about the Assange case, drawing on the research of UN Special Rapporteur Nils Melzer, who has long protested against the persecution of Assange and warned of its consequences for press freedom.

On January 31, the Swiss online publication Republika published an in-depth interview with Melzer under the title, “A murderous system is being created before our eyes,” **in which he meticulously unpicks the shameful conspiracy of the Swedish judiciary against Assange.**

Melzer, who speaks Swedish and has analysed the original documents of the Swedish judiciary, says the following about the rape accusations against Assange: "I couldn't believe my eyes: according to the woman involved herself, there had never been a rape ... The statement of this woman was subsequently rewritten by the Stockholm police without her participation."

What was striking, Melzer wrote, was the coincidence of these accusations with the publication of the so-called "Afghan War Diary," one of the biggest leaks in the history of the US military, which WikiLeaks was able to publish in Der Spiegel, the Guardian and the New York Times in 2010.

On February 5, "Heute Journal," the main news program of broadcaster ZDF, reported on the case for several minutes. **The report, which noted, "Hacker, spy, suspected rapist — none of this is true," was the first time such a thing had been reported on public television, and Nils Melzer was also reported on at length.** "If you scratch the surface a bit," he said, "the contradictions immediately come out."

A full-page advert appeared in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung demanding Assange's release. This was followed by the Süddeutsche Zeitung, broadcaster Deutschlandfunk, the Frankfurter Rundschau, Tagesspiegel, taz, etc. ... Many large newspapers and media bodies, which for years had helped to spread the absurd and publicly refuted accusations and slander about Assange, now reported critically on the case.

The long-time taz journalist Bettina Gaus even condescended to admit, "The public has been manipulated in the Assange case. Me too." Self-critically she wrote, "I always found the Assange case unappetizing, and I was not very interested in it. I don't like the man. I thought that somehow, everything will be correct. If I thought about it at all." And, "Apparently, I wasn't the only one."

The change of course by the media and some politicians in the Assange case is undoubtedly due to massive pressure from public opinion. The slanders and accusations against the courageous journalist, orchestrated by state authorities and supported by right-wing feminist circles, never penetrated very deeply. And the mistrust grew with increasing militarism and the aggressive appearance of right-wing extremists supported by the establishment parties, as in the election of the Thuringia state premier with the votes of far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), Christian Democrats (CDU) and FDP.

Under these circumstances, **the worldwide campaign of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the initiatives of local support groups in defence of Assange have had a great impact.** The ICFI had already organized international meetings and rallies for Assange's liberation before his arrest in London.

In a statement on June 20, 2019, the WSWWS editorial board then called for a "worldwide campaign to prevent Julian Assange's rendition to the US!" "Only by organizing protest actions on an international scale—meetings, rallies, demonstrations, and public conferences—will it be possible to frustrate and defeat the plans of reactionary governments, their intelligence agencies and political agents to silence and destroy Julian Assange," the WSWWS wrote. "The aim of this campaign must be to politically arouse and mobilize the international working class — the overwhelming majority of the population and the most powerful social force on the planet — in defence of Julian Assange and, in fact, the democratic and social rights of all workers."

The statement further predicted: "There will come a time when all the sordid details of this plan to destroy Assange will become fully known to an outraged public." This has now been confirmed.

However, it would be dangerous to believe that the high-ranking politicians who are now advocating the release of the WikiLeaks founder will lift a finger to achieve this. It should be noted that many of the initial signatories of the joint appeal are no longer in office. Not a single politician today having governmental responsibility supports it. With his own cynical openness, Gabriel, who as foreign minister and vice-chancellor would have had numerous opportunities to help Assange and offer him asylum, declared at the Federal Press Conference that in retrospect, he would not have acted otherwise. "I understand every member of the federal government who does not deal with cases like this one in public," he said. "That is the difference between my present situation and my past one."

In other words, Gabriel is only in favour of Assange as long as this has no practical consequences. In this way, he is seeking to adapt to the widespread sentiments and prevent them from slipping out of the control of the establishment parties and moving further to the left. Foreign policy motives also play a role. Gabriel himself, and several other politicians who have signed the appeal, advocate a stronger independence of German imperialism vis-à-vis American imperialism.

Merkel's former foreign minister, who now sits on the supervisory board of Deutsche Bank, also limits his support for Assange to the demand for "due legal process." He described the courageous journalist as a "border-liner" and said that the rule of law must prove itself precisely when "we are dealing with people with whom we cannot agree, who are strangers to us and sometimes seem odd to us, or who have committed serious crimes." Gabriel did not say what crimes Assange had committed in his opinion.

Liberating Assange and preventing his extradition to the US remains a task for the working class. As the WSWS wrote on June 20, the campaign must "politically arouse and mobilize the international working class." We call on all WSWS readers to join this campaign.

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/02/19/germ-f19.html>

Donald Trump 'offered Julian Assange a pardon if he denied Russia link to hack'

Offer claim made at WikiLeaks founder's extradition hearing

*Owen Bowcott & Julian Borger
The Guardian
19 Feb. 2020*

WikiLeaks' founder Julian Assange leaves Westminster magistrates court in London after a previous hearing last month.

WikiLeaks' founder Julian Assange leaves Westminster magistrates court in London after a previous hearing last month. Photograph: Simon Dawson/Reuters

Donald Trump offered Julian Assange a pardon if he would say Russia was not involved in leaking Democratic party emails, a court in London has been told.

The extraordinary claim was made at Westminster magistrates court before the opening next week of Assange's legal battle to block attempts to extradite him to the US.

Assange's barrister, Edward Fitzgerald QC, referred to evidence alleging that the former US Republican congressman Dana Rohrabacher had been to see Assange, now 48, while he was still in the Ecuadorian embassy in August 2017.

Assange appeared in court on Wednesday by videolink from Belmarsh prison, wearing dark tracksuit bottoms and a brown jumper over a white shirt.

A statement from Assange's lawyer Jennifer Robinson shows "Mr Rohrabacher going to see Mr Assange and saying, on instructions from the president, he was offering a pardon or some other way out, if Mr Assange ... said Russia had nothing to do with the DNC [Democratic National Committee] leaks", Fitzgerald told Westminster magistrates court.

District Judge Vanessa Baraitser, who is hearing the case at Westminster, said the evidence is admissible.

White House spokeswoman, Stephanie Grisham, told reporters: "The president barely knows Dana Rohrabacher other than he's an ex-congressman. He's never spoken to him on this subject or almost any subject."

"It is a complete fabrication and a total lie," Grisham said. "This is probably another never ending hoax and total lie from the DNC."

Trump, however, invited Rohrabacher to the White House in April 2017 after seeing the then congressman on Fox TV defending the president.

In September 2017, the White House confirmed that Rohrabacher had called the then chief of staff, John Kelly, to talk about a possible deal with Assange.

Rohrabacher told the Wall Street Journal that as part of the deal he was proposing, Assange would have to hand over a computer drive or other data storage device that would prove that Russia was not the source of the hacked emails.

"He would get nothing, obviously, if what he gave us was not proof," Rohrabacher said.

The report quoted an unnamed administration official as saying that Kelly had told Rohrabacher that the proposal "was best directed to the intelligence community". The same official said Kelly did not convey Rohrabacher's message to Trump, who was unaware of the details of the proposed deal.

Rohrabacher said at the time he was sceptical of the CIA's impartiality, as it had been part of the US intelligence community consensus that Russia had meddled in the presidential election.

Until he was voted out of office in 2018, Rohrabacher was a consistent voice in Congress in defence of Vladimir Putin's Russia, claiming to have been so close to the Russian leader that they had engaged in a drunken arm-wrestling match in the 1990s. In 2012, the FBI warned him that Russian spies were seeking to recruit him as an "agent of influence".

Neither Rohrabacher, who now lives in Maine, nor his lawyer returned calls seeking comment on Assange's claims.

The publication of emails hacked from the Hillary Clinton campaign helped perpetuate an aura of scandal around the Democratic candidate a few weeks before the 2016 election.

WikiLeaks put them online hours after Trump had suffered an apparent public relations disaster with the emergence of a tape in which he boasted of molesting women.

Assange is wanted in America to face 18 charges, including conspiring to commit computer intrusion, over the publication of US cables a decade ago.

He could face up to 175 years in jail if found guilty. He is accused of working with the former US army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning to leak hundreds of thousands of classified documents.

The extradition hearing is due to begin at Woolwich crown court on Monday, beginning with a week of legal argument. It will then be adjourned and continue with three weeks of evidence scheduled to begin on 18 May.

The decision, which is expected months later, is likely to be appealed against by the losing side, whatever the outcome.

Assange has been held on remand in Belmarsh prison since last September after serving a 50-week jail sentence for breaching his bail conditions while he was in the Ecuadorian embassy in London.

He entered the building in 2012 to avoid extradition to Sweden over sex offence allegations, which he has always denied and were subsequently dropped.

Assange's claims of a deal emerged a day after Trump granted clemency to a string of high-profile figures convicted on fraud or corruption charges, including the former Illinois governor Rod Blagojevich and the "junk bond king" Michael Milken. Trump has not excluded pardoning Roger Stone, a former aide who was convicted in November of obstructing a congressional investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 presidential race, and in particular for lying to investigators about his relationship with Assange and WikiLeaks.

Stone once boasted that he had dinner with Assange but later said the claim was a joke.

Ned Price, a former national security council spokesman said on Twitter: "It sure sounds like Assange's attorneys are prepared to back-up this claim with evidence. It's another indication that Trump's assault on the rule of law isn't new; it's been ongoing throughout his term."

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/feb/19/donald-trump-offered-julian-assange-pardon-russia-hack-wikileaks>

Rohrabacher confirms he offered Trump pardon to Assange for proof Russia didn't hack DNC email

Michael Isikoff
Yahoo News
February 20, 2020

WASHINGTON — Former California Republican congressman Dana Rohrabacher confirmed in a new interview that during a three-hour meeting at the Ecuadorian Embassy in August 2017, he told Julian Assange he would get President Trump to give him a pardon if he turned over information proving the Russians had not been the source of internal Democratic National Committee emails published by WikiLeaks.

In a phone interview with Yahoo News, Rohrabacher said his goal during the meeting was to find proof for a widely debunked conspiracy theory: that WikiLeaks' real source for the DNC emails was not Russian intelligence agents, as U.S. officials have since concluded, but former DNC staffer Seth Rich, who was murdered on the streets of Washington in July 2016 in what police believe was a botched robbery.

A lawyer for Assange in London on Wednesday cited the pardon offer from Rohrabacher during a court hearing on the U.S. government's request to extradite the WikiLeaks founder.

White House press secretary Stephanie Grisham immediately denounced the claim about a pardon discussion with Assange as a "complete fabrication," adding that the president "barely knows Dana Rohrabacher" and has "never spoken to him on this subject or almost any subject."

Rohrabacher said that not only did talk of a Trump pardon take place during his meeting, but he also followed up by calling then White House chief of staff John Kelly to discuss the proposal. He did not, however, ever speak to Trump about it, he said.

"I spoke to Julian Assange and told him if he would provide evidence about who gave WikiLeaks the emails I would petition the president to give him a pardon," Rohrabacher said. "He knew I could get to the president."

When he spoke to Kelly, the then chief of staff was "courteous" but made no commitment that he would even raise the matter directly with the president. "He knew this had to be handled with care," Rohrabacher said, and that it could be spun by the news media in ways that would be "harmful" to the president. In fact, Rohrabacher said he never heard anything further from Kelly about the matter, nor did he ever discuss the subject directly with Trump.

Rohrabacher, who was defeated when he ran for reelection in 2018 and is now a consultant to the cannabis industry, long had a reputation as one of the few members of Congress willing to defend Russian President Vladimir Putin.

He also was a strong defender of Trump on the Russia investigation by special counsel Robert Mueller. He said the president personally called him to thank him for one of his TV appearances during which he said that Trump was right to be angry with then Attorney General Jeff Sessions for recusing himself about all matters relating to the investigation.

Rohrabacher also emphasized in the interview that he only wanted “truthful” information from Assange and never suggested that he “lie.” But he said he believed then — and even more so now — that the information he was seeking would prove that WikiLeaks got its DNC emails from Seth Rich, a claim that if true would undercut the findings of U.S. intelligence agencies and Mueller’s prosecutors that Russian agents had hacked the Democratic Party and stolen the emails.

“Seth Rich’s name came up a couple of times” during his meeting with Assange, Rohrabacher said, although he acknowledged that the WikiLeaks founder never confirmed to him that Rich was his source. Still, Rohrabacher added, he believed the media is covering up the late DNC staffer’s supposed role in the theft of the party emails. “The whole thing stinks,” he said.

A Yahoo News podcast, “Conspiracyland,” revealed last summer that Russian intelligence agencies first planted the conspiracy theory that Rich was murdered by gunmen hired by Hillary Clinton. It also reported that Russian trolls later repeatedly boosted claims on Twitter and other social media platforms that the former staffer had leaked the material to WikiLeaks.

In fact, a top Washington police commander overseeing the investigation into Rich’s death said during the “Conspiracyland” podcast that law enforcement had found no evidence that Rich’s death was in any way related to his work at the DNC or that he played any role in the leaking of party emails.

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/rohrabacher-confirms-he-offered-trump-pardon-to-assange-for-proof-russia-didnt-hack-dnc-email-131438007.html>

Growing support for Julian Assange on eve of extradition hearings

*Oscar Grenfell
World Socialist Web Site
20 February 2020*

On the eve of British court hearings this coming Monday on Julian Assange’s extradition to the US, there is a growing recognition that a grave injustice, with far-reaching implications for the democratic rights of millions of people, is underway. The critical issue is to transform this latent sentiment into a mass political movement of the working class fighting to block Assange’s extradition and secure his complete freedom.

The stakes are high.

The attempt to dispatch the WikiLeaks publisher to a US prison for having exposed war crimes is the most sweeping attack on freedom of the press in decades. Assange’s lawyers and colleagues, such as barrister Jennifer Robinson and WikiLeaks editor-in-

chief Kristinn Hrafnson, have sounded the alarm: If Assange is extradited to the US, the same can be done to any journalist, publisher or activist who falls foul of the American government.

Assange has already undergone what United Nations official Nils Melzer assessed to be psychological torture at the hands of the governments pursuing him. He now faces the prospect of being treated as a terrorist in the darkest reaches of a US prison for the rest of his life.

At an administrative hearing yesterday the WikiLeaks founder appeared gaunt and recited his date of birth in faltering tones. His lawyers signalled that during the full hearing they would point to the ban on extradition from Britain to the US for political offenses, and would detail the innumerable abuses that Assange has suffered, including having been spied on in Ecuador's London embassy by American intelligence agencies while he was a political refugee.

The evidence already brands the attempted extradition as a lawless show trial. The representatives of the corporate press, however, are largely indifferent to these issues. Instead, they have focused on the revelation that a defence witness will testify that US President Donald Trump offered Assange a pardon through former Republican Congressman Dana Rohrabacher in late 2017. The offer allegedly was in exchange for evidence disproving the claims that Trump was elected as a result of "Russian interference" in the 2016 election.

The Democratic Party-aligned media has already responded hysterically, claiming that the reported pardon offer vindicates their discredited "Russiagate" conspiracy theories involving a nexus between Trump, Russia and WikiLeaks. **In reality, negotiations between Rohrabacher and Assange were publicly reported at the time, in August of 2017.**

Assange, moreover, required no inducement to deny Russian involvement in WikiLeaks' 2016 publication of Democratic National Committee (DNC) emails establishing that organisation's gross corruption. **He stated on several occasions that Russia was not the source of the emails. His close collaborator Craig Murray said they had been provided by DNC insiders.** And whatever the contents of the discussions, it is the Trump administration that is now spearheading the attempt to prosecute and imprison Assange.

The Democratic Party slanders against Assange and the protracted efforts of the ruling elites internationally to isolate him are breaking down.

This is expressed in Germany, where leading newspapers, artists and retired politicians have condemned Assange's persecution, and in the decision of Australian MPs Andrew Wikie and George Christensen to visit Assange in Belmarsh Prison this week and demand that the Australian government defend him as one of its citizens. These initiatives were undoubtedly a response to a groundswell of support from below. Broad popular sympathy for Assange is one expression of a growing political radicalisation of workers and youth, who are increasingly attracted to left-wing, anti-war and socialist positions amid an upsurge of the class struggle and an explosion of imperialist militarism.

The decisive question is how the fight to free Assange is to be taken forward. The greatest mistake — and the surest route to ensuring Assange's extradition — would

be to harbour illusions that any element of the capitalist state, in Britain or elsewhere, will secure the WikiLeaks founder's freedom.

British Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn is at the forefront of efforts to divert defenders of Assange behind the very political establishment responsible for his dire plight. The Labour leader, like his colleagues, promoted the attempt to frame Assange on bogus sexual misconduct allegations in Sweden. Corbyn then remained silent on Assange, Britain's political prisoner, for over 10 months, including during last year's general election. The transparent purpose was to suppress opposition, particularly among rank-and-file Labour Party members, to Assange's extradition.

Now, having lost the election after capitulating to the right-wing of his own party on every occasion, Corbyn has stated that he opposes the US persecution of Assange. The declaration, just weeks before he will stand down as party leader, is aimed at rehabilitating Labour and channelling anger over the attacks on Assange behind the parliamentary set-up.

This was demonstrated by Corbyn's attempts this week to present Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson as a latter-day convert to the fight to defend freedom of the press.

In an interview with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Corbyn said that in response to a question he asked in parliament, Johnson had "accepted" that the extradition treaty between Britain and the US was "unbalanced." This, Corbyn proclaimed, was a "big change" from the government.

Corbyn then declared that Johnson "seems to me to understand that there is a principle here that somebody who opens up and tells the truth, as Julian Assange has done, should not face deportation to the United States."

Johnson is an extreme right-wing figure. His program is British nationalism, the building up of the military, an onslaught on the social rights of the working class and police state repression. He gloated when Assange was illegally dragged out of the Ecuadorian embassy by British cops last year.

Corbyn made the comments as it was revealed that Johnson has surrounded himself with fascistic advisors, including open advocates of eugenics.

Corbyn's call for a moral appeal to Johnson is an attempt to divert opposition to the persecution of Assange into harmless channels. The defense of Assange, like all democratic rights, is inseparable from the struggle to build a mass socialist movement of the working class.

In other words, the campaign to free Assange is a key component of the fight for all of the social and democratic rights of the working class.

It is inseparable from the fight to end militarism and war, amid preparations by the major powers for catastrophic new conflicts. It is part of the struggle to prevent the censorship of the internet by governments, as they turn to ever more authoritarian measures to suppress mass social opposition.

A Socialist Equality Party (Australia) campaign in Toronto, New South Wales
The millions of workers who are entering into major class battles, from France, Lebanon and Chile to Britain, the US and Australia, are the constituency for the

defence of Assange, the courageous whistleblower Chelsea Manning and all class war prisoners.

As part of its fight to mobilise the working class in Assange's defence, the WSWs and Socialist Equality Parties are holding a series of initiatives over the coming weeks, including rallies in Sydney and Melbourne this weekend and a public meeting in London on Sunday. We urge all supporters of democratic rights to attend.

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/02/20/pers-f20.html>

Lawyers to seek asylum for Julian Assange in France

Assange's European defence team say it is their duty to raise case with Emmanuel Macron

*Associated Press/The Guardian
20 Feb. 2020*

Julian Assange's European defence team have said they will try to seek asylum for him in France. Hearings over Assange's extradition from the UK to the US on spying charges are due to start next week in London.

Éric Dupond-Moretti said the "fate and the status of all journalists" was at stake in Assange's case. "We consider the situation is sufficiently serious," he said, "that our duty is to talk about it" with the French president, Emmanuel Macron.

He was one of a team of lawyers lined up at a Paris news conference to explain why they view the case against Assange as unfair, citing his poor health and alleged violations of his rights while in jail in London.

French members of the team said they had been working on a "concrete demand" for Macron to grant Assange asylum in France, where he has children and where WikiLeaks had a presence at its founding.

Baltasar Garzón, the Spanish coordinator of Assange's team, reiterated his client's plan to claim that the Trump administration offered him a pardon in return for saying Russia was not involved in leaking Democratic National Committee emails during the 2016 US election campaign.

Garzón said Assange was "pressured by the Trump administration" but resisted, and "the order was given to demand the extradition of Julian Assange".

The White House has firmly denied the claim. However, Garzón said that testimony and "documentary proof" of the claim would be offered to the court at the full hearing which opens on Monday.

Assange, 48, spent seven years in Ecuador's London embassy before being evicted and arrested in April 2019. Last November, Sweden dropped a sex crimes investigation against him because so much time had elapsed.

Assange, who is Australian, has received backing from numerous quarters. The Council of Europe's commissioner for human rights, Dunja Mijatović, added a voice

of opposition on Thursday, citing concerns over Assange's eventual treatment in a US prison and the impact on press freedoms were he to be extradited.

The shadow chancellor, John McDonnell, visited Assange in prison on Thursday and said: "I think this is one of the most important and significant political trials of this generation -- in fact longer."

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/feb/20/lawyers-to-seek-asylum-for-julian-assange-in-france>

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Julian Assange case is the Dreyfus of our age, says John McDonnell

Shadow chancellor compares US extradition case to 19th-century treason trial

Ben Quinn
The Guardian
20 Feb. 2020

The US attempt to extradite Julian Assange is the "the Dreyfus case of our age", John McDonnell has said, as Europe's human rights watchdog added her voice to opposition to the move.

The shadow chancellor paid a two-hour visit to see Assange in Belmarsh prison in London on Thursday and said Britain's standing in the world would be severely damaged if the extradition went ahead

On Wednesday it was claimed in a London court that Donald Trump had offered Assange a pardon if he would say Russia was not involved in leaking Democratic party emails.

McDonnell likening the plight of Assange to Alfred Dreyfus, the 19th-century Jewish French army officer who was tried and convicted on charges of treason amid a climate of antisemitism.

"I think this is one of the most important and significant political trials of this generation," the shadow chancellor said. "In fact, longer. I think it is the Dreyfus case of our age, the way in which a person is being persecuted for political reasons for simply exposing the truth of what went on in relation to recent wars."

Separately, the Council of Europe commissioner for human rights. Dunja Mijatović, said Assange should not be extradited because of the potential impact on press freedom and concerns about "the real risk of torture or inhuman or degrading treatment", in contravention of the European convention on human rights.

Allowing the extradition would have "a chilling effect on media freedom, and could ultimately hamper the press in performing its task as purveyor of information and public watchdog in democratic societies", she said.

"The indictment raises important questions about the protection of those that publish classified information in the public interest, including those that expose human rights violations. The broad and vague nature of the allegations against Julian Assange, and

of the offences listed in the indictment, are troubling, as many of them concern activities at the core of investigative journalism in Europe and beyond.”

The extraordinary claim about the supposed offer of a pardon from Trump was made at a hearing at Westminster magistrates court on Wednesday before the opening next week of Assange’s legal case to block attempts to extradite him. Assange faces charges in the US for publishing hacked documents.

Assange’s lawyers alleged that during a visit to London in August 2017, congressman Dana Rohrabacher told Assange that “on instructions from the president he was offering a pardon or some other way out if Mr Assange ... said Russia had nothing to do with the DNC [Democratic National Committee] leaks.”

Rohrabacher denied the claim, saying he had made the proposal on his own initiative, and that the White House had not endorsed it.

McDonnell said he and Assange had discussed the issue of the reported pardon but had not gone into great detail.

“We are hoping that in court he is able to defeat the extradition bid. We don’t believe that extradition should be used for political purposes, and all the evidence – even the recent revelations with regard to Trump engagement – demonstrates that this is a political trial and we are hoping that the courts will see it that way,” he said.

“If this extradition takes place it will damage the democratic standing of our own country as well as America. We have a longstanding tradition in this country of standing up for whistleblowers, journalists ... if this extradition takes place I think it will damage our reputation.”

The comparison between Assange and Dreyfus drew criticism, including from the Community Security Trust (CST), a charity working against antisemitism and racism in British society, which tweeted: “Disgraceful false equivalence to one of the key learning moments of modern Jewish history.”

A protest in support of Assange is due to take place on Saturday in Parliament Square and will be addressed by political figures and others such as the music producer Brian Eno. McDonnell said he and others were calling on people to demonstrate peacefully.

He alluded to attempts to build a cross-party alliance to fight any extradition, adding that there were Tory MPs who he believed could come onboard. He also believed there were “deep doubts” in government, based on comments by Boris Johnson to Jeremy Corbyn about the unbalanced nature of the extradition treaty between the US and the UK

“The problems we have now is that when the hearings start they will be subjudice and it will be difficult to raise it in the House of Commons, but we will be looking to see how we can raise it as often as we possibly can, of course within parliamentary rules, but also build cross-party support, and as you know people like [the Conservative MP] David Davis have raised their concerns, so this is across parties in the House of Commons,” McDonnell said.

“I am hoping that combination of cross-party support, what has happened in the media, the exposes that have taken place in recent weeks, will ensure that we have a climate of opinion in this country that prevents this extradition taking place.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/feb/20/julian-assange-case-is-the-dreyfus-of-our-age-says-john-mcdonnell>

Julian Assange should not be extradited due to potential impact on press freedom and concerns about ill-treatment

Dunja Mijatović
Commissioner for Human Rights
Council of Europe
STRASBOURG
20/02/2020

I have been following with great attention the developments concerning Julian Assange's case, in particular the charges against him and the extradition request submitted by the United States government to the United Kingdom. In addition to my own monitoring and analysis, I have received information from medical professionals, civil society activists, human rights defenders, journalists' associations and others on this case.

Julian Assange's potential extradition has human rights implications that reach far beyond his individual case. The indictment raises important questions about the protection of those that publish classified information in the public interest, including those that expose human rights violations. **The broad and vague nature of the allegations against Julian Assange, and of the offences listed in the indictment, are troubling as many of them concern activities at the core of investigative journalism in Europe and beyond. Consequently, allowing Julian Assange's extradition on this basis would have a chilling effect on media freedom, and could ultimately hamper the press in performing its task as purveyor of information and public watchdog in democratic societies.**

Furthermore, any extradition to a situation in which the person involved would be at real risk of torture or inhuman or degrading treatment would be contrary to Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment has made clear that he considers that both the detention conditions in the United States and the sentence likely to be imposed on Julian Assange present such a real risk.

In view of both the press freedom implications and the **serious concerns over the treatment Julian Assange would be subjected to in the United States**, my assessment as Commissioner for Human Rights is that he should not be extradited.

I will continue to monitor the developments in this case closely.

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/julian-assange-should-not-be-extradited-due-to-potential-impact-on-press-freedom-and-concerns-about-ill-treatment>

Over 1,000 journalists from across the world unite in defence of Julian Assange

The WikiLeaks founder faces extradition to the US and 175 years behind bars

JOURNALISTS from nearly 100 countries have united to defend jailed Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, as he faces extradition to the US and 175 years behind bars.

A statement signed by more than 1,200 media workers warned of an unprecedented attack on press freedom as Mr Assange's court hearing begins on Monday. If extradited he will face charges under the draconian Espionage Act, which would be its first use against a publisher of information provided by a whistleblower.

Signatories believe that Mr Assange's imprisonment and the court proceedings are a "gross miscarriage of justice."

"It is very rare for journalists to join together and speak up on an issue. Indeed, the size and breadth of this joint journalists' statement may be unprecedented," Journalists Speak Up For Assange spokeswoman Serena Tinari said.

Mr Assange remains in Belmarsh Prison despite his sentence for skipping bail ending in September, after judges deemed that he was a flight risk.

He faces charges after publishing US military documents from Afghanistan and Iraq and US State Department cables, including some containing evidence of war crimes.

"If governments can use espionage laws against journalists and publishers, they are deprived of their most important and traditional defence — of acting in the public interest — which does not apply under the Espionage Act," the statement says. "Journalists anywhere in the world could find themselves being extradited to another country and charged under draconian espionage laws."

The statement has been signed by prominent whistleblowers Katharine Gunn and Edward Snowden, as well as by Daniel Ellsberg, the source of the [Pentagon] Papers.

Ms Tinari said: "Many of us use confidential information received from whistleblowers. It is an essential part of our role on behalf of the public. Every journalist and publisher should be appalled and worried at this attempt to criminalise our work."

The journalists demanded the immediate release of Mr Assange and for all charges to be dropped. "We urge our fellow journalists to inform the public accurately about this abuse of fundamental rights. We urge all journalists to speak up in defence of Julian Assange at this critical time.

"Dangerous times call for fearless journalism," the statement concluded.

<https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/w/over-1000-journalists-from-across-the-world-unite-in-defence-of-julain-assange>

Fredrik S. Heffermehl
fredpax@online.no

Appell holdt foran Stortinget 20. feb 2020

ASSANGE — SKAL HELE VERDEN HA USA SOM JURIDISK OVERINSTANS?

La oss bruke vår fantasi — Hva om Erna Solberg hadde sendt beskjed til Riksadvokaten om at en politiker hadde fått for hard eller for mild straff? I Norge ville det blitt ramaskrik mot et slikt overtramp. I strid med fordelingen av makt og roller i statsstyret. Statsadvokater og dommere skal være selvstendige og følge lovene, ikke kunne brukes politisk. Til å kaste kritikere i mørke fangehull, slik eneveldige fyrster gjorde i middelalderen. Hva så om Solberg hadde ringt til statsminister Skvernelis i Litauen og bedt ham gå på TV og fortelle verden at Litauen starter en etterforskning av Jonas Gahr Støre? Og deretter hadde stått i Stortinget og hevdet at dette var helt i orden? Vi ser det alle, dette er en vill fantasiverden.

Men ikke for Julian Assange. For ham er vilkårlig politisk rettsforfølgelse blodig virkelighet: Sveriges aktorer jukser med fabrikkerte voldtektsanklager. Britiske aktorer presser i en privat email svenske kolleger til å opprettholde anklagene, «Dere våger ikke å trekke arrestordren». Ecuador lar seg presse til å direktesende til CIA lyd og filmopptak av Assange i ambassaden, av alt han foretar seg, døgnet rundt. Ecuador bryter asylretten, åpner dørene og lar britisk politi ta Assange og CIA ta hans papirer og datautstyr. Det lar seg knapt fatte hvor uhørte og uhyrlige misbruk av myndighet som her ble begått. Heldigvis har FN en rapportør om tortur, Nils Melzer, som kan svensk, kunne se jukset hos svensk politi, og med enestående styrke har fordømt at fire nasjoner har gått sammen om å knuse en journalist for hans enestående avsløringer ved avansert bruk av datateknologi – som grundig vist i et intervju i Klassekampen 20.2.

Julian har ikke gjort annet enn det vi alle bør gjøre, prøve å stanse stater som begår krigsforbrytelser. Han har med sin ekstraordinære begavelse avslørt grove forbrytelser. Supermakten USA har ikke villet straffe landets egne krigsforbrytere og rette opp sin politikk, i stedet er hundrevis av personer satt i arbeid med å forfølge varsleren Assange og gjøre det klart for alle, især journalister, at enhver som avdekker USAs militære forbrytelser vil bli forfulgt til verdens og livets ende.

Dermed er middelalderen er tilbake. Rettsvesenet brukes politisk. Verre enn noen gang. Nå er det ikke sin egen fyrste man skal frykte, men et fordekt samspill mellom hemmelige tjenester i hele den vestlige verden. Rettsinstanser over hele verden blir overstyrt i saker som har med militære forhold å gjøre. USA misbruker makt, som fyrstene i middelalderen, åpent, helt uten skam. Det er det vi nettopp har sett i riksrettsforhandlingene i USA. Trump var anklaget for å ha opptrådt unfair mot en utfordrer i neste valg. Dette ble dekket av verdenspressen som et internt amerikansk anliggende, et indrepolitisk amerikansk tema.

Også for norske media var dette et indrepolitisk amerikansk tema. Betydde ikke saken mye for oss som bor i Norge? Var det selvsagt og helt i orden å ha presset andre lands politiske ledere til å bruke sine rettsapparater slik USA ønsker? Var ikke det å underminere rettsinstansenes selvstendighet og integritet, og også rettssikkerhet og menneskerettigheter i hele verden? Og med Assange som det fremste og verste eksempel hittil — og varsel om hva som er i vente.

Heldigvis, vi er med i NATO vil mange tenke. USA er vår fremste venn, dette rammer ikke oss. Men britene, som ofrer alle prinsipper for å hjelpe USA mot Assange, er ikke de også med i NATO? Og håper ikke Sverige på å bli medlem? Julian Assange er en ekstrem grov og klar illustrasjon på at middelalderen er tilbake. Vi, vår regjering, våre rettsinstanser, media, bør tenke grundig over hvor robust rettsvesenets integritet er i Norge.

Fredrik S. Heffermehl, jurist og forfatter, Internasjonale jurister for Assange, Nobel Peace Prize Watch.

Drop Charges and Extradition Pursuit of Assange, Says Amnesty International, Denouncing US Govt's "Full-Scale Assault on the Right to Freedom of Expression"

"The potential chilling effect on journalists and others who expose official wrongdoing by publishing information disclosed to them by credible sources could have a profound impact on the public's right to know what their government is up to."

*Andrea Germanos
Common Dreams
February 21, 2020*

Amnesty International on Friday criticized what it called a "full-scale assault on the right to freedom of expression" by the United States and demanded the country drop its Espionage Charges against and extradition request of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

The call from the human rights organization came three days before a London court will determine the fate of that extraction request.

Assange has been in the high security Belmarsh prison in London since April 2019 after being forcibly removed from the Ecuadoran embassy where he'd been effectively trapped since 2012. The WikiLeaks founder faces up to 175 years in prison for 18 counts of violating the Espionage Act — charges journalists and press freedom defenders said represent a dangerous assault on press freedom by attacking Assange for publishing and exposing U.S. war crimes.

Doctors and a United Nations expert have warned that Assange is being held under conditions that threaten his very life.

"The U.S. government's unrelenting pursuit of Julian Assange for having published disclosed documents that included possible war crimes committed by the U.S. military is nothing short of a full-scale assault on the right to freedom of expression," said Massimo Moratti, Amnesty International's deputy Europe director.

"The potential chilling effect on journalists and others who expose official wrongdoing by publishing information disclosed to them by credible sources could have a profound impact on the public's right to know what their government is up to," he continued. "All charges against Assange for such activities must be dropped."

If the court fails to drop the charges, Moratti added, the U.K. must not allow him to be extradited.

"Julian Assange could face detention conditions in the U.S. that amount to torture and other ill-treatment, including prolonged solitary confinement. The risk of an unfair trial is very real given the targeted public campaign against him undertaken by U.S. officials at the highest levels, which has severely undermined his right to be presumed innocent," said Moratti.

Over 1,200 international journalists amplified the call for Assange's freedom in a new statement this week.

"This case stands at the heart of the principle of free speech," they wrote. "If the U.S. government can prosecute Mr Assange for publishing classified documents, it may clear the way for governments to prosecute journalists anywhere, an alarming precedent for freedom of the press worldwide."

The "use of espionage charges against people publishing materials provided by whistleblowers is a first," the journalists said, "and should alarm every journalist and publisher."

Dunja Mijatovic, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, added her voice Thursday to the chorus against Assange's extradition.

"The broad and vague nature of the allegations against Julian Assange, and of the offenses listed in the indictment, are troubling as many of them concern activities at the core of investigative journalism in Europe and beyond," she said. "Consequently, allowing Julian Assange's extradition on this basis would have a chilling effect on media freedom, and could ultimately hamper the press in performing its task as purveyor of information and public watchdog in democratic societies."

<https://www.commondreams.org/news/2020/02/21/drop-charges-and-extradition-pursuit-assange-says-amnesty-international-denouncing>

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US/UK: Drop charges and halt extradition of Julian Assange

Amnesty International
21 February 2020

- Amnesty International launches new campaign ahead of extradition hearing
- Espionage charges are chilling blow to publishers and journalists

Authorities in the US must drop all espionage and other related charges that Julian Assange is facing as part of the US extradition request to allow for his prompt release, said Amnesty International ahead of his 24 February extradition hearing.

If these charges are not dropped, the UK authorities must ensure that Julian Assange is not extradited to the USA where he would face a real risk of serious human rights violations.

"The US government's unrelenting pursuit of Julian Assange for having published disclosed documents that included possible war crimes committed by the US military is nothing short of a full-scale assault on the right to freedom of expression," said Massimo Moratti, Amnesty International's Deputy Europe Director.

"The potential chilling effect on journalists and others who expose official wrongdoing by publishing information disclosed to them by credible sources could have a profound impact on the public's right to know what their government is up to. All charges against Assange for such activities must be dropped."

According to an analysis by the organisation, the charges against Julian Assange stem directly from the publication of disclosed documents as part of his work with Wikileaks. This activity, in and of itself, should not be punishable and mirrors conduct that investigative journalists undertake regularly in their professional capacity.

"All charges underpinning the US extradition request should be dropped to allow for Julian Assange's prompt release. If the charges against him are not dropped, the UK authorities are under a clear and unequivocal obligation not to send him to the USA where he could suffer serious human rights violations," said Massimo Moratti.

"Julian Assange could face detention conditions in the USA that amount to torture and other ill-treatment, including prolonged solitary confinement. The risk of an unfair trial is very real given the targeted public campaign against him undertaken by US officials at the highest levels, which has severely undermined his right to be presumed innocent."

For more information or to arrange an interview contact press@amnesty.org or call +90 212 361 62 17-18 or +90 531 105 42 67, +44 (0) 20 7413 5566.

BACKGROUND

Amnesty International has launched a global petition calling on the US authorities to drop the charges against Julian Assange that stem solely from his publishing activities with Wikileaks.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/take-action/julian-assange-usa-justice/>

In addition, international human rights law and standards forbid the transfer of an individual to another country where there is a real risk they would face serious human rights violations. Were Julian Assange to be extradited or subjected to transfer in any other manner to the USA, the UK would be in breach of these obligations.

Workers for Assange: Uniting to fight for Assange's freedom

Inspired by the words of Julian Assange, workers around the world are collaborating to stand up for his freedom, writes Davey Heller.

*Davey Heller
Independent Australia
21 February 2020*

IN A TIME of deepening capitalist crisis, just as in the 1930s, the ruling class is turning to fascism and dictatorship. Fascism requires crushing working class resistance to succeed.

The fascist in the White House, Donald Trump, is leading a global attack on the rights of the working class with his persecution of Julian Assange. The “defend Assange” campaign is correctly characterised as being a free speech campaign, but it must also be seen as part of the class struggle and the working-class fightback against the threat of fascism.

This is why the launch of the Workers for Assange movement is necessary. Today the war on journalism is the spearhead of what is really a class war and Julian Assange is a class war prisoner. Without access to journalism which tells the truth about the crimes of imperial power, without the fundamental right to know the truth, all the rights of the working class won in struggle over a century are existentially threatened.

At root, the fight to free Julian Assange must be seen as an industrial struggle. Therefore, only the international working class organised in the fight to free Julian Assange has the social power to win his freedom — another reason why this movement is necessary.

Julian Assange himself has called for industrial organising in his defence. In early November 2019, one of the few letters from Julian Assange that managed to break through the cruel information blockade inflicted by Belmarsh Prison emerged. The letter sent to a supporter in France encouraged workers to form “blocs” in their unions.

Julian’s letter read:

‘Dear Anne-Marie, you ask what you can do to fight for my freedom? Use your strongest skills, friends, resources and associations. If you are a nurse, gather nurses, create a bloc in the nurses union, etc! defend.wikileaks.org JPA.’

The import of Julian urging workers to organise industrially in his defence cannot be overstated. It reveals that Julian himself understands that only a mass movement of the working class can unleash the power needed to free him.

Marxists define the working class as everyone who has to survive by earning a wage — for instance, by selling their labour. This is the vast majority of humanity who all share the same social interests of wanting access to good working conditions, democratic rights, safe and stable housing, healthcare, education and a clean environment. The working class is therefore not just “blue-collar” or factory workers, but teachers, nurses, retail workers, people in the service industry and so on.

There have already been the stirrings of a working-class orientated campaign to free Julian. Out of the Yellow Vest movement, who have been bravely marching against social equality — literally under police fire in France for over a year — has grown a contingent of Yellow Vests organising on Facebook who has now travelled to London three times to protest for Assange. Most significantly on 25 January, over a hundred Yellow Vests brought their militant spirit of resistance to Belmarsh.

Workers have also organised in professional “blocs”. This includes the very effective Doctors for Assange. Over a hundred doctors globally have signed an open letter demanding that Julian be immediately moved out of prison to a hospital setting where he can recover his health. Journalists have also collaborated in the Speak Up For Assange open letter, now signed by over 1,000 journalists. Ranks and file teachers in Melbourne and Sydney have passed motions in support of Assange. Motions have been passed by unionists in the San Francisco Labor Council and Pacifica Media Guild in the U.S. This must be built on.

LAUNCHING "WORKERS FOR ASSANGE"

To take this fight forward, workers around the world can join a new campaign entitled Workers for Assange. Whilst unions are a major focus of this campaign, the reality is that not all workers are in unions. It must also be recognised that this struggle must be waged by ordinary workers as **union bureaucracies have either been silent or made no more than token gestures**. No union has sought to seriously mobilise its members through protests, strikes or even a stop-work meeting.

1. Join the Workers for Assange Facebook group or start a worker bloc.

Whilst Facebook is a platform that is owned by an oligarch, is politically censored and can be a vehicle for surveillance, it is also one of the most effective organising tools available for workers globally. It has been utilised to organise Yellow Vest protests, wildcat strikes and innumerable political struggles. That is why as part of the launch of Workers for Assange, a Facebook group has been created for workers to discuss ways the working class can be mobilised to free Assange.

2. Start a specific workers bloc.

Follow Julian's advice. If you are a nurse, start a nurses bloc. If you are a teacher, start a teachers bloc. Once again, starting a Facebook group would be a good place to start this process.

3. Pass a motion within your unionised or non-unionised workplace.

Just as teachers have done in Australia, move a motion in your workplace or union branch to defend Assange.



People For Assange
@people4assange



Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance @withMEAA
Australia's professional union for media workers stands strong with Julian Assange sending @marisepayne a letter requesting the gov to use all resources available to convince the UK to oppose Assange's extradition to the U.S.

These motions are stepping stones to action, such as the calling of stop-work meetings, mobilising workers for protests and ultimately political general strikes across borders. Whilst aiming at strikes for Assange might sound overly ambitious, there are already political general strikes breaking out around the world. This includes the general strike in France against cuts to the pension and the general strikes and mass protests in Chile which began with small student protests against public transport fare hikes.

The demand to free Assange would not be the only demand of such a strike but it could be a spark for such a broader movement. If the U.S. and its accomplices in the UK and Australian Government were not concerned about the potential for this campaign to spark a broad political struggle they would not be trying so hard to slander Assange and prosecute this outrageous case in the dark.

4. Adopt the Yellow Vest as the symbol of protest for Assange.

By wearing the Yellow Vest you are not only being inspired by the spirit of resistance of our French comrades but we are also connecting the Assange campaign to the broader international struggle against inequality and repression. Buy a Yellow Vest and write 'free Julian Assange' on the back and/or stencil Julian's face like protesters in France and Melbourne have done. Let's make this our international symbol of resistance.

5. Use your associations.

Workers are not only found in workplaces but belong to many associations. Most university students are also waged workers. Some are in political parties or other community organisations. As Julian suggested, organise in these places, too. Labor Party branches in the UK and Greens branches in Australia have begun to pass motions. People have moved motions in Australia at a local council level. Such actions are powerful in building a movement that involves the widest possible layers of the working class.

It's time to take the campaign to free Julian Assange to the next level. The courts and politicians in the UK must be compelled to free Assange. Join the Workers For Assange Facebook group and start organising. There is no time to waste. Workers must unite for Assange.

Davey Heller is a writer and campaigner. You can follow him on @socialist_davey.

<https://independentaustralia.net/politics/politics-display/workers-for-assange-uniting-to-fight-for-assanges-freedom,13618>

Protesters gather on eve of Julian Assange extradition hearing

WikiLeaks says 'dark force' is behind effort to jail its founder in the United States

*Mark Townsend
The Observer
22 Feb. 2020*

Hundreds of Julian Assange's supporters from across Europe gathered in London on Saturday to demand that the WikiLeaks founder be released from detention and spared extradition to the US.

Italians and Germans were among those showing their support for the 48-year-old before his extradition hearing opens at Woolwich crown court on 24 February. Assange's father John Shipton addressed the crowd in Parliament Square. The protesters brandished banners with slogans such as "Journalism is not a crime".

The United States wants Assange to face 18 charges over the publication of classified government documents, which could result in a 170-year prison sentence.

Shipton told the protesters that he did not understand why his son was being held in Belmarsh prison, in south-east London. "I bring to you his affection, his nobility of purpose and his strength of character after nine years," he said.

Almost a decade has passed since WikiLeaks published secret US diplomatic cables and documents about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which Assange's supporters say shed crucial light on American abuses. Kristinn Hrafnsson, editor in chief of WikiLeaks, told the protesters that they were standing against a "dark force". He said: "This is not about left or right, we can unite on this, it is a dark force against [those] who want justice, transparency and truth."

Other speakers included the former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis, Pink Floyd's Roger Waters and the fashion designer Vivienne Westwood, who wore a halo with Assange's name on it and referred to herself as "the angel of democracy". His supporters claim the extradition attempt is politically motivated and driven by people who are embarrassed by WikiLeaks's revelations.

Among the crowd was a 24-year-old wearing a gold face mask who had flown in from Berlin in the morning. She said she also wanted to make a statement against Boris Johnson. "Johnson wants to break all the laws, the rule of law. He is a very real threat for all of us," she said.

Wolf Pozinski, 60, from Amsterdam, also wanted to show his support. He said: "It's important that people like Assange are not criminalised for journalism that revealed a war crime."

In 2010 WikiLeaks published a classified US military video showing a 2007 attack by Apache helicopters in Baghdad that killed a dozen people, including two Reuters news staff.

Two years later, Assange took refuge in Ecuador's London embassy to avoid extradition to Sweden where he was accused of sex crimes. However, last November Swedish prosecutors said they were discontinuing an investigation into a rape allegation, explaining that although the complainant's evidence was deemed credible and reliable, witnesses' memories had faded over the decade since the allegations were first made. Assange has always denied the allegations.

He was removed from the embassy last April and was arrested for failing to surrender to the court. He has been in prison ever since after the US lodged its extradition request.

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/feb/22/protesters-gather-on-eve-of-julian-assange-extradition-hearing>

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International Jurists' Letter in Defence of Julian Assange

Deepa Driver
Medium
Feb 22, 2020

Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson MP
10, Downing Street
City of Westminster
London, SW1A 2AA

22 February 2020

Dear Mr Johnson,

As international jurists, with an acute awareness of the responsibilities that our profession demands of us, we call on the British authorities to refuse the request for the extradition of Mr. Julian Assange to the United States. We also call for his immediate release.

The treatment of Mr. Assange, the circumstances surrounding his continued detention in Belmarsh maximum security prison, and the circumstances surrounding British attempts to comply with the US request for his extradition, highlight:

1. the involvement of the United Kingdom in long-term, severe, psychological ill-treatment of Mr. Assange (ECHR Article 3)
2. the disregard shown by the British authorities towards their duties and responsibilities under international law
3. the disregard by the British authorities of British law, including Mr. Assange's right to a fair trial (ECHR Article 6), for protection of his private life (ECHR Article 8) and his right to freedom of speech (ECHR Article 10)
4. the sweeping, extraordinary, extra-territorial claims now being made by the United States, who are seeking to prosecute in the US and under US laws, non-US citizens for conduct outside the United States (including in jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom where that conduct is lawful).

1. UK involvement in the psychological torture and mistreatment of Mr. Assange (infringement of ECHR Article 3):

International human rights experts, healthcare professionals and the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Prof. Nils Melzer, have all found that Mr. Assange has been subjected to arbitrary confinement, and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment amounting to torture. They note that the torture poses grave risks of significant physical, psychological, neuropsychological harm, with life-changing and potentially fatal consequences for Mr. Assange. Prof. Melzer has found the British state responsible for Mr. Assange's torture "through perpetration, or through attempt, complicity or other forms of participation". This involvement of the British authorities in the psychological torture and mistreatment of Mr. Assange violates his rights under ECHR Article 3 and takes various forms:

a. Interference in the Swedish investigations, and inordinate protraction of Mr. Assange's detention:

Mr. Assange originally sought asylum in the Ecuadorean embassy — as was his right — because he was concerned that if extradited to Sweden where he was being investigated in relation to (now-abandoned) sexual assault allegations, he might be subjected to onward rendition from Sweden to the United States (or another state with a US interrogation facility / black site), for which there were precedents. Whilst physically present in the embassy, Mr. Assange offered to make himself available for interview by the Swedish authorities, whether in person or by video link, so as to facilitate the investigation of the sexual assault allegations. Mr. Assange also offered

to go to Sweden, subject to an assurance from the Swedish authorities that he would not be rendered to the United States.

Information obtained under the Freedom of Information Act reveals that the Swedish authorities may have been minded to accept Mr. Assange's offers of interviews in the embassy or by video link. However, they were dissuaded from doing so by the British authorities. The Crown Prosecution Service repeatedly urged Swedish authorities not to interview Mr. Assange in the United Kingdom and suggested they insist instead on his extradition to Sweden. This compelled Mr. Assange to remain in the embassy for many years, despite the injury this was known to be causing to his health. Even the Stockholm Chief District Prosecutor has described the Swedish extradition effort, now known to have been urged on the Swedish authorities by the United Kingdom's **Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)**, as: "... unreasonable and unprofessional, as well as unfair and disproportionate."

Requests under the Freedom of Information Act show that the CPS specifically and repeatedly urged the Swedish authorities to keep their investigation of Mr. Assange ongoing. In such missives, **the CPS made extraordinary comments such as, "...do not think this case is being treated as just another extradition" and "Don't you dare get cold feet!!!", discouraging the Swedish authorities from concluding their investigations.**

Mr. Assange was therefore unduly confined to the Ecuadorean embassy, on the urging of the UK authorities, when in fact, there were no charges to answer in Sweden. The United Kingdom therefore shares responsibility for the severe injury to health that Mr. Assange suffered as a consequence of this protracted and unnecessary stay at the embassy, and the consequent damage which the British authorities, in part caused, through their arbitrary, disproportionate and illegal treatment of Mr. Assange.

b. Denial of Medical Treatment whilst in the embassy:

Mr. Assange had to endure debilitating and painful medical conditions in the embassy. These conditions included an excruciating tooth abscess and a serious injury to his shoulder, both of which remained untreated for several years.

Mr. Assange was denied permission by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to leave the Embassy to receive hospital treatment. This was despite a request from the Ecuadorean embassy to the British government for such access to be provided on medical grounds.

c. Conditions of Mr. Assange's detention since his forced removal from the embassy and subsequent denial of proper medical treatment

Disregarding the well-established principle of 'proportionality', Mr. Assange, an award-winning journalist with complex healthcare needs (some of which are the result of the mistreatment he endured whilst forced to remain in the embassy), was given a custodial sentence of 50 weeks in the maximum-security Belmarsh prison for the offence of skipping bail. This sentence was not only harsh and disproportionate; in the circumstances, given Ecuador's granting of asylum and the findings of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (see above), it was vindictive.

The conditions in which Mr. Assange continues to be detained whilst on remand also appear harsh, disproportionate and vindictive. Mr. Assange poses no threat to the public. Given the significant breakdown in his health he is not a flight risk. Yet the

court, even before his lawyers had initiated any application for bail in the extradition proceedings, said that he would be remanded in custody because of his behaviour “in these proceedings”. Yet, at the time there had been no proceedings in the extradition case. He has been kept in custody in a maximum-security prison which the UN special rapporteur referred to, as “oppressive conditions of isolation involving at least 22 hours per day in a single occupancy cell... [He] is not allowed to socialize with other inmates and, when circulating in the prison, corridors are cleared and all other inmates locked in their cells. Contrary to assurances.... by the prison administration... and contrary to the general population of the prison, Mr. Assange reportedly still is not allowed to work or to go to the gym, where he could socialize with other inmates.”

Visitors to Mr. Assange have reported that he was wearing prison uniform despite only being a remand prisoner, that he is denied civilian clothes, and that his access to his prescription glasses was “inexplicably delayed” for months, after they were sent to him at Belmarsh. Coming after 9 years of arbitrary and illegal detention in the embassy, the harsh and disproportionate conditions in which Mr. Assange is being held have unsurprisingly caused further grave injury to his health. An international group of doctors has expressed serious concern for his present and future safety and wellbeing. They too have called for him to urgently receive appropriate treatment there. British authorities bear responsibility for the ongoing situation.

2. Disregard for international law and infringement of Mr. Assange’s rights as a refugee:

Sweden, the United Kingdom and Ecuador are parties to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which places on States an obligation to respect non-refoulement with no reservations. Not only have Mr. Assange’s rights as a refugee been ignored, U.K. authorities have helped undermine Mr. Assange’s rights as an Ecuadorean citizen to protections under Ecuadorean law such as a protection against extradition. In addition, the U.K. authorities have not paid due regard to the clear findings of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on the arbitrary detention of Mr. Assange. Importantly, **the U.K. authorities have repeatedly ignored their duty to investigate the serious concerns raised by the UN Special Rapporteur Prof Nils Melzer** in relation to the prohibition against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

3. Disregard for Mr. Assange’s right to a fair trial (ECHR Article 6), and for protection of his private life (ECHR Article 8)

Mr. Assange has suffered sustained infringement of his private life, whilst the conduct of the legal proceedings which have been brought against him, has been **riddled with procedural irregularities that call into question the possibility of a fair trial.**

a) Intrusive Surveillance: It is now known that Mr. Assange and his visitors, including his lawyers, were put under extraordinary levels of covert surveillance within the Ecuadorean embassy at the behest of the US. Evidence has now emerged to prove that this surveillance breached not just the diplomatic sovereignty of the Ecuadorean embassy, but also Mr. Assange’s human rights in respect of privacy, and attorney-client privilege. It also intensified his torture. **Prof. Melzer notes, “relentless surveillance for 24 hours a day is often used deliberately in psychological torture in**

order to drive victims into paranoia, except that the victim's perception actually corresponds to reality".

b) Destruction of Evidence: When the actions of the British and Swedish authorities came to be scrutinised via Freedom of Information Act requests and through other channels, it emerged that evidentiary trails — including communications with the US Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) — have been **destroyed by Swedish and British prosecutors, with no plausible explanation provided.**

c) Political interference: Senior UK governmental ministers have boasted about using their diplomatic skills and clout to broker a deal with Ecuador's new government to rescind Mr. Assange's asylum so that he could be taken into custody.

d) Inability to Prepare Defence: Mr. Assange has been subjected to material and repeated disruptions both with respect to his access to the documents he needs in order to prepare his case and with respect to the facilities he needs in order to consult with his lawyers so that he can prepare his defence.

e) Concerns about impartiality: Officials responsible for key decisions about various aspects of Mr. Assange's case have made inappropriate comments about him, suggesting high levels of prejudice and bias. For example, Mr. Assange has been called a 'narcissist' by a judge during a court hearing. There are also concerns that the senior judge who dealt with his previous case appears to have had serious, multiple conflicts of interest. All this has led to doubts about whether an attempt to deny Mr. Assange a fair investigation of his case may be underway.

f) Failure to respond to UN and other experts: UN officials have stated publicly that Mr. Assange has been detained illegally and arbitrarily and has been tortured. The British authorities have an obligation to engage with and to investigate these criticisms. Instead their responses to UN officials have been belated, improper and inadequate. Moreover, those responsible for these inadequate replies are those — in the British government and the criminal justice system — who are specifically responsible for ensuring that justice is served.

4. US extra-territorial overreach and the dangers to Mr. Assange from extradition to the United States

The extradition request made by the US authorities in itself gives rise to serious concerns. Mr. Assange is an Australian citizen and a journalist based in the United Kingdom. There is no suggestion that he has ever broken any British law whilst undertaking his work as a journalist in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Assange, however, faces an extradition request from the United States in which the US authorities claim that he has committed offences including under the US Espionage Act, which applies exclusively to the jurisdiction of the United States. The charges the US authorities are seeking to bring against Mr. Assange are seen by many journalists around the world as an open assault against investigative journalism as it is practiced. These demands by the US authorities for the extradition to the United States of an Australian journalist based in the United Kingdom must inevitably give rise to serious concerns about **the extraordinary extra-territorial demands which the US authorities are now making.** The consequences if such demands are accepted by the UK to facilitate the extradition of a multi award-winning journalist and publisher are a matter of great concern.

There must also be serious concerns, whether in the context of such demands, Mr. Assange has any realistic prospect of a fair trial if he is extradited to the United States. This is especially concerning given the disproportionate, cruel and inhuman punishment with which Mr. Assange is being threatened if he is convicted in the United States. His alleged accomplice and whistleblower Chelsea Manning, after already serving a lengthy prison term in often inhumane conditions, is now being held in indefinite detention in order to coerce her into giving evidence against Mr. Assange. Mr. Assange faces a possible prison sentence of 175 years. Extraditing Mr. Assange to the United States would in such circumstances not only be inhumane and wrong; it would set a disastrous precedent, legitimising the US authorities' practice of extra-territorial overreach, whilst infringing Mr. Assange's human rights in the most fundamental way, putting his very life at risk. It would also set the scene for a trial whose eventual outcome might set extraordinarily dangerous precedents which could endanger the entire practice of journalism.

Conclusion

Under the rule of law, a State is required to afford all defendants their human rights and to honour international law whether "deriving from treaty or from international custom and practice".

Such considerations are not intended to be optional or dependent on the nature of the crime. Nor are they justified by the nature of the circumstances; nor are they implemented at the discretion of the judge or the State.

As Lord Bingham eloquently reminds jurists in his eponymous 2006 lecture on the subject, the constitutional principle of the 'Rule of Law' is statutory and paramount.

Yet time and time again in Mr. Assange's case, we have seen the law ignored, manipulated or summarily rejected.

We call on the British legal community to reclaim professional standards, to condemn the torture of Mr. Assange and to engage in urgent actions to secure his immediate and safe release.

Signed by:

Alberto Alemanno, Professeur de Droit, HEC et NYU, France

Ahmed Aydeed, Director of Public Law, Duncan Lewis Solicitors, UK

Greg Barns, Barrister & former National President of the Australian Lawyers Alliance

Professor Eirik Bjorge, University of Bristol Law School, UK

Heidi Boghosian, Esq., Executive Director, A.J. Muste Institute, Inc., USA

William Bourdon, Avocat au Barreau de Paris, France

Vincent Brengarth, Avocat au Barreau de Paris, France

Dr Alysia Brooks, Transnational Strategic Litigation Specialist— LawAid International

Nick Brown, Barrister, Doughty Street Chambers, UK

Julian Burnside AO, QC, Australia

Timothy A. Canova, Prof. of Law and Public Finance, Nova Southeastern Univ., USA

Heather Ellis Cucolo, Distinguished Adjunct Prof. of Law, New York Law School

Marie-Anne Cohendet, Prof. de Droit Public, L'Ecole de Droit de la Sorbonne, France

Marjorie Cohn, Professor Emerita, Thomas Jefferson School of Law, USA

Fabiano Cangelosi, Barrister, Tasmanian President of the Australian Lawyers Alliance,
 Olga Margrét Cilia, Lawyer and Deputy MP, The Pirate Party of Iceland
 Jacques Chevallier, Prof. honoraire à l'université de Paris 2 Panthéon-Assas, France
 Dominique Custos, Professeure Droits Fondamentaux, l'Université de Caen, France
 Anne Millet-Devalle, Prof. de Droit Public à l'Université de la Côte d'Azur, France
 Marie-Joëlle Fichrot-Redor, Prof. honoraire, Droits Fondamentaux, Univ. de Caen, France
 Géraldine Giraudeau, Agrégée des facultés de droit, Prof. de droit public à l'UPVD, France
 Ms. Elísabet Guðbjörnsdóttir, Attorney at Law at Consilia ehf., Iceland
 Marit Halvorsen, Professor of Jurisprudence, University of Oslo, Norway
 Dr Thomas Harrè, Barrister, New Zealand
 Leonard Hartnett, Barrister, Gorman Chambers, Australia
 Charles Hector Fernandez, Advocate and Solicitor, Messrs Charles Hector, Malaysia
 Dr Joseph M Fernandez, Adjunct Associate Professor, Curtin University, Australia
 Fredrik Heffermehl, Lawyer and author (Nobel Peace Prize Watch, IALANA), Norway
 Arlette Heymann-Doat, Prof. émérite de Droit Public, Spécialiste des libertés fondamentales, France
 Nancy Hollander, Lawyer, USA
 Toufique Hossain, Director of Public Law, Duncan Lewis Solicitors, UK
 Colin Hutchinson, Barrister, Garden Court Chambers, UK
 Eva Joly, Lawyer, Paris Bar & former judge, Paris Court, France
 Ögmundur Jónasson, Former Minister of Justice, Iceland
 Mamadou Konate, Avocat au Barreau de Bamako et Paris, Ancien Garde des Sceaux, France
 Niki Konstantinidis, Barrister and Solicitor, Australia and UK
 James Lafferty, Executive Director Emeritus, National Lawyers Guild, Los Angeles, USA
 Jean-Manuel Larralde, Professeur de droit public à l'Université de Caen, France
 David Lewis, Professor of Employment Law, Middlesex University, UK
 Lisa Longstaff, Women Against Rape, UK
 Nina Lopez, Legal Action for Women, UK
 Carl J Mayer, Esq., Lawyer and consumer advocate, Mayer Law Group Llc, USA
 Rajiv Menon QC, Barrister, Garden Court Chambers, UK
 Adriana Navarro, Lawyer and Notary Public, Navarro & Associates, Australia
 Thomas Perroud, Professeur de Droit Public, Université Panthéon-Assas, France
 Diane Roman, Professeure à l'école de Droit de la Sorbonne, Université de Paris
 Phillip Segal, Barrister, Samuel Griffith Chambers, Australia
 Catherine Teitgen-Colly, Prof. émérite de l'Université de Paris 1, Droit public, Panthéon-Sorbonne
 Philippe Texier, Magistrat, Ancien Conseiller à la Cour de Cassation, France
 Robert Tibbo, Barrister, Eastern Chambers, Hong Kong
 Craig Tuck, Human rights Lawyer, Director of LawAid International, New Zealand
 Michael Tuck, Barrister, New Zealand
 Mara Verheyden-Hilliard, President of the Partnership for Civil Justice Fund, USA
 Richard J. Whitney, Attorney, USA

cc:

Jeremy Corbyn, MP
 Priti Patel, MP
 Dianne Abbott, MP
 Suella Braverman, MP
 Shami Chakrabarti
 Robert Buckland QC, MP
 Richard Burdon, MP

NOTE:

If you are a retired or serving judge, lawyer, legal academic, or a representative of an organisation engaging on behalf of civil society with the justice system, AND if you

would like to sign this letter, please contact deepadriver@protonmail.com with email heading Signatory: International Jurists' Letter in the title of your email. If you are having difficulties with contacting us, you can also reach the organiser via Twitter @deepa_driver

<https://medium.com/@deepadriver/international-jurists-letter-82c90061994c>

Roger Waters on Julian Assange

Craig Murray
23 Feb. 2020

Roger Waters has become one of the most eloquent and persistent supporters of Julian Assange. He is prepared to challenge the propagandists of the mainstream media head-on in a way that many more people should do.

For yesterday's rally for Assange Roger had prepared a talk putting Julian's persecution in a global context. He did not have time to give the whole speech, and so I asked him if I could publish it:

WE ARE HERE TODAY FOR JULIAN ASSANGE.

But I have four names on this piece of paper.

The First and last of course is Julian Assange, A Journalist, a courageous shiner of light into the dark places from which the powers that be would dearly like to have us turn away.

Julian Assange. A name to be carved with pride into any monument to human progress.

Julian is why we are here today, but this is no parochial protest. We are today part of a global movement, a global movement that might be the beginning of the global enlightenment that this fragile planet so desperately needs.

Ok. Second Name. Sent to me by my friend VJ Prashad. Second name is Aamir Aziz, Aamir is a young poet and activist in Delhi involved in the fight against Modi and his racist Citizenship law.

*Everything Will Be Remembered
Kill us, we will become ghosts and write
of your killings, with all the evidence.
You write jokes in court;
We will write 'justice' on the walls.
We will speak so loudly that even the deaf will hear.
We will write so clearly that even the blind will read.
You write 'injustice' on the earth;
We will write 'revolution' in the sky.
Everything will be remembered;
Everything recorded*

This out pouring of the human spirit from India is taking place in a time of revolt, when the fetters of propriety are set aside.

As we meet here in London, across the Atlantic in Argentina thousands of women are taking to the streets to demand the legalization of abortion from President Fernandez. It's not just Argentina. This last year we have seen major protests erupt across the whole world against neoliberal / fascist regimes. In Chile, The Lebanon, Colombia, Ecuador, Haiti, France and now, of course also in Bolivia fighting the new US imposed military dictatorship there.

When will we see the name of England appended to that noble list? I sense the scratching of heads in drawing rooms across the home counties, "What's he talking about, the man's a bloody pinkoperver, bloody anti semite, what's he talking about? We don't live in a dictatorship, this is a free country, a democracy, with all the finest traditions of fair play, pah!"

Well, I've got news for you Disgruntled of Tunbridge Wells. We'd like to think this is a free country, but are we really free? Why, when Julian Assange is brought to the dock in the tiny magistrates court inside Belmarsh prison are so many seats occupied by anonymous American suits, whispering instructions into the attentive ear of the prosecution's lead barrister, James Lewis QC?

Why?

Because we don't live in a free country, we live in a glorified dog kennel and we bark and/or wag our tails at the bidding of our lords and masters across the pond.

I stand here today, in front of the Mother of Parliaments, and there she stands blushing in all her embarrassment. And just upstream from here is Runnemede, where in 1215, we, the English, laid out the rudiments of common law. Magna Carta, ratified in 1297 article 29 of which gave us Habeus Corpus. Or did it? It stated: "The body of a free man is not to be arrested, or imprisoned, or outlawed, or exiled, or in any way ruined, nor is the king to go against him or send forcibly against him, except by judgment of his peers or by the law of the land."

Sadly, Article 29 is not enforceable in modern law. Magna Carta is only an idea, and in this propaganda driven modern world, it provides no check in principle to Parliament legislating against the rights of citizens.

We do however have an extradition treaty with the USA and in the first paragraph of article 4 of that treaty it states. "Extradition shall not be granted if the offense for which extradition is requested is a political offense." Julian Assange has committed no crime but he has committed a political act. He has spoken truth to power. He has angered some of our masters in Washington by telling the truth and in retribution for the act of telling the truth they want his blood.

Yesterday in front of Battersea Power Station I did a TV interview for SKY news to promote this event, there was no visual link, so my only contact with the lady asking me questions was via an ear bud on a curly wire. I learned something about telling truth in the phrasing of her questions to me. She came at me like some crazed Don Quixote every question laced, thick with the smears and innuendo and the false accusations with which the powers that be have been trying to blacken Julian Assange's name. She rattled off the tired, but well prepared narrative, and then interrupted constantly when I made reply. I don't know who she is, she may mean well. If she does, my advice would be to stop drinking the Kool-aid, and if she actually gives a fig for her chosen profession get her sorry ass down here and join us.

So England. I call upon our prime minister, Boris Johnson, to declare his colours, does he support the spirit of Magna Carta? Does he believe in, democracy, freedom, fair play, free speech, and especially the freedom of the press? If the answer to those questions is yes, then come on Prime Minister be the British Bulldog you would have us all believe you are? Stand up to the bluster of American hegemony, call off this show trial, this charade, this kangaroo court. "The evidence before the court is incontrovertible." Julian Assange is an innocent man. A journalist doing very important work for "we the people" by exposing the crimes of powerful sociopaths in the corridors of power.

I call on you to free him today.

I cannot leave this stage without mention of Chelsea Manning, who provided some of the material that Julian published.

Chelsea has been in a federal prison for a year incarcerated by the Americans for refusing, on principle, to give evidence to a grand jury specifically convened to make an example of Julian Assange. What courage. They are also fining her \$1,000 a day. Chelsea yours is another name to be carved in pride, I've been reading the latest on your case, it looks as if your legal team are finding light at the end of the tunnel, please god, you get out soon back to your loved ones, you are a true hero. You exemplify the bulldog spirit that I was talking about a few moments ago.

Also Daniel Hale. Daniel is a whistle-blower you may not know yet. He was in a great documentary movie National Bird, made by my good friend Sonia Kennebeck. He was part of the US drone program targeting Afghans in their own country from some mobile command center in Nevada. When his stint in the USAF was over. Daniel's good heart refused to edit out the burden of remorse he carried and he very bravely decided to tell his story. The FBI/CIA have pursued Daniel remorselessly ever since and he is now in prison awaiting trial. Daniel's is another name to be carved in pride.

Those of us who have never compromised our liberty in the cause of freedom, who have never picked up the burning torch and held it trembling over the crimes of their superior officers, can only wonder at the extraordinary courage of those who have. There are other speakers here, so I will make way, I could stand here all day railing against the dying of the light should we not stand Bulldog like, with arms linked, ranks closed in front of our brother and comrade Julian Assange. And when the lackies of the American Empire come to take him, to destroy him and hang him in the hedge as a warning to frighten future journalists, we will look them in the eye and steadfast with one voice we will intone. "Over our dead fucking bodies."

Roger Waters Feb. 22nd 2020

* * *

Today I move from the centre of London down to Woolwich and have to get to Belmarsh Magistrate's Court (which is entered through Woolwich Crown Court) before dawn to try to queue for one of the 14 public seats in the courtroom. Holding the hearing in such a tiny court is a deliberate act of censorship by the British government. If any readers can offer practical advice on where to queue precisely in terms of access to the building it would be extremely welcome. There is of course no guarantee that the authorities will respect any queue, or have not reserved some of the public seats for the US Embassy etc.

<https://www.craigmurray.org.uk/archives/2020/02/roger-waters-on-julian-assange/>

Chief Magistrate In Assange Extradition Received Financial Benefits From Shadowy Groups

Matt Kennard & Mark Curtis
Daily Maverick
2/23/2020

The senior judge overseeing the extradition proceedings of WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange received financial benefits from two partner organisations of the British Foreign Office before her appointment, it can be revealed.

It can further be revealed that Lady Emma Arbuthnot was appointed Chief Magistrate in Westminster on the advice of a Conservative government minister with whom she had attended a secretive meeting organised by one of these Foreign Office partner organisations two years before.

Liz Truss, then Justice Secretary, “advised” the Queen to appoint Lady Arbuthnot in October 2016. Two years before, **Truss — who is now Trade Secretary — and Lady Arbuthnot both attended an off-the-record two-day meeting in Bilbao, Spain.**

The expenses were covered by an organisation called Tertulias, chaired by Lady Arbuthnot’s husband — Lord Arbuthnot of Edrom, a former Conservative defence minister with extensive links to the British military and intelligence community exposed by WikiLeaks.

Tertulias, an annual forum held for political and corporate leaders in the UK and Spain, is regarded by the UK Foreign Office as one of its “partnerships”. The 2014 event in Bilbao was attended by David Lidington, the Minister for Europe, while the Foreign Office has in the past funded Lord Arbuthnot’s attendance at the forum.

The Foreign Office has long taken a strong anti-Assange position, rejecting UN findings in his favour, refusing to recognise the political asylum given to him by Ecuador, and even labelling Assange a “miserable little worm”.

Lady Arbuthnot also benefited financially from another trip with her husband in 2014, this time to Istanbul for the British-Turkish Tatlidil, a forum established by the UK and Turkish governments for “high level” individuals involved in politics and business.

Both Tertulias and Tatlidil are secretive gatherings about which little is known and are not obviously connected — but Declassified has discovered that the UK address of the two organisations has been the same.

Lady Arbuthnot personally presided over Assange’s case as judge from late 2017 until mid-2019, delivering two controversial rulings. Although she is no longer personally hearing the Assange extradition proceedings, she remains responsible for supporting and guiding the junior judges in her jurisdiction. **Lady Arbuthnot has refused to declare any conflicts of interest in the case.**

The new revelations follow previous investigations by Declassified showing that Lady Arbuthnot received gifts and hospitality in relation to her husband from a military and cybersecurity company exposed by WikiLeaks. Declassified also revealed that the **Arbuthnots’ son is linked to an anti-data leak company created by the UK**

intelligence establishment and staffed by officials recruited from US intelligence agencies behind that country's prosecution of the WikiLeaks founder.

Lady and Lord Arbuthnot attend the Queen's garden party at Buckingham Palace in May 2017. Lady Arbuthnot was appointed Chief Magistrate in Westminster by the Queen eight months before, in September 2016, on the advice of Liz Truss, who had attended the 2014 Tertulias event with Lady Arbuthnot.

Tertulias' annual meetings between the UK and Spain have been held since 1989 but the organisation has no public presence and provides no record of events. Declassified found that its current president is Jose de Areilza, a Spanish law professor who is also a board member of the Spanish Ministry of Defence.

Lord Arbuthnot records that he became the unpaid chair of Tertulias in 2012, at which time he was also chair of parliament's Defence Committee. Arbuthnot was then also a member of the Joint Committee on National Security Strategy and chair of Conservative Friends of Israel.

In October 2014, Liz Truss, who was then Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), attended the Tertulias meeting in Bilbao, alongside the Arbuthnots, Lidington and at least four other British MPs.

Lord and Lady Arbuthnot spent two days at the event and received expenses worth £1,488.20 from Tertulias. Although having attended the annual event regularly since 2000, this was the first time Lord Arbuthnot recorded in his parliamentary register of interests the attendance of his wife.

At the time Lady Arbuthnot was deputy senior district judge. The reason for her attending a meeting described by Lord Arbuthnot as "bringing MPs, business people, academics and artists together to discuss topical issues" is not clear.

Liz Truss was in Bilbao for three days and accrued expenses of £1,235.48 paid by Tertulias. Her flight cost £825.48, suggesting she was flown first class. By contrast, Nick Boles MP charged £178.98 for his flight. **The funders of Tertulias and Tatlidil are not known.**

The trip to Bilbao was one of only three Truss has accepted from third parties since becoming an MP in 2010. She also joined a group of Conservative MPs on a trip to Berlin in 2011 and attended in 2019 the annual forum of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), a highly secretive meeting organised by the most influential neoconservative think tank in Washington populated by senior US military and intelligence officials.

Declassified recently revealed how the AEI, which has a strongly anti-Assange position, has been courting British ministers for years.



Liz Truss, then minister for DEFRA, speaks in the Guggenheim museum at the secretive Tertulias meeting in Bilbao, Spain, 18 October 2014. Standing to her right is Tertulias' chairman, Lord Arbuthnot. Foreign Office partner organisation Tertulias also paid for Lady Arbuthnot — Julian Assange's senior judge — to attend this event. Declassified is now publishing a photo of Truss giving a speech at the 2014 Tertulias forum in the Guggenheim museum in Bilbao. Lord Arbuthnot can be seen standing next to her, likely having just introduced his fellow Conservative MP. It is not known if Lady Arbuthnot was present.

Truss's visit to Tertulias is secret enough for even the department she oversaw as minister at the time — DEFRA — to have no information on it. Responding to Declassified's Freedom of Information request for communications between the minister and Tertulias or an itinerary for the Bilbao meeting, DEFRA responded: "Following a search of our paper and electronic records, we have established that the information...you have requested is not held by DEFRA." It is unclear if Truss used a private email to organise the visit.

The month following the Tertulias forum, in November 2014, Lady Arbuthnot went on another trip with her husband, this time to Istanbul for the British-Turkish Tatlidil, which paid the Arbuthnots £2,426 for flights and expenses.

Lord Arbuthnot described the purpose of the visit as "to promote and further bilateral relations between Britain and Turkey at a high level". Tatlidil, which means "sweet talk" in Turkish, was established in 2011 by then prime minister David Cameron and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. It describes its objectives as "facilitating and strengthen [sic] relations between the Republic of Turkey and the United Kingdom at the level of government, diplomacy, business, academia and media".

The UK delegation to the 2014 meeting in Istanbul was led by Prince Andrew, who also hosted the Tatlidil in Edinburgh the previous year. Then foreign minister Tobias Ellwood spoke at the forum while former foreign secretary Jack Straw, who is a co-chair of Tatlidil, presided over one of the discussions. Erdoğan spoke at the meeting and reportedly called for the removal of Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad.

The sparse information available on the meeting, which largely comes from social media, suggests that Lady Arbuthnot may not have attended the discussions since there was a separate “spouses/partners programme” involving local visits.

Declassified has discovered that the addresses given by Lord Arbuthnot and other parliamentarians for Tertulias and Tatlidil have been the same — despite no obvious connection between the two organisations other than the UK Foreign Office. All the addresses are residential with no clear reason why they would be official addresses of high-level Foreign Office-linked fora.

In 2012, Arbuthnot recorded in his parliamentary register of interests that the address of both organisations was a Grade II listed house in the village of Cowlinge, Suffolk, which has a population of just over 600 people. From 2013-16, the address changed to a house in Higham, a small village with 140 people, also in Suffolk.

The land registry states that the Higham address is part of the Dalham Estate in Newmarket, and is owned by Arat Investments, a vehicle incorporated in Guernsey with a PO Box address. There is little information publicly available about Arat, given Guernsey’s secrecy laws. It has been reported that the estate is owned by Sheikh Mohammed al-Makhtoum, the ruler of Dubai, one of the United Arab Emirates.

In 2017, the address for Tertulias changed again to a house — which is divided into three flats — in Battersea, south London. In more recent entries to the register of interests, the address is given by MPs as simply “private”.

Declassified has discovered that both Tertulias and Tatlidil had been managed by the same person living at the addresses given by parliamentarians. She told Declassified that Tertulias is “independent” but “works closely” with the Foreign Office. When asked about the organisation’s funders or any personnel involved, including its current parliamentary chair, information was refused.

One of the three residential properties which have been recorded by MPs in the parliamentary register of interests as the location of the Tertulias organisation, which funded Lady Arbuthnot’s trip to Bilbao. In the latest entries, the organisation’s address is listed only as “private”. (Photo: Matt Kennard)

Tertulias and the Foreign Office

Tatlidil was openly set up by the UK government, but Tertulias is also closely linked to the Foreign Office, which describes Tertulias as one of its “partnerships” and in 2013 referred to the forum as “our Tertulias”. Britain’s former ambassador to Spain, Simon Manley, described the annual event as “our #1 bilateral forum” between the UK and Spain.

Last October, Europe minister Christopher Pincher attended the forum in Edinburgh and stated that “the annual Tertulias dialogue illustrates the breadth and depth of the relationship between the United Kingdom and Spain”. His predecessor Sir Alan Duncan attended the previous forum in Malaga.

Duncan, who has now left office, personally insulted Julian Assange in parliament in 2018 before adding: “It is of great regret that Julian Assange remains in the Ecuador embassy,” where he had been given political asylum by the Ecuadorian government.

Lord Arbuthnot recorded that the costs of his attending his first forum in 2000 were partly met by a “grant” from the Foreign Office. Labour minister Peter Mandelson said in 1998 that he attended the Tertulias forum “following official advice from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.”

At the 2014 Tertulias attended by Truss and the Arbuthnots, a Spanish banker was awarded a CBE by the Queen on recommendation of the British government.

Lady Arbuthnot's rulings

Lady Arbuthnot's husband is a key figure in the British military and intelligence establishment — a highly controversial issue given that Lady Arbuthnot has made rulings in the Assange case and continues to oversee it as chief magistrate.

Lord Arbuthnot was from 2016-17 a director of SC Strategy, a consultancy created by Sir John Scarlett, the former head of MI6 who had been behind the “dodgy dossier” used by Tony Blair to push for war with Iraq.

Arbuthnot is currently the chair of the advisory board of arms corporation Thales UK and board member of Montrose Associates, a “strategic intelligence” consultancy, whose president is former Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd.

Lady Arbuthnot has refused to formally recuse herself from the Assange case. A judiciary spokesman has said, “There has been no bias demonstrated by the chief magistrate. The chief magistrate, however, is aware of the judicial conduct guidance that advises on avoiding the perception of bias and is not hearing the case”.

It is unclear what “perception of bias” Lady Arbuthnot accepts and on what basis she stepped aside from personally hearing the case.

The chief magistrate's role includes “supporting and guiding district judge colleagues”, including Vanessa Baraitser, who ruled on the case in 2019. Lady Arbuthnot is also likely to have approved of Baraitser's appointment to hear the Assange case.

Her previous rulings on Assange cannot be revisited by the defence when she fails to declare a conflict of interest.

Lady Arbuthnot's first ruling on Assange was made in February 2018 while he was a political asylee in the Ecuadorian embassy in London. Assange's lawyers had applied to have his British arrest warrant withdrawn.

Assange had never been charged with a crime, and in May 2017 the Swedish proceedings had been discontinued along with the European Arrest Warrant. The warrant related to Assange skipping bail to claim asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy, where the Ecuadorian government agreed that he was at risk of political persecution in the United States.

Arbuthnot refused the request. Her ruling was irregular, dismissing Assange's fears of US extradition and the findings of the UN. “I accept that Mr Assange had expressed fears of being returned to the United States from a very early stage in the Swedish extradition proceedings but... I do not find that Mr Assange's fears were reasonable,” she said.

"I give little weight to the views of the Working Group," she added, referring to the United Nations body which termed Assange's condition one of "arbitrary detention". "I do not find that Mr Assange's stay in the Embassy is inappropriate, unjust, unpredictable, unreasonable, unnecessary or disproportionate."

When he was grabbed from the Ecuadorian embassy by British police in April 2019, district judge Michael Snow pilloried Assange's claims that Lady Arbuthnot was conflicted: "His assertion that he has not had a fair hearing is laughable. And his behaviour is that of a narcissist who cannot get beyond his own selfish interests," Snow told the court.

Lady Arbuthnot made her most recent ruling on Assange in June 2019. District Judge Vanessa Baraitser — who is still overseen by Lady Arbuthnot — will rule on the extradition proceedings which begin on 25 February.

Liz Truss, Lady Arbuthnot, Lord Arbuthnot, and the Foreign Office, did not respond to requests for comment. DM

Matt Kennard is head of investigations and Mark Curtis editor, of Declassified UK, a media organisation investigating UK foreign, military and intelligence policies. They tweet at @DCKennard and @markcurtis30. Follow Declassified on twitter at @DeclassifiedUK

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-02-21-revealed-chief-magistrate-in-assange-case-received-financial-benefits-from-secretive-partner-organisations-of-uk-foreign-office/>

Former Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis visits Julian Assange at Belmarsh Prison ahead of tomorrow's US extradition hearing

ROSS IBBETSON
Daily Mail
23 February 2020

Former Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis today visited Julian Assange at Belmarsh prison ahead of the Wikileaks founder's US extradition hearing.

Assange, 48, will tomorrow face off with the US government at Woolwich Crown Court, just a stone's throw from the notorious southeast London jail dubbed 'the British Guantanamo Bay.'

American officials want Assange hauled across the Atlantic to be tried on espionage charges, which carry a maximum of 175 years in prison, for publishing classified military intelligence.

Varoufakis said outside Belmarsh: 'What we have is an assault on journalism ... The only charge against Julian, hiding behind the nonsense of espionage, is a charge of journalism.'

The Greek economist joined Assange's father John Shipton at a support rally for the prisoner on Sunday afternoon. Shipton has been vociferous in condemnation of his son's treatment, claiming sending him to the US would be a 'death sentence.'....

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8035213/Former-Greek-Finance-Minister-Yanis-Varoufakis-visits-Julian-Assange-Belmarsh-Prison.html>

USA v Julian Assange Extradition Hearing

Defend WikiLeaks website:

<https://defend.wikileaks.org/2020/02/23/usa-v-julian-assange-extradition-hearing/>

Julian Assange was 'harassed' by cell search, father claims

John Shipton says his son's Belmarsh room was targeted on eve of extradition hearing

*Sam Gelder
The Guardian
24 Feb. 2020*

Julian Assange's father has claimed his son was "harassed" by a prison cell search the day before his extradition hearing was planned to begin.

John Shipton visited the WikiLeaks founder at Belmarsh prison in south-east London for two hours on Sunday.

Speaking to reporters afterwards, Shipton demanded Assange be released on bail.

"For the life of me I can't understand why Julian Assange is in jail having committed no crime, with family here that he can come and live with," he said.

"Bail ought to be given immediately if the extradition order isn't dropped.

"Julian had a harassment today. He goes to court tomorrow. They searched his cell this afternoon just before he came down to see us.

"This plague of malice that emanates from the Crown Prosecution Service to Julian Assange must stop immediately."

Shipton was accompanied by Greek economist Yanis Varoufakis. They were met by representatives from Reporters Without Borders, an organisation that defends freedom of the press, as they left the prison.

Shipton said it was "distressing" and "very upsetting" to see his son in jail, adding that he had told him his whole family would be supporting him.

Varoufakis said Assange was in a "very dark place" due to spending more than 20 hours a day in solitary confinement. Describing the Australian as a "force of nature", he said **he was not being allowed to exercise in the gym with other inmates.**

“We have to stop this extradition in the interests of 300 years of modernity, 300 years of trying to establish human rights and civil liberties in the west and around the world,” Varoufakis added.

Christophe Deloire, secretary general of Reporters Without Borders, said journalism “will be in danger” at the Woolwich crown court hearing.

He said: “If Assange would be extradited to the US, it would be the sign that journalism is considered espionage and it would endanger all journalists who want to uncover the lies of governments whatever the country.”

Assange, 48, is wanted in the US on 18 charges over the publication of US cables a decade ago, and if found guilty could face a 175-year prison sentence.

He is accused of working with former US army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning to leak hundreds of thousands of classified documents.

Last week Shipton warned his son’s extradition would be akin to a “death sentence”. He addressed the hundreds of Assange supporters after they marched through central London to Parliament Square on Saturday to protest against his son’s potential extradition.

On Sunday evening, Assange supporters were setting up tents outside the court building.

Musician Roger Waters, Varoufakis and fashion designer Vivienne Westwood also gave speeches in support of Assange.

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/feb/23/julian-assange-was-harassed-by-cell-search-claims-father>

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Australian and New Zealand demonstrations demand freedom for WikiLeaks founder and US whistleblower

World Socialist Web Site
24 February 2020

Workers and retirees, as well as youth and students attending the Socialist Equality Party’s rally in the western-Sydney suburb of Parramatta on Saturday responded powerfully to speakers’ calls for them to deepen their involvement in the fight to defend WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and US whistleblower Chelsea Manning.

The Parramatta rally, which was attended by up to 120 people — and has now been watched by over 4,000 via online streaming — was followed the next day by an SEP rally outside the State Library of Victoria and a march through the city of Melbourne. A demonstration was also held on Sunday in Wellington, the New Zealand capital, organised by the Socialist Equality Group.

In Parramatta, the predominantly working-class audience — some of whom were attending their first rally in defence of Assange and others who travelled hundreds of kilometres — listened intently as speakers explained the global, US-led conspiracy

and persecution of the WikiLeaks founder and the US whistleblower. Addressing the crowd from the Town Hall steps, speakers were frequently interrupted by applause during the live-streamed event. The warm and serious response is a reflection of the growing international support for Assange and Manning and a deeper political understanding and determination to fight by important layers of students, workers and youth.

The rally heard greetings from the recently-established Darwin Northern Territory Assange Action Group, which had protested on Friday outside the Northern Territory parliament. The group saluted the WikiLeaks founder and declared: "Thank you Mr Assange for speaking for us the people. Now it is our turn to speak on your behalf! With protests being held worldwide we stand together united for the truth, for justice and for freedom."

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) member John Davis told the rally that Assange and Manning were the victims of a vicious, decade-long political witch-hunt. He reviewed the brutal and ongoing imprisonment of Manning and her fearless refusal to capitulate to Washington's legal blackmail.

"The actions of Assange and Manning," Davis said, "whilst being deemed criminal by the American state apparatus and its allies, are correctly regarded by millions around the world as heroic acts."

Margaret "Mags" Richardson, a registered nurse and founding member of the Julian Assange Supporters Alice Springs Action Group, explained the impact on her of Assange's violent arrest and expulsion from the Ecuadorian Embassy in London. Outraged over his persecution, Richardson found the SEP on the internet, flew from Alice Springs to Sydney to attend its June 2019 rally, then, with SEP members, organised a public meeting in Alice Springs in November. Out of that meeting, she then established an "action group" for Assange.

She told the rally: "We are building an awareness [in Alice Springs], talking to people about Assange's situation and the real reasons behind his persecution. Even if the numbers are small to begin with, it doesn't matter, because you are building an awareness amongst ordinary people, which is the only way forward, and you do this in the knowledge that there is a definite groundswell of support internationally..."

"That we have established an Assange action group in Alice Springs, just a few kilometres from the US Pine Gap spy base, is a powerful message to the US and its corrupt and illegal attempts to extradite Assange, and the Australian government which is allowing this to happen."

Richardson explained that the group had petitioned the Alice Springs City Council to pass a resolution opposing the US extradition of Assange. After the resolution was presented to last month's meeting, one councillor walked out and another opposed any debate on the issue claiming that it was in "conflict with the community" and "the very large American contingent" in Alice Springs.

"In other words, don't do anything to upset the US government. It was a political microcosm of what is going on in the Australian parliament... Our initiative was very revealing and points to the attitude of Australian governments — Liberal and Labor alike — towards Assange and why they have thrown him to the Washington wolves," she said.

Richardson noted the inseparable connection between the defence of Assange and every other basic right: “I’ve been an environmental campaigner for many years of my life, but Assange’s situation underpins everything. **We won’t have a voice on any environmental issue, or any other issue, if we do not have honest information and freedom of speech...**

“You cannot rely on the parliamentary polities because they support the US-Australia military alliance and Washington’s great war machine. The release of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning is up to us, the people, to form grassroots organisations and develop a mass movement from below.”

Lissa Johnson, a clinical psychologist and a leading member of Doctors4Assange, told the rally that she began writing about the psychology of Assange’s persecution after attending an SEP rally in Sydney in June 2018.

In a chilling address, she reviewed the media and psychological war conducted against the WikiLeaks founder and how this campaign — including his extended isolation in the Ecuadorian embassy and his torturous incarceration in Belmarsh prison — were destroying his physical and mental health. **Assange is the victim, she said of, state-sponsored medical abuse “perpetrated for political reasons” and to “facilitate the political extradition of a journalist.”**

Johnson explained the work being conducted by Doctors4Assange, which has sent letters to the UK Home Secretary and Secretary of State calling for Assange’s transfer to an appropriate hospital, along with a letter to Australia’s prime minister, foreign affairs minister, and Labor Party opposition leader Anthony Albanese.

Johnson noted that all the letters had been ignored and drew attention to the latest letter authored by Doctors4Assange which was published in the Lancet medical journal.

She told the audience: “Psychology has been used and abused to inflict politically motivated smear campaigns and psychological torture. The law has been used and abused to inflict politically-motivated persecution. And journalism has been used and abused to cover for all of it.

“It is this last abuse that is the most dangerous, because true investigative journalism, the kind that exposes the crimes of the powerful, like Julian Assange’s journalism, is what protects us from all the other abuses of power.

“When true investigative journalism is stamped out, which it will be if Julian Assange is extradited, thereby criminalising journalism, we will be at the mercy of unchecked power... And if the psychology profession knows anything about power, it’s that unchecked power and unchecked abuse, will escalate. That is the kind of world we’re on the brink of entering now.

“The powerful don’t persecute and silence journalists unless they want to get away with murder... If Julian Assange is extradited we will have set tyranny free.”

The final speaker was SEP National Committee member James Cogan, who has played a leading role in the Socialist Equality Party’s defence of the WikiLeaks publisher and the US whistleblower. Assange and Manning, Cogan said, were class-war prisoners and the victims of the generalised and escalating state assault on the basic democratic and social rights of the working class. He warned that the growing

international support from workers and youth had forced some politicians and various previously silent organisations to speak out.

He stressed that there should be no illusions about Australian Prime Minister Morrison, or the opposition Labor Party, the British government or the Trump administration. Moral appeals to these forces will not produce some “overnight transformation.”

“The determination of the Trump administration and its allies in the British and Australian ruling classes to railroad Assange into prison is because US imperialism and its allies are conspiring to commit even greater war crimes than those exposed by Manning and WikiLeaks a decade ago...

“The evisceration of democratic rights and the preparations for police-state rule are part of the preparations to suppress mass opposition to war — whether it is war against Iran, or war against nuclear-armed powers such as Russia and China,” he said.

The speaker pointed to last week’s court endorsement of the Australian Federal Police raids last June on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, when it ruled that national security “outweighs public interest in the free flow of information.” This meant, Cogan said, **“Any media that publishes whistleblower evidence of Australian war crimes or intelligence operations, or just how close US-Australian military collaboration has become, will become the target of police investigations, raids and charges.”**

He also noted that the Morrison government, with the full bipartisan support of Labor and its leader, Anthony Albanese, has announced that another \$1.1 billion will be spent on upgrading the Air Force base at Tindal in the Northern Territory. These developments, the speaker continued, were in preparation for war. “The hostility of successive Labor and Coalition governments toward Assange stems directly from their mutual commitment to the US-Australia military alliance and their alignment with the US preparations for a catastrophic military confrontation with China. The dominant sections of Australian finance and big business are tied to Wall Street by a thousand threads.”

Cogan concluded by assuring all those in attendance that the SEP would intensify the fight for the release of Assange and Manning and appealed for workers and youth across Australia to follow the example set by the Alice Springs action group and form similar committees.

Many people remained behind after the rally to discuss with the speakers the issues raised, give interviews or leave their contact details, purchase literature and “Free Assange” t-shirts and donate.

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/02/24/sepa-f24.html>

Trump administration targeting 'enemy of America' Julian Assange, court told

*WikiLeaks founder's life is at risk if he is extradited to US, judge in London hears
Amid the din, Assange struggles to hear the case against him*

Ben Quinn
The Guardian
24 Feb. 2020

Donald Trump's administration is targeting Julian Assange as "an enemy of the America who must be brought down" and his very life could be at risk if sent to face trial in the US, the first day of the WikiLeaks founder's extradition hearing has been told.

Lawyers for Assange intend to call as a witness a former employee of a Spanish security company who says surveillance was carried out for the US on Assange while he was at Ecuador's London embassy and that conversations had turned to potentially kidnapping or poisoning him.

This was an indication of the danger which Assange faced were he to be extradited to a state "prepared to consider such extreme measures", Edward Fitzgerald QC told Woolwich crown court in south-east London.

The case against extradition, which Assange's lawyers oppose on a range of grounds including that it contravenes the UK-US treaty by being "politically motivated", was laid out after a barrister for US authorities said secret sources who supplied information to the US government "disappeared" after they were put at risk of death or torture by WikiLeaks's release of classified documents.

Assange, 48, is wanted in the US to face 18 charges of attempted hacking and breaches of the Espionage Act. They relate to the publication a decade ago of hundreds of thousands of diplomatic cables and files covering areas including US activities in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Australian, who could face a 175-year prison sentence if found guilty, is accused of working with the former US army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning to leak classified documents.

The case is set to continue on Tuesday and over the course of this week, when some witnesses are expected to give evidence anonymously, potentially from behind screens.

James Lewis QC, acting for US authorities, told the court: "The US is aware of sources, whose unredacted names and other identifying information was contained in classified documents published by WikiLeaks, who subsequently disappeared, **although the US can't prove at this point that their disappearance was the result of being outed by WikiLeaks.**"

By disseminating material in an unredacted form, Lewis said Assange knowingly put human rights activists, dissidents, journalists and their families at risk of serious harm in states run by oppressive regimes.

Sitting at the back of the court and dressed in a grey blazer, grey sweater and white shirt with reading glasses perched on his head, Assange stood up shortly before lunchtime to tell the judge, Vanessa Baraitser, he was having difficulty hearing amid the noise of chanting from hundreds of supporters outside.

"I am having difficulty concentrating and this noise is not helpful," he said. "I understand and am very appreciative of the public support. I do understand they must be disgusted by these proceedings."

Assange's counsel delivered a barrage of arguments against extradition, including that Assange would be exposed to cruel and degrading treatment in a maximum-security prison.

Fitzgerald added that Prof Michael Kopelman, a distinguished forensic psychiatrist and expert witness for the defence had said: "I am as confident as a psychiatrist can ever be that, if extradition to the United States were to become imminent, Mr Assange would find a way of suiciding."

Other key parts of the evidence related to the claim, which emerged last week, that a then US Republican congressman offered Assange a pardon if he denied Russian involvement in the leaking of US Democratic party emails during the 2016 US presidential contest.

The court was told that Dana Rohrabacher, who claims to have made the proposal on his own initiative, had presented it as a "win-win" scenario that would allow Assange to leave the embassy and get on with his life. Assange was also said to have been asked to reveal the source of the leaks and rejected this overture.

Fitzgerald was scathing of the US president and referred back to WikiLeaks revelations such as video of US soldiers shooting unarmed civilians from a helicopter and the torture of detainees in Iraq. he added: **"Such revelations obviously put him in the sights of the aggressive 'America first' ideologues of the Trump administration."**

Earlier, Lewis said that journalism was not an excuse for breaking laws.

He took the court through a number of details about documents relating to sources which the US alleges were put at risk. One had supplied information about an improvised explosive device (IED) attack in Iraq. Another was named in a 2008 US state department cable discussing issues relating to ethnic conflict in China.

Lewis said he wanted to emphasise: "He is not charged with disclosure of embarrassing or awkward information that the government would rather not have have disclosed."

Earlier, Lewis referred to a report in the Guardian from September 2011, which said WikiLeaks had published its full archive of 251,000 secret US diplomatic cables, without redactions, potentially exposing thousands of individuals named in the documents to detention, harm or putting their lives in danger.

He went on to describe how the move had been strongly condemned by WikiLeaks' five previous media partners -- the Guardian, the New York Times, El País, Der Spiegel and Le Monde -- who have worked with the site publishing carefully selected and redacted documents.

The case against extradition counters it is completely misleading to suggest Assange and WikiLeaks were responsible for the disclosure of unredacted names to the public. They say he took every step to prevent the disclosure of unredacted names, and **WikiLeaks only published unredacted materials after they had been published in full by others [notably The Guardian, as The Guardian in this report choose not to note. -A.B.]**.

Assange has been held on remand in Belmarsh prison since last September after serving a jail sentence for breaching bail conditions. He sought refuge in Ecuador's embassy to avoid extradition to Sweden where he was accused of sexual offences, which he denied.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/feb/24/julian-assange-hearing-journalism-is-no-excuse-for-breaking-law>

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Amid the din, Julian Assange struggles to hear case against him

*From inside court 2, WikiLeaks' co-founder thanks those 'disgusted' by extradition proceedings
Informant named in WikiLeaks files disappeared, Assange hearing told*

Ben Quinn
The Guardian
24 Feb. 2020

There was no room inside for the hundreds who had turned up to support Julian Assange, but the the sound of their chants in support of the WikiLeaks founder could be heard throughout the long-awaited extradition hearing at Woolwich crown court.

At an early stage, perhaps as much in hope as anything else, the presiding judge, Vanessa Baraitser, had sent court staff outside to speak Assange's supporters, adding that the noise could interfere with her ability to hear the case properly.

It was to no avail, but James Lewis QC nevertheless pressed on, outlining the US case for why the Australian should be extradited to America to face trial on 18 charges of attempted hacking and breaches of the country's espionage laws.

It has been about 10 months since Assange was dragged from the Ecuadorian embassy, where he had spent seven years inside as he faced allegations in Sweden of sex crimes, which he has always denied.

The bedraggled-looking figure pulled from the embassy last April was nowhere to be seen on Monday. Instead, at the back of court 2 sat a cleancut Assange in a crisp white shirt under a grey sweater, impassive and with reading glasses on his head.

After a morning spent straining to hear the US case against him being read out, Assange rose shortly before the lunchtime break to thank those protesting outside in support of him, but adding that it was making it hard for him to concentrate.

"I am having difficulty concentrating and this noise is not helpful. I understand and am very appreciative of the public support. I do understand they must be disgusted by these proceedings," he told the judge.

Above him and to his left were those who gathered in the public gallery. They included his father, John Shipton, and figures from WikiLeaks, the site Assange co-founded in 2006.

Others at court -- though not all inside the courtroom -- included 33 parliamentarians from 12 different European countries. They formed a monitoring

group organised by the freedom of expression project Bridges for Media Freedom and came from Belgium, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and the UK.

It was outside Woolwich crown court, however, that the full mosaic of the following that has rowed in behind Assange could be found. They included a dozen gilet jaune protesters who had travelled from Paris overnight.

"I am a yellow vest here to support because he did the best for all the world, for his courage," said Jean-Baptiste Voltuan, 64.

The ranks of those keeping up a steady stream of chants included the fashion designer Vivienne Westwood, wearing a headband reading "angel", who told the Press Association: "I am Vivienne. I'm the angel of democracy. Nobody knows more about democracies than Julian Assange.

"It is not a crime to publish American war crimes. It's in the public interest, it is democracy, that he is allowed to do this. I feel really worried and frightened actually, really frightened."

Inside court 2 meanwhile, there was silence as the extradition case was laid out in slow, meticulous detail by Lewis as he took Baraitser and those listening through a US depiction of WikiLeaks, visiting the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts along the way.

The sombre delivery of Lewis gave way eventually to the equally sombre opening statement of Assange's defence councils, Edward Fitzgerald QC, lightened only briefly by the latter's channeling Mandy Rice-Davies' Profumo-era retort to Lord Astor's claims not to have met her.

In this case, the famous quote was deployed as a response to Donald Trump's absolute denial of anything in relation to claims that a Republican Congressman had offered Assange a pardon on the President's behalf

"We say: 'well, he would say that, wouldn't he?'" said Fitzgerald.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/feb/24/cleancut-assange-struggles-to-hear-case-against-him-wikileaks-extradition>

As Hearing Begins, Rights Groups Warn Extraditing Assange to US Would Deal 'Body Blow to Press Freedom'

"Using the draconian wartime powers of the Espionage Act against Assange undermines journalists's rights and sets dangerous precedents that cast journalists and publishers as criminals."

Julia Conley
Common Dreams
February 24, 2020

Press freedom advocates slammed the U.S. over its pending espionage charges against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange Monday as the first phase of Assange's extradition trial began in London.

Groups including Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) joined supporters of Assange gathered at demonstrations around the world in demanding the U.K. not allow the Wikileaks founder's extradition to the U.S., where he faces espionage charges for publishing thousands of classified materials regarding U.S. activities — including evidence of war crimes — in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere.

On social media, the #DontExtraditeAssange hashtag was being used worldwide by those opposed to the treatment of the now famous journalist and publisher.

The trial, supporters said, is about not just Assange's individual fate, but concerns the future of press freedom all over the world.

"The extradition of Julian Assange to the United States to stand trial for his groundbreaking work with WikiLeaks would deal a body blow to First Amendment rights and press freedom. The U.K. should deny this request," said CPJ deputy executive director Robert Mahoney. "Using the draconian wartime powers of the Espionage Act against Assange undermines journalists's rights and sets dangerous precedents that cast journalists and publishers as criminals."

The first phase of the trial is set to last a week and is aimed at determining whether U.S. efforts to extradite Assange are politically-motivated, which would make it illegal under a 2003 treaty between the two countries.

If extradited, Assange could face a prison sentence of up to 175 years for working with former U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning, who leaked documents to WikiLeaks and who has been held for nearly a year in a prison in Virginia for refusing to cooperate with a grand jury subpoena.

Demonstrators assembled outside Belmarsh Prison, where Assange has been held since September, and at other protests around the world, holding signs reading, "Assange's freedom is my freedom" and "Free Assange."



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Thousands showed up in support of Julian Assange 🌟🌟
telesurenglish.net/news/assanges-...



Assange's Trial for U.S. Extradition Begins in London

The case for extradition to the U.S. began on Monday, as thousands of protesters show their support to Assange.

telesurenglish.net

Prosecutors focused opening arguments on government sources who "disappeared" after being put at risk by Wikileaks' release of the documents, which included information about U.S. attacks and civilian casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan. Press freedom groups have argued for years that punishing Assange for disseminating information about U.S. military and diplomatic activities will put all journalists' rights at grave risk.

"Deciding if Julian Assange is a hero or a saint is not the question. Whether we like or don't like Julian Assange is not the question," said Christophe Deloire, secretary-general of Reporters Without Borders, at a press conference in London. "The question is: do we think it's acceptable for a contribution to journalism to be treated as spying? That's the question."

Deloire reported from the trial that while the prosecutor accused Assange of placing individuals in danger, "he was not capable of naming any victims."

Human rights advocates including Amnesty International have in recent days joined in demanding the charges against Assange, brought by the Trump administration, be dropped.

In addition to waging a "full-scale assault on the right to freedom of expression," Amnesty said Friday, the U.S. has taken part in an attack on Assange's human rights as medical experts warn that his imprisonment and the seven years he spent in the Ecuadorean embassy in London have led to "medical neglect and fragile health."

Should he be extradited, Amnesty said, Assange could face further "torture and other ill-treatment, including prolonged solitary confinement."

The Council of Europe's human rights commissioner expressed similar concerns last week.

"Any extradition to a situation in which the person involved would be at real risk of torture or inhuman or degrading treatment would be contrary to Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights," said Commissioner Dunja Mijatovic.

<https://www.commondreams.org/news/2020/02/24/hearing-begins-rights-groups-warn-extraditing-assange-us-would-deal-body-blow-press>

Protests in Washington Call on US Lawmakers to Oppose Assange's Extradition

Morgan Artyukhina

Sputnik

24.02.2020

As the extradition hearing for Julian Assange began in the UK on Monday, protesters in Washington, DC, demonstrated against the WikiLeaks co-founder being charged for publishing leaked documents and brought to the US to stand trial.

At Woolwich Crown Court, immediately adjacent to the southeast London jail that has held him for nearly a year, Assange's hearing on being extradited to the US to stand trial on 18 charges relating to WikiLeaks publications began. The charges include that he helped then-US Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning break into a US government computer to steal documents WikiLeaks later published, and that he violated the 1917 Espionage Act by publishing stolen classified documents.

Those documents exposed systematic coverups by Washington of war crimes carried out by US forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, including the murder of Reuters journalists by US soldiers, which the Pentagon claimed had been a tragic incident of collateral damage. However, barrister James Lewis QC, representing the US government, revealed in the courtroom Monday that Assange isn't wanted for exposing war crimes, but for dissemination of "particular classified documents concerning national defense, including the unredacted identities of sources," even though he also admitted "no harm" came from those divulgences.

Protesters around the world rallied on Monday against Assange's potential extradition to the US from the UK, where he was arrested last April in connection with the indictments. In Washington, DC, they met in front of the White House before marching to Trump Hotel and then the US Department of Justice.

"We really want to make sure people know that this is happening right now," Christy Dopf of Action 4 Assange told Sputnik Monday outside the White House. "There's a lot going on in the US -- primary season kicking off and the candidates taking up a lot of the news cycle -- so we really want to make sure the American public understands that the US government is the one indicting Assange and why we do not want him

brought here: because he would face a show trial and essentially be put away for 175 years for publishing war crimes.”

Action 4 Assange was one of several groups that convened a week of protests in the US capital in conjunction with those in London and elsewhere, including Unity4J and anti-war group Code Pink.

Andrew Smith, another Action 4 Assange activist, said that while third-party, US candidates for the Libertarian, Green and Socialist Equality parties had come out against Assange’s charges, no mainstream candidates were willing to talk about the case, and the corporate media avoids mentioning the content of the documents WikiLeaks published, even when discussing information that came from them.

“Even with the discussions around Syria and all the things that WikiLeaks has revealed, they won’t even bring his name up in reference to the information that we now know,” Smith said. “So it’s really disheartening to see the established political order constantly killing this man.”

“Absent from CNN’s debate stage is any mention of Julian Assange whatsoever,” Steve Boykin, another Action 4 Assange activist, said.

Code Pink co-founder Medea Benjamin told Sputnik that as a journalist and publisher, Assange’s case is “about free expression and releasing information that’s critical for the public to know about how our governments act. And to take that as a case of espionage is to so totally twist what he has been doing and trying to punish him to the max to send a message out to other journalists around the world: ‘Don’t mess with what we consider our national security.’”

“There’s a big discussion about this extradition treaty that there exists between the US and the UK: it says ‘except for political cases,’ and this, for the public, I think, it’s very obvious that this is a political case,” Benjamin said, noting the case was further complicated by the Conservative UK government of Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who “wants to please [US President] Donald Trump.”

“We’ll see if there’s really an independent court in the UK that understands that this is a totally political case, and Julian Assange should not be extradited -- on the contrary, he should be set free and allowed to go back home to Australia.”

An activist with Unity4J named Dack told Sputnik he had personally asked 18 Democratic presidential candidates what their positions on Assange’s case were.

“The only person who actually took a clear, unambiguous stance against the prosecution was [Hawaii Rep.] Tulsi Gabbard. She of course has been disrespected by the Democratic Party from the beginning, the mainstream media did not cover her, and her campaign is basically dead in the water now,”

Dack told Sputnik. “All of the other candidates expressed either an unwillingness to talk about the case, an ignorance of the case or said that they did not support him and they felt that he did something wrong and he should face the consequences for it. We saw a lot of agreement with what the Trump administration is doing.”

The activist noted that businessman Andrew Yang, despite being a party outsider, nonetheless gave a “disappointing” answer in favor of prosecuting Assange; Sen.

Cory Booker (D-NJ), "who's good friends with Hillary Clinton, he claimed he didn't know enough about the issue to comment. I find that hard to believe."

As for former South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg, "when I explained that Assange was dying in prison, Pete Buttigieg said that he's not going to make a commitment pardon Assange, and the crowd of about three or four hundred erupted in applause," Dack said. "This is the state of American morality in the year 2020."

"They're really not any different from Trump in terms of superficial style," he noted. "I even framed it: 'Do you support Trump's war on journalism?' And they could not show a clear definitive opposition to that. So if any of them were to get into power, I would not be optimistic for Assange's chances for survival."

<https://sputniknews.com/us/202002241078396920-videos-protests-in-washington-call-on-us-lawmakers-to-oppose-assanges-extradition/>

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SvD-Debatt: 2020-02-24

"Farligt prejudikat kan sättas i fallet Assange"

Om Julian Assange utvisas och döms under Espionage Act i USA kan det vara dödsstöten för journalistik som är kritisk till det växande militär-industriella komplexet. Det skriver Katarina Stensson, Piratpartiet.

1998 arresterades Augusto Pinochet i Storbritannien. Chiles tidigare diktator hade åtalats i Spanien för ett flertal brott mot de mänskliga rättigheterna, bland annat flera fall av tortyr och politisk förföljelse. Efter arresteringen riktades kritik från tidigare ledare för både USA (Bush Sr) och Storbritannien (Thatcher) mot förfarandet. De tyckte att Pinochet genast skulle släppas fri. Thatcher liknade agerandet vid en polisstat. Den brittiska regeringen valde till slut att inte utvisa Pinochet till Spanien, utan låta honom återvända hem. Man hänvisade bland annat till hans påstått svaga hälsa.

Nästan exakt 20 år senare står en annan man gripen i Storbritannien. Han är inte heller brittisk medborgare, och åtalas precis som Pinochet för brott i ett tredje land. I maj 2019 anhöll den amerikanska regeringen om utvisning av Julian Assange för att ha brutit mot Espionage Act.

Tongångarna är inte likadana nu som när Pinochet stod inför utvisning. Inga tidigare politiska ledare från USA eller Storbritannien kommer till Assanges försvar. Allting tyder på att han kommer utvisas till USA, där han nu riskerar 175 år i fängelse för att ha publicerat information som var i allmänhetens intresse.

Tack vare Assange och Wikileaks vet vi mer om krigen i Afghanistan och Irak än vi annars gjort. Utan dem hade vi inte känt till tusentals fall av dödade civila, avrättning av fiender som försökt ge upp, eller hur mycket tortyr som fortsatte även efter Abu Ghraib-avslöjandena. **Det är värt att förtydliga: Assange var med och avslöjade amerikanska krigsbrott, och för det riskerar han livstids fängelse.**

Och det är bara toppen av isberget; vår kunskap om tortyr i Guantanamo, det hemliga drönarkriget i Jemen, spionage mot FN, Saudiarabiens diplomatiska

ansträngningar för krig med Iran, tibetanskt motstånd mot kinesiska regeringen, utomrättsliga avrättningar från kenyansk polis, utsläpp av farliga kemikalier vid Elfenbenskusten och illegal bankverksamhet på Island har stärkts av Wikileaks och av Assanges arbete.

Kanske är det därför som Assanges allt sämre hälsa inte diskuteras i relation till utvisningsärendet, medan det var relevant för den brittiska regeringens beslut att låta Pinochet komma undan rättvisa för tortyr och politisk förföljelse. Assange har trots allt avslöjat mycket om den brittiska regeringen – som hur man kringgått förbud av klusterbomber – medan Pinochet var en allierad till Storbritannien och USA.

Annon

Det prejudikat som sätts är att det är farligare för en medborgare i västvärlden att rapportera om våra regeringars människorättsbrott och hemligheter än att tortera människor, se till att politiska fiender "försvinner" eller mörda dissidenter. Om Assange utvisas och döms under Espionage Act i USA kan det vara dödsstöten för journalistik som är kritisk till det växande militär-industriella komplexet.

Rättegången som Assange står inför är vår tids viktigaste händelse för pressfriheten i västvärlden. Det vet till exempel de internationella och europeiska journalistförbunden, och det är anledningen till att de tydligt ställt sig på Assanges sida.

Assanges hälsa var dålig redan när han fängslades efter att ha varit instängd i Ecuadors ambassad i sju år, och den har försämrats kraftigt sedan han inledde sin vistelse i Storbritanniens ökända fängelse Belmarsh, känt som Storbritanniens Guantanamo. Drar utvisningsförhandlingarna ut på tiden och han tvingas fortsätta sitt liv i Belmarsh finns det en risk att han dör av vistelsen. Kanske är det vad USA och Storbritannien hoppas på.

Sverige borde ge Assange asyl med hänvisning till den politiska förföljelse han utsatts för från den amerikanska regeringens sida. Det borde ha gjorts för länge sedan. Då hade Assange fått återvända till frihet i stället för att långsamt ruttna bort i ett fängelse. Då hade också rättsfallet som involverat anklagelser om våldtäkt i Sverige kunnat utredas utan fördröjning.

Katarina Stensson, partiledare för Piratpartiet

<https://www.svd.se/farligt-prejudikat-kan-sattas-i-fallet-assange>

The Assange Story

WikiLeaks founder's journey from whistleblowing hero to exile

RT

2020-02-24

Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=630X89TbI74>

Julian Assange was 'handcuffed 11 times and stripped naked'

WikiLeaks founder's lawyers complain of interference after first day of extradition hearing

*Ben Quinn
The Guardian
25 Feb. 2020*

Julian Assange was handcuffed 11 times, stripped naked twice and had his case files confiscated after the first day of his extradition hearing, according to his lawyers, who complained of interference in his ability to take part.

Their appeal to the judge overseeing the trial at Woolwich crown court in south-east London was also supported by legal counsel for the US government, who said it was essential the WikiLeaks founder be given a fair trial.

Edward Fitzgerald QC, acting for Assange, said **the case files, which the prisoner was reading in court on Monday, were confiscated by guards when he returned to prison** later that night and that he was put in five cells.

The judge, Vanessa Baraitser, replied that she did not have the legal power to comment or rule on Assange's conditions but encouraged the defence team to formally raise the matter with the prison.

The details emerged on the second day of Assange's extradition hearing, during which his legal team denied that he had "knowingly placed lives at risk" by publishing unredacted US government files.

The court was told Wikileaks had entered into a collaboration with the Guardian, El País, the New York Times and other media outlets to make redactions to 250,000 leaked cables secret cables in 2010 and publish them.

Mark Summers, QC, claimed the unredacted files had been published because a password to this material had appeared in a Guardian book on the affair. "The gates got opened not by Assange or WikiLeaks but by another member of that partnership," he said.

The Guardian denied the claim.

"The Guardian has made clear it is opposed to the extradition of Julian Assange. However, it is entirely wrong to say the Guardian's 2011 Wikileaks book led to the publication of unredacted US government files," a spokesman said.

"The book contained a password which the authors had been told by Julian Assange was temporary and would expire and be deleted in a matter of hours. The book also contained no details about the whereabouts of the files. No concerns were expressed by Assange or Wikileaks about security being compromised when the book was published in February 2011. Wikileaks published the unredacted files in September 2011."

The Guardian's former investigations editor David Leigh, who wrote the book with Luke Harding, said: "It's a complete invention that I had anything to do with Julian Assange's own publication decisions. His cause is not helped by people making things up."

Assange, 48, is wanted in the US to face 18 charges of attempted hacking and breaches of the Espionage Act. They relate to the publication a decade ago of hundreds of

thousands of diplomatic cables and files covering areas including US activities in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The Australian, who could face a 175-year prison sentence if found guilty, is accused of working with the former US army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning to leak classified documents.

As well as rejecting allegations that Assange had put the lives of US sources in danger, much of the hearing was taken up with defence counter arguments to the US case that he helped the former intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning to “crack” a scrambled password stored on US Department of Defense computers in order to continue sending leaked material to Wikileaks.

“You can accurately describe this chapter of the case as lies, lies and more lies,” Summers told the court at the outset of the day.

Manning already had access to the information and did not need to decode the scrambled password, or “hash value”. Nor could she have done so, as is alleged, in order to gain someone else’s password, because access to the system was recorded on the basis of IP addresses, Summers says.

As for the US contention that Assange had “solicited” leaks from Manning, a whistleblower who served more than six years of a 35-year military prison sentence before it was commuted by Barack Obama, Summers drew on Manning’s insistence that she was moved by her conscience.

James Lewis QC responded for the US government by accusing the defence of consistently misrepresenting the US indictment of Assange, adding: “What he [Summers] is trying to do is consistently put up a straw man and then knock it down.”

For example, on the question of cracking the password hash, he emphasised that the US was making a “general allegation” that doing so would make it “more difficult” for the authorities to identify the source of the leaks.

Lewis rejected claims made on Monday by the defence that the US had deliberately “ratcheted up” the charges against Assange in response to the fact that Swedish authorities announced in May 2019 their intention to reopen the investigation of Assange for alleged sexual offences and issue a European arrest warrant.

“The inference that charging Mr Assange with publishing the names of sources was simply ratcheting up the charges is defeated by the objective facts that the [US] grand jury found and indicted him on,” he said.

“It just does not follow we will ratchet up the charges in case there might be a competition. We have a clear unequivocal and legal basis for charging him and that is the end of it.”

The hearing continues.

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/feb/25/julian-assange-handcuffed-stripped-naked-claim-lawyers>

Julian Assange 'phoned White House to warn of risk to lives'

BBC

2020-02-25

Wikileaks co-founder Julian Assange tried to phone the White House to warn them unredacted files were about to be published online, a court has heard.

Mr Assange is fighting extradition to the US to face trial over the leaking of classified US military documents.

His lawyer dismissed claims he "knowingly" put lives at risk by publishing the names of informants.

He told Woolwich Crown Court that a book by the Guardian newspaper was to blame for the names being published.

Those suggestions have been rejected by the Guardian.

The claims came on the second day of the extradition hearing for Mr Assange, 48, who is accused of conspiring to hack into US military databases to acquire sensitive secret information, which was then published on the Wikileaks website.

Lawyers for Mr Assange claim the US charges are politically motivated.

Mark Summers QC, representing Mr Assange, told the hearing in London that Wikileaks had begun redacting a tranche of 250,000 leaked cables in November 2010, working with media partners around the world as well as the US government.

He said that in February 2011 the Guardian published a book about Wikileaks which contained a password to the unredacted documents.

He said it wasn't until months later that it was discovered the password could be used to access the unredacted database, which was revealed by German news outlet Der Freitag on 25 August 2011.

On that day, Mr Assange called the White House and asked to speak to then secretary of state Hillary Clinton "as a matter of urgency" over fears the documents were about to be dumped online by third parties who had gained access, Mr Summers told the court. He was told to ring back in a few hours.

Mr Summers said Mr Assange had warned: "I don't understand why you're not seeing the urgency of this.

"Unless we do something, then people's lives are put at risk."

Responding to the claims made in court, a Guardian spokesman said it was "entirely wrong" that its 2011 Wikileaks book led to the publication of unredacted files.

He said: "The book contained a password which the authors had been told by Julian Assange was temporary and would expire and be deleted in a matter of hours. The book also contained no details about the whereabouts of the files."

He added that "no concerns were expressed" by Mr Assange or Wikileaks about security being compromised when the book was published.

Prosecutors argued on Monday that Mr Assange knowingly put hundreds of sources around the world at risk of torture and death by publishing the unredacted documents containing names or other identifying details.

But Mr Summers told the court that the US extradition request "boldly and brazenly" misrepresented the facts.

He said the US government, which was involved in the redaction process, knows "what actually occurred" which was "far from being a reckless, unredacted release".

In response, James Lewis QC, representing the US government, told the court that Mr Assange "didn't have to publish the unredacted cables".

"He decided to do so on a widely followed and easily searchable website, knowing that it was dangerous to do so," he added.

Mr Assange has been held in Belmarsh prison since last September ahead of his extradition hearing.

He was originally jailed for 50 weeks in May 2019 for breaching his bail conditions after going into hiding in the Ecuadorian embassy in London for nearly seven years.

He sought asylum at the embassy to avoid extradition to Sweden on a rape allegation that he denied. That investigation was subsequently dropped.

The hearing continues on Wednesday.

https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-51633303?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.com/news/world&link_location=live-reporting-story

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US once considered poisoning Julian Assange, court told

The US government once considered poisoning Julian Assange, while informants to the US disappeared after WikiLeaks outed them, a London court has heard.

SBS News
25/02/2020

The US government considered poisoning Julian Assange after WikiLeaks published the names of hundreds of their informants, some of whom disappeared, a court has heard.

The first day of the WikiLeaks founder's extradition hearing in a London court heard a series of revelations by lawyers for the US government and Assange's legal team.

Mr Assange, 48, is facing 17 charges of violating the US Espionage Act and one of conspiring to commit computer intrusion over leaking and publishing thousands of classified US diplomatic and military files in 2010.

Barrister Edward Fitzgerald, for Mr Assange, told the packed court a witness will confirm the US had contemplated more "extreme measures" against the Australian.

"Such as kidnapping or poisoning Julian Assange in the embassy," he said at Woolwich Crown Court, referring to Mr Assange's seven-year asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy in London.

James Lewis QC, for the prosecution, said some US informants disappeared after WikiLeaks published their real names.

"The US is aware of sources, whose redacted names and other identifying information was contained in classified documents published by WikiLeaks, who subsequently disappeared, although the US can't prove at this point that their disappearance was the result of being outed by WikiLeaks," Mr Lewis said.

He said Mr Assange was also charged with conspiracy to commit computer intrusion for helping former US Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning, hack a password hash so he could hide his identity while accessing and downloading classified files.

Mr Lewis said the extradition hearing wasn't a trial and all Judge Vanessa Baraitser had to decide was whether Mr Assange's alleged offences were crimes under UK laws.

"Reporting or journalism is not an excuse for criminal activities or a licence to break ordinary criminal laws," he said.

But Mr Assange's defence argued he was being pursued for "ulterior political motives".

Mr Fitzgerald detailed how the Americans had spied on his meetings with lawyers in the embassy and added charges to their extradition request in order to supersede a Swedish extradition request.

"Again this is not about criminal justice. It is about the manipulation of the system to ensure the US government was able to make an example of Julian Assange," he said.

Mr Fitzgerald also maintained that US congressman Dana Rohrabacher had indeed offered Mr Assange a pardon on orders of President Donald Trump, which both men denied last week.

"President Trump denies everything and we say 'well, he would, wouldn't he'," Mr Fitzgerald said.

Mr Fitzgerald argued if Mr Assange were extradited he would face discrimination because of his foreign nationality, which denied him free speech protections under the US First Amendment.

He warned it would be unjust given his long battle with depression and high risk of suicide.

Mr Assange, who looked relaxed in the dock and wore a grey suit and grey sweater with a white shirt, is unlikely to give evidence, his lawyers said.

But the Australian unexpectedly stood as the judge was about to rise for the lunch break, saying the sound of protesters outside the court was distracting.

"I cannot concentrate and the noise outside is not helpful, even though I appreciate the public support -- they must be disgusted with the proceedings," he said.

The charges against Mr Assange carry a total sentence of 175 years imprisonment in the US.

<https://www.sbs.com.au/news/us-once-considered-poisoning-julian-assange-court-told>

Doctors treating Julian Assange in London faced intimidation and state surveillance

*Laura Tieman
TruePublica
25 February 2020*

This week's edition of the Lancet — the world's pre-eminent peer-reviewed medical journal — carries a letter from **117 medical doctors in 18 countries**, renewing their call for urgent action to save the life of WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange. Their letter [appeared] less than one week before the start of the US extradition hearing in London that may decide Assange's fate.

The doctors' two-page letter appears in the correspondence section of the Lancet under the heading "End torture and medical neglect of Julian Assange." It was written by Dr Stephen Frost (UK), Dr Lissa Johnson, clinical psychologist (Australia), Dr Jill Stein (former leader of the US Green Party) and William Frost (UK).

"The case of Assange... is multifaceted," the doctors write. "It relates to law, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, journalism, publishing, and politics. It also, however, clearly relates to medicine and public health. The case highlights several concerning aspects that warrant the medical profession's close attention and concerted action."

Nearly three months ago, on November 22, more than 65 doctors issued an open letter to the UK government challenging the illegal and arbitrary detention of Assange. A follow-up letter to the Australian government was issued on December 16. Neither government has responded.

Issuing their appeal to medical colleagues throughout the world — the Lancet has 1.8 million subscribers — the letter's authors describe multiple human rights violations by the US, UK, Swedish, Ecuadorian and Australian governments against Assange. This includes nearly a decade of "illegal and arbitrary detention" and relentless state persecution amounting to "prolonged psychological torture."

Readers of the Lancet might be shocked to learn that doctors treating Assange in London have faced intimidation and state surveillance — methods commonly

employed by military dictatorships. **“There was a climate of fear surrounding the provision of health care in the Embassy,”** the letter recounts, with treating doctors forced to report their identity to police.

“Disturbingly,” they write, “it seems that this environment of insecurity and intimidation, further compromising the medical care available to Assange, **was by design**. Assange was the subject of a 24/7 covert surveillance operation inside the embassy, as the emergence of secret video and audio recordings has shown.

“He was surveilled in private and with visitors, including family, friends, journalists, lawyers, and doctors. Not only were his rights to privacy, personal life, legal privilege, and freedom of speech violated, but so, too, was his right to doctor-patient confidentiality.”

The signatories state emphatically, “We condemn the torture of Assange. We condemn the denial of his fundamental right to appropriate health care. We condemn the climate of fear surrounding the provision of health care to him. We condemn the violations of his right to doctor-patient confidentiality. Politics cannot be allowed to interfere with the right to health and the practice of medicine.”

Doctors for Assange (as the doctors are collectively known) have launched a new website, and their letter to the Lancet links to this, “We invite fellow doctors to join us as signatories to our letters to add further voice to our calls. Even as the world’s designated authorities on arbitrary detention, torture, and human rights added their calls to doctors’ warnings, governments have sidelined medical authority, medical ethics, and the human right to health.

“This politicisation of foundational medical principles is of grave concern to us, as it carries implications beyond the case of Assange. Abuse by politically motivated medical neglect sets a dangerous precedent”

“This politicisation of foundational medical principles is of grave concern to us, as it carries implications beyond the case of Assange. **Abuse by politically motivated medical neglect sets a dangerous precedent, whereby the medical profession can be manipulated as a political tool, ultimately undermining our profession’s impartiality, commitment to health for all, and obligation to do no harm.**”

The doctors issue a stark warning, “Should Assange die in a UK prison, as the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture has warned, he will have effectively been tortured to death. Much of that torture will have taken place in a prison medical ward, on doctors’ watch. **The medical profession cannot afford to stand silently by, on the wrong side of torture and the wrong side of history, while such a travesty unfolds.**”

Yesterday, Doctors for Assange sent copies of their letter to UK Home Secretary Priti Patel and to Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne. “Mr Assange’s human rights to health care and freedom from torture must be upheld. At this late hour, we call on you to act decisively,” the doctors wrote.

Their letter to the Lancet concludes, “Our appeals are simple: we are calling upon governments to end the torture of Julian Assange and ensure his access to the best available health care before it is too late. Our request to others is this: please join us.”

<https://truepublica.org.uk/united-kingdom/doctors-treating-julian-assange-in-london-faced-intimidation-and-state-surveillance/>

Your Man in the Public Gallery — Assange Hearing Day 1

Craig Murray
25 Feb. 2020

Woolwich Crown Court is designed to impose the power of the state. Normal courts in this country are public buildings, deliberately placed by our ancestors right in the centre of towns, almost always just up a few steps from a main street. **The major purpose of their positioning and of their architecture was to facilitate public access in the belief that it is vital that justice can be seen by the public.**

Woolwich Crown Court, which hosts Belmarsh Magistrates Court, is built on totally the opposite principle. It is designed with no other purpose than to exclude the public. Attached to a prison on a windswept marsh far from any normal social centre, an island accessible only through navigating a maze of dual carriageways, **the entire location and architecture of the building is predicated on preventing public access.** It is surrounded by a continuation of the same extremely heavy duty steel paling barrier that surrounds the prison. It is the most extraordinary thing, **a courthouse which is a part of the prison system itself, a place where you are already considered guilty and in jail on arrival. Woolwich Crown Court is nothing but the physical negation of the presumption of innocence,** the very incarnation of injustice in unyielding steel, concrete and armoured glass. It has precisely the same relationship to the administration of justice as Guantanamo Bay or the Lubyanka. **It is in truth just the sentencing wing of Belmarsh prison.**

When enquiring about facilities for the public to attend the hearing, an Assange activist was told by a member of court staff that we should realise that Woolwich is a “counter-terrorism court”. That is true *de facto*, but **in truth a “counter-terrorism court” is an institution unknown to the UK constitution.** Indeed, if a single day at Woolwich Crown Court does not convince you the existence of liberal democracy is now a lie, then your mind must be very closed indeed.

Extradition hearings are not held at Belmarsh Magistrates Court inside Woolwich Crown Court. They are always held at Westminster Magistrates Court as the application is deemed to be delivered to the government at Westminster. Now get your head around this. **This hearing is at Westminster Magistrates Court. It is being held by the Westminster magistrates and Westminster court staff, but located at Belmarsh Magistrates Court inside Woolwich Crown Court. All of which weird convulsion is precisely so they can use the “counter-terrorist court” to limit public access and to impose the fear of the power of the state.**

One consequence is that, in the courtroom itself, Julian Assange is confined at the back of the court behind a bulletproof glass screen. He made the point several times during proceedings that this makes it very difficult for him to see and hear the proceedings. The magistrate, Vanessa Baraitser, chose to interpret this with studied dishonesty as a problem caused by the very faint noise of demonstrators outside, as opposed to a problem caused by Assange being locked away from the court in a massive bulletproof glass box.

Now there is no reason at all for Assange to be in that box, designed to restrain extremely physically violent terrorists. He could sit, as a defendant at a hearing normally would, in the body of the court with his lawyers. **But the cowardly and vicious Baraitser has refused repeated and persistent requests from the defence for**

Assange to be allowed to sit with his lawyers. Baraitser of course is but a puppet, being supervised by Chief Magistrate Lady Arbuthnot, a woman so enmeshed in the defence and security service establishment I can conceive of no way in which her involvement in this case could be more corrupt.

It does not matter to Baraitser or Arbuthnot if there is any genuine need for Assange to be incarcerated in a bulletproof box, or whether it stops him from following proceedings in court. Baraitser's intention is to humiliate Assange, and to instill in the rest of us horror at the vast crushing power of the state. The inexorable strength of the sentencing wing of the nightmarish Belmarsh Prison must be maintained. If you are here, you are guilty.

It's the Lubyanka. You may only be a remand prisoner. This may only be a hearing not a trial. You may have no history of violence and not be accused of any violence. You may have three of the country's most eminent psychiatrists submitting reports of your history of severe clinical depression and warning of suicide. But I, Vanessa Baraitser, am still going to lock you up in a box designed for the most violent of terrorists. To show what we can do to dissidents. And if you can't then follow court proceedings, all the better.

You will perhaps better accept what I say about the Court when I tell you that, **for a hearing being followed all round the world, they have brought it to a courtroom which had a total number of sixteen seats available to members of the public. 16.** To make sure I got one of those 16 and could be your man in the gallery, I was outside that great locked iron fence queuing in the cold, wet and wind from 6am. At 8am the gate was unlocked, and I was able to walk inside the fence to another queue before the doors of the courtroom, where despite the fact notices clearly state the court opens to the public at 8am, I had to queue outside the building again for another hour and forty minutes. Then I was processed through armoured airlock doors, through airport type security, and had to queue behind two further locked doors, before finally getting to my seat just as the court started at 10am. **By which stage the intention was we should have been thoroughly cowed and intimidated,** not to mention drenched and potentially hypothermic.

There was a separate media entrance and a media room with live transmission from the courtroom, and there were so many scores of media I thought I could relax and not worry as the basic facts would be widely reported. In fact, I could not have been more wrong. I followed the arguments very clearly every minute of the day, and **not a single one of the most important facts and arguments today has been reported anywhere in the mainstream media.** That is a bold claim, but I fear it is perfectly true. So I have much work to do to let the world know what actually happened. The mere act of being an honest witness is suddenly extremely important, when the entire media has abandoned that role.

James Lewis QC made the opening statement for the prosecution. It consisted of two parts, both equally extraordinary. The first and longest part was truly remarkable for containing no legal argument, and for being addressed not to the magistrate but to the media. It is not just that it was obvious that is where his remarks were aimed, he actually stated on two occasions during his opening statement that he was addressing the media, once repeating a sentence and saying specifically that he was repeating it again because it was important that the media got it.

I am frankly astonished that Baraitser allowed this. **It is completely out of order for a counsel to address remarks not to the court but to the media, and there simply could not be any clearer evidence that this is a political show trial and that Baraitser is complicit in that.** I have not the slightest doubt that the defence would have been pulled up extremely quickly had they started addressing remarks to the media. Baraitser makes zero pretence of being anything other than in thrall to the Crown, and by extension to the US Government.

The points which Lewis wished the media to know were these: it is not true that mainstream outlets like the Guardian and New York Times are also threatened by the charges against Assange, because Assange was not charged with publishing the cables but only with publishing the names of informants, and with cultivating Manning and assisting him to attempt computer hacking. Only Assange had done these things, not mainstream outlets.

Lewis then proceeded to read out a series of articles from the mainstream media attacking Assange, as evidence that the media and Assange were not in the same boat. **The entire opening hour consisted of the prosecution addressing the media, attempting to drive a clear wedge between the media and Wikileaks** and thus aimed at reducing media support for Assange. It was a political address, not remotely a legal submission. At the same time, the prosecution had prepared reams of copies of this section of Lewis' address, which were handed out to the media and given them electronically so they could cut and paste.

Following an adjournment, magistrate Baraitser questioned the prosecution on the veracity of some of these claims. In particular, the claim that newspapers were not in the same position because Assange was charged not with publication, but with "aiding and abetting" Chelsea Manning in getting the material, did not seem consistent with Lewis' reading of the 1989 Official Secrets Act, which said that merely obtaining and publishing any government secret was an offence. Surely, Baraitser suggested, that meant that newspapers just publishing the Manning leaks would be guilty of an offence?

This appeared to catch Lewis entirely off guard. The last thing he had expected was any perspicacity from Baraitser, whose job was just to do what he said. Lewis hummed and hawed, put his glasses on and off several times, adjusted his microphone repeatedly and picked up a succession of pieces of paper from his brief, each of which appeared to surprise him by its contents, as he waved them haplessly in the air and said he really should have cited the Shayler case but couldn't find it. It was like watching Columbo with none of the charm and without the killer question at the end of the process.

Suddenly Lewis appeared to come to a decision. Yes, he said much more firmly. The 1989 Official Secrets Act had been introduced by the Thatcher Government after the Ponting Case, specifically to remove the public interest defence and to make unauthorised possession of an official secret a crime of strict liability — meaning no matter how you got it, publishing and even possessing made you guilty. Therefore, under the principle of dual criminality, Assange was liable for extradition whether or not he had aided and abetted Manning. **Lewis then went on to add that any journalist and any publication that printed the official secret would therefore also be committing an offence, no matter how they had obtained it, and no matter if it did or did not name informants.**

Lewis had thus just flat out contradicted his entire opening statement to the media stating that they need not worry as the Assange charges could never be applied to them. And he did so straight after the adjournment, immediately after his team had handed out copies of the argument he had now just completely contradicted. **I cannot think it has often happened in court that a senior lawyer has proven himself so absolutely and so immediately to be an unmitigated and ill-motivated liar.** This was undoubtedly the most breathtaking moment in today's court hearing.

Yet remarkably I cannot find any mention anywhere in the mainstream media that this happened at all. What I can find, everywhere, is the mainstream media reporting, via cut and paste, Lewis's first part of his statement on why the prosecution of Assange is not a threat to press freedom; but nobody seems to have reported that he totally abandoned his own argument five minutes later. Were the journalists too stupid to understand the exchanges?

The explanation is very simple. The clarification coming from a question Baraitser asked Lewis, there is no printed or electronic record of Lewis' reply. His original statement was provided in cut and paste format to the media. **His contradiction of it would require a journalist to listen to what was said in court, understand it and write it down. There is no significant percentage of mainstream media journalists who command that elementary ability nowadays. "Journalism" consists of cut and paste of approved sources only. Lewis could have stabbed Assange to death in the courtroom, and it would not be reported unless contained in a government press release.**

I was left uncertain of Baraitser's purpose in this. Plainly she discomfited Lewis very badly on this point, and appeared rather to enjoy doing so. On the other hand the point she made is not necessarily helpful to the defence. What she was saying was essentially that Julian could be extradited under dual criminality, from the UK point of view, just for publishing, whether or not he conspired with Chelsea Manning, and that all the journalists who published could be charged too. But surely this is a point so extreme that it would be bound to be invalid under the Human Rights Act? Was she pushing Lewis to articulate a position so extreme as to be untenable — giving him enough rope to hang himself — or was she slavering at the prospect of not just extraditing Assange, but of mass prosecutions of journalists?

The reaction of one group was very interesting. **The four US government lawyers seated immediately behind Lewis had the grace to look very uncomfortable** indeed as Lewis baldly declared that any journalist and any newspaper or broadcast media publishing or even possessing any government secret was committing a serious offence. **Their entire strategy had been to pretend not to be saying that.**

Lewis then moved on to conclude the prosecution's arguments. The court had no decision to make, he stated. Assange must be extradited. The offence met the test of dual criminality as it was an offence both in the USA and UK. UK extradition law specifically barred the court from testing whether there was any evidence to back up the charges. If there had been, as the defence argued, abuse of process, the court must still extradite and then the court must pursue the abuse of process as a separate matter against the abusers. (This is a particularly specious argument as it is not possible for the court to take action against the US government due to sovereign immunity, as Lewis well knows). **Finally, Lewis stated that the Human Rights Act and freedom of speech were completely irrelevant in extradition proceedings.**

Edward Fitzgerald then arose to make the opening statement for the defence. He **started by stating that the motive for the prosecution was entirely political, and that political offences were specifically excluded under article 4.1 of the UK/US extradition treaty.** He pointed out that at the time of the Chelsea Manning Trial and again in 2013 the Obama administration had taken specific decisions not to prosecute Assange for the Manning leaks. This had been reversed by the Trump administration for reasons that were entirely political.

On abuse of process, Fitzgerald referred to evidence presented to the Spanish criminal courts that the CIA had commissioned a Spanish security company to spy on Julian Assange in the Embassy, and that this spying specifically included surveillance of Assange's privileged meetings with his lawyers to discuss extradition. For the state trying to extradite to spy on the defendant's client-lawyer consultations is in itself grounds to dismiss the case. (This point is undoubtedly true. Any decent judge would throw the case out summarily for the outrageous spying on the defence lawyers).

Fitzgerald went on to say the defence would produce evidence the CIA not only spied on Assange and his lawyers, but **actively considered kidnapping or poisoning him,** and that this showed there was no commitment to proper rule of law in this case.

Fitzgerald said that the prosecution's framing of the case contained deliberate misrepresentation of the facts that also amounted to abuse of process. It was not true that there was any evidence of harm to informants, and the US government had confirmed this in other fora, eg in Chelsea Manning's trial. There had been no conspiracy to hack computers, and Chelsea Manning had been acquitted on that charge at court martial. Lastly it was untrue that Wikileaks had initiated publication of unredacted names of informants, as other media organisations had been responsible for this first.

Again, so far as I can see, **while the US allegation of harm to informants is widely reported, the defence's total refutation on the facts and claim that the fabrication of facts amounts to abuse of process is not much reported at all.** Fitzgerald finally referred to US prison conditions, the impossibility of a fair trial in the US, and the fact the Trump Administration has stated foreign nationals will not receive First Amendment protections, as reasons that extradition must be barred. You can read the whole defence statement: https://dontextraditeassange.com/IA_Defence_Opening.pdf

<https://www.craigmurray.org.uk/archives/2020/02/your-man-in-the-public-gallery-assange-hearing-day-1/>

Queen's Counsel Charges vs Assange 'Significantly Overwrought'

The CIA and Pentagon are saying, in effect, "Trust Us." What could possibly go wrong? — aside from a publisher of accurate information spending the rest of his life in prison .

Ray McGovern
Consortium News
February 25, 2020

We are about to see how malleable the British Court system is to dictat from Washington. Will the British embrace the flimsiest of circumstantial “evidence” from U.S. security services that have axes to grind?

Will British officials turn their back on 800 years of progress on the human rights wrested from King John at Runnymede? Are there today no “English Nobles” to thwart the obscene “legal” proceedings aimed at extraditing WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange to a U.S. prison for publishing the truth about U.S. and UK war crimes?

At Monday’s court hearing in London, James Lewis QC, argued the U.S. case using information the U.S. gave him from “secret sources” in Iraq and Afghanistan. Here’s Mr. Lewis:

“The U.S. is aware of sources, whose unredacted names and other identifying information were contained in classified documents published by WikiLeaks, who subsequently disappeared, although the US can’t prove at this point that their disappearance was the result of being outed by WikiLeaks.”

With the CIA and Defense Department saying, in effect, “Trust Us”, what could possibly go wrong? — aside from a publisher of accurate information spending the rest of his life in prison — and all future journalists running the same risk, should they run afoul of U.S. authorities.

Unless the British Court system has become totally subservient to U.S. influence, James Lewis QC will have to do better in the coming weeks to plausibly pin a crime on Julian Assange.

Still, do not underestimate British “flexibility” in reaction to orders from Washington. Recall, for example, that just a short, but havoc-filled 17 years ago, **UK Attorney General Lord Peter Henry QC (now Baron) Goldsmith was persuaded to abruptly reverse his opinion on the upcoming U.S./UK unprovoked attack on Iraq from “illegal” to “legal”, for which he was awarded yet additional British honorifics.**

Do President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Boris Johnson really wish to take their cue from the sorry pair of Bush and Blair? We never did learn very much about the “secret sources” that were said to be behind all the poppycock about those elusive Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq, did we?

Speaking on behalf of U.S. officialdom, Lewis claimed that hundreds of people across the world had to be warned after the WikiLeaks disclosures. Some had to be relocated. Others later disappeared, he said. But wait. He was careful to indicate that the U.S. would not try to prove that these events resulted directly from the disclosures. (Is this not what was once called “hearsay”?)

As an ominous coda to his presentation, **Lewis somberly added that some WikiLeaks information was found at Osama bin Laden’s hideout in Pakistan. Aha!**

‘Significantly Overwrought’

After WikiLeaks published copious materials on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and State Department cables, there was a hue and cry regarding the “inevitable” damage to U.S. assets and equities. On Nov. 30, 2010, then Secretary of Defense Robert

Gates offered a more candid appraisal of risks and damage from the WikiLeaks disclosures.

Here's Gates at a formal Pentagon news briefing: "Now, I've heard the impact of these releases on our foreign policy described as a meltdown, as a game-changer, and so on. I think — **I think those descriptions are fairly significantly overwrought** ... We are still essentially, as has been said before, the indispensable nation. So other nations will continue to work with us. We will continue to share sensitive information with one another.

"Is this embarrassing? Yes. Is it awkward? Yes. Consequences for U.S. foreign policy? I think fairly modest."

Shortly after Gates's unusually frank correction, politicians and pundits adjusted their sights on Assange, to allegations that he was a "terrorist." Then Vice President Joe Biden said publicly that Assange was a "high-tech terrorist", and CNN invited a slew of talking heads to confirm the new meme: Yes indeed, Assange clearly was a terrorist.

Apparently, someone told CNN it might look a little better if they added another head for balance. I became the token head "for balance" — the patsy.

CNN's Don Lemon asked me on Dec. 12, 2010 to explain why many of my VIPS colleagues and I could conceivably think Assange was not a terrorist, but rather a journalist.

Lemon: "So, you don't like the way he's been labeled a terrorist or a hacker? You actually think that he's a journalist. I want to get that correct."

Lemon was right about one thing: "That will have to be the last word." Indeed, I have not been invited onto CNN since.

When I had a chance to review the show, I found it so transparent that I actually felt a bit sorry for Lemon who, after all, clearly had his instructions — and perhaps a family to feed. That turned out to be silly; he got promoted and now has his on show on CNN.

Collateral Murder

The gunsight video-cum-audio showing the cold-blooded killing of at least 12 Iraqi civilians, including two Reuters journalists, by gunners in a U.S. Apache helicopter on July 12, 2007 during the "surge" of U.S. forces into the Baghdad area needs to accompany any story on WikiLeaks' revelations; this whether or not it is given much play at the hearing in the days ahead. Watching this 18-minute video will provide some idea as to why Private Chelsea Manning was moved to give it to WikiLeaks.

Every American should watch this video to get some sense of the kind of war crimes WikiLeaks exposed — accurately, with original footage — and to understand why Establishment Washington got so angry at Assange and remains hell bent on making an example of him.

For broader perspective on events surrounding Manning's decision to give the video to WikiLeaks, there is no better source than the account given by video-maker Sonia Kennebeck, née Mayr.

Her work “Shooters Walk Free, Whistleblower Jailed” appeared first on the German TV program Panorama; it is only 12 minutes long, but speaks volumes.

There was nothing like it at the time, so Panorama was persuaded to prepare a version, with Sonia’s own voice-over, for English speakers. Strongly recommended. (Kennebeck later directed/produced the award winning documentary film about drone warfare, “National Bird” (2016).

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in Washington, DC. He was an Army/Infantry and CIA intelligence analyst for three decades, and personally conducted the early morning briefings of The President’s Daily Brief from 1981 to 1985. He is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

<https://consortiumnews.com/2020/02/25/ray-mcgovern-queens-counsel-charges-vs-assange-significantly-overwrought/>

Yanis Varoufakis: To persecute Assange is to “murder the truth”

*Anu Shukla
The London Economic
February 25, 2020*

If the trial of Julian Assange has made one thing clear, it is that the US has immunity from alleged war crimes exposed by Wikileaks, Yanis Varoufakis told *The London Economic* at the Don’t Extradite Assange protest in London yesterday.

Speaking on Parliament Square the Greek economist and former finance minister of the Syriza Party warned that these are no longer the days of Daniel Ellsberg. **“The machinations of the establishment were not as sophisticated back then as they are post 911.”**

“Absolute power leads to absolute tyranny. And the US government has enjoyed immunity from any kind of check and balance”, he said.

But the “scandalous way” that US authorities have so far been allowed to “eves-drop” on conversations between Assange and his lawyers “effectively guarantees that this trial is going to be lost”.

As far as Varoufakis is concerned though, the fight for freedom does not end there.

He added: “There are great hopes for the next step when we appeal, because there will be judges in this country who will see this as a fantastic opportunity to assert their independence and dignity against a crime perpetrated not just towards Julian, but the Magna Carta, and basic civil liberties.”

Varoufakis has already said in the past that Assange, who was facing allegations of sexual abuse under a rape inquiry dropped in November 2019, was not given the chance to face his accusers without risk of extradition to the US. Had he been given this opportunity, he said it would not only have been a move that “empowered women”, but it would also have “protected whistleblowers.”

He told The London Economic: "Julian is being persecuted for embarrassing national security operators and the American military by telling truth. He has allowed us to know what was done in our name while we were ignorant. That is what matters.

"So whether it's the Arab Spring or the political revolution that is now supporting Bernie Sanders, you find links between the truth and political events left, right and centre. What matters right now, is that we do not obliterate the truth by allowing the British and American state to murder Assange."

But Varoufakis said he is not convinced by actions taken in support of whistleblowers at EU level.

He said such gestures as the Whistleblower's Directive, launched several months after Assange's arrest at the Embassy of Ecuador, shows how the EU "is remarkably good at creating beautiful directives that warm our hearts," but which are "only labels covering up the absence of truth with packaging."

He added: "The EU is brilliant at creating the resemblance of a humanitarian and progressive policy setting. Look at the Green Deal, which they are now presenting as a one trillion euro leap to a green future. There's no money involved in that."

In the coming days, Varoufakis said he planned to release the recordings of EU meetings which were not officially documented. "For five years now, they have been lying about what's going on there. So much for European transparency."

The release of the recordings dubbed 'Euroleaks', he said, will expose the EU's internal decision making process and why its reform is necessary for upholding democracy.

But he said Assange and Wikileaks are "not favoured anywhere", as also seen by past media reports claiming Wikileaks and the exposure of western secrets are beneficial to Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

"Julian has created this digital postbox so anyone can put information there that would be in the public interest. He cannot control who puts what into this postbox. What he can control, is that it is accurate. That is his job"

"And as for the benefits to Putin, Russia, Iran and so on from any Wikileaks exposés, let me put it this way: Mr Putin is sitting in his office in the Kremlin watching the US establishment and the EU, and killing himself with laughter because everything they do strengthens him.

"It is not Wikileaks that sucked in Putin, it was the comedy of errors in the foreign and economic policies of Europe and the US. Look at the way Trump abandoned the Kurdish fighters who helped the west defeat ISIS, they abandoned them and allowed free space to Putin's troops.

"Now, the west is working for Putin, not as a result of any strategic plan, but as a result of immense idiocy. So let's stop this rubbish about Wikileaks helping Putin; Putin's best friend is Donald Trump and the EU."

Julian Assange's trial began for a week on Monday 24 February. Proceedings will resume again for a period of three weeks, beginning 18 May. He faces an 18-count

indictment under the US Espionage Act for publishing classified diplomatic documents exposing alleged war crimes in Iraq and the U.S, and secret reports detailing ill-treatment of detainees in Guantanamo Bay. Assange could face 175 years in jail if taken to stand trial in the US.

<https://www.thelondoneconomic.com/politics/yanis-varoufakis-exclusive-to-persecute-assange-is-to-murder-the-truth/25/02/>

Julian Assange extradition: Guardian to blame for publication of unredacted cables, court told

Press Association & Press Gazette Twitter
25 Feb. 2020

A lawyer for Julian Assange has told a court the Guardian is to blame for publishing unredacted US cables which could have “put lives at risk”.

Wikileaks founder Assange, 48, is fighting extradition to the US to face trial on 18 charges over the leaking of hundreds of thousands of classified documents in 2010 and 2011.

He is accused of conspiring to steal from and hack into US department of defence computers along with former US army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning.

Prosecutors claim he knowingly put hundreds of sources around the world at risk of torture and death by publishing unredacted documents containing names or other identifying details.

Mark Summers QC, representing Assange, today told Woolwich Crown Court, which is sitting as a magistrates’ court, that Wikileaks had begun redacting a tranche of 250,000 leaked cables in November 2010 in partnership with media outlets around the world.

“That process involved the US government and state department feeding suggested redactions to the media,” he said.

“Knowing the US government was involved in the redaction process, can it be in any way said the request represents a fair or accurate representation of what occurred?”

Summers blamed the publication of the unredacted database of documents on a 2011 book from the Guardian newspaper about Wikileaks, which contained a **58-key password**.

He said: “Far from being a reckless, unredacted release, the world knows, every reporter in this room knows, the US government knows, that what actually occurred was that one of the media partners published a book in February 2011 and published the password to the unredacted materials, which then enabled the entire world to publish those unredacted materials in a book and they circulated on the internet, not on the Wikileaks site, but on other sites.

“None of them have been prosecuted, some of which are US-based, all of them published first, some of them are still there.”

Summers said it was not until months later that it was discovered the password could be used along with a mirrored site to access the unredacted database, which was revealed by German news outlet *Der Freitag* on 25 August 2011.

The Guardian has previously described the claim that its book “compromised security in any way” as “nonsense”.

The newspaper stands by its previous statement, including that it had been told the password was temporary and would expire in a matter of hours.

The court heard, in a phone call to the White House on the same day, Wikileaks had asked to speak to then secretary of state Hillary Clinton as “a matter of urgency” over fears the information was about to be dumped online.

Summers said Assange had warned: “I don’t understand why you’re not seeing the urgency of this. Unless we do something, then people’s lives are put at risk.”

Summers told the court the extradition request “boldly and brazenly” misrepresents the facts.

“You can accurately describe this chapter of the case as lies, lies and more lies,” he said.

Assange is also accused of encouraging Manning to steal classified documents, which allegedly included a bid to crack a password “hash” (a scrambled password) on US department of defence computers to anonymously access a classified network called the Secret Internet Protocol Network.

But his lawyers point to evidence given by Manning at her own 2013 court martial, which they say refutes these claims.

Assange’s barrister Edward Fitzgerald QC complained of his client’s treatment inside high-security Belmarsh prison at the start of the second day of the hearing today, as supporters’ chants could again be heard outside the building.

“Yesterday, Mr Assange was handcuffed 11 times and stripped naked twice at Belmarsh and put into five separate holding cells,” he said.

Fitzgerald said papers handed to Assange in court had been taken off him at Belmarsh, which is next door to the court, arguing his treatment “could be a contempt of this court”.

But District Judge Vanessa Baraitser said she has no powers to issue directions to the Prison Service and could only act if there is evidence Assange is unable to participate in the case.

“If it comes to that please let me know.

“Unless and until it does, unless you are asking this court to make a finding of contempt, I’m afraid my powers are very limited in this respect,” she said.

Assange has been held on remand in Belmarsh prison since last September after serving a 50-week jail sentence for breaching his bail conditions while he was in the Ecuadorian embassy in London.

He entered the building in 2012 to avoid extradition to Sweden over sex offence allegations, which he has always denied and were subsequently dropped.

<https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/julian-assange-extradition-guardian-to-blame-for-publication-of-unredacted-cables-court-told/>

‘Lies, lies and more lies’: Lawyer slams day 2 of Julian Assange’s US extradition hearing, here is how it went down

RT

25 Feb. 2020

Day two of Julian Assange's US extradition hearing saw his lawyers argue he made great efforts to ensure his leaks endangered no lives and even warned the White House when media outlets were about to dump unredacted files.

The day began with a furore over WikiLeaks editor Kristinn Hrafnsson being kicked out of the courtroom’s public gallery without explanation. The drama was short-lived, however and proceedings soon got underway. During the confusion, former MEP Matthew Patten tweeted that there was a "strong rumour" that Downing Street made an "immediate call" to get him back in.

Once again, protesters gathered outside the Woolwich Crown Court in support of Assange and could be heard inside the courtroom — something which Assange had said, while appreciated, made it hard to concentrate during Monday’s hearing.

Assange ‘handcuffed and strip-searched’

As the hearing began, James Lewis QC, representing the US government, complained that the defense was receiving transcripts of court proceedings while the prosecution was not. Edward Fitzgerald QC, representing Assange, said the transcripts were privately made and they would share a copy if the prosecution paid half the costs.

Next, Fitzgerald told the court that on Monday, the first day of the US extradition hearing, **Assange was handcuffed 11 times, stripped naked twice and placed in five different holding cells at Belmarsh Prison.** He asked Judge Vanessa Baraitser to request that the prison treat Assange humanely. She said there was little she could do, but would expect that the WikiLeaks founder be treated in accordance with his human rights.

At one point, journalist Kevin Gosztola, who was present in the press annex, tweeted to complain that Lewis “won’t speak into the microphone” and that reporters “cannot hear a word.”

Defense lawyer Mark Summers told the court that the prosecution’s case was full of “lies, lies and more lies.” He told the judge that Assange’s alleged offenses in the US extradition request were false.

In particular, the defense argued that claims that Assange enabled fellow whistleblower Chelsea Manning to access databases of sensitive material were “provably wrong.” This relates to the massive cache of military material leaked to WikiLeaks by Manning in 2010, including the infamous footage of a US military helicopter killing 12 people, including two Reuters journalists.

Summers said that the evidence proves Manning already had access to classified material, while the prosecution claimed that Assange assisted Manning with a password hack. He also said the leaks were clearly in the public interest and proved that the US was spying on UN diplomats and engaging in extra-judicial killings. Making them public “changed the world,” he said.

Next, attention turned to WikiLeaks’ ‘most wanted’ list of leaks it had asked for people to submit to the site. Summers said the list did not mention anything about US diplomatic cables and dismissed the “fantasy” claim that Manning uploaded the cables after seeing a request for them on that list.

To counteract the claim that Assange had recklessly released the leaks and put lives at risk (one of the prosecution’s key arguments), the defense noted that Assange had partnered with major media organization to read and redact the cables, where necessary, before releasing them.

He said the US government was also involved in the redaction process and said a witness from German publication *Der Spiegel* will testify that it discussed redactions with the US State Department and that WikiLeaks took extreme measures to keep certain information secure.

Summers noted that the reason the cables ended up online in unredacted form was because two Guardian journalists, David Leigh and Luke Harding, published a secret password in their 2011 book on WikiLeaks.

The defense said that in 2011 Assange had even phoned the White House to warn them that the unredacted files were about to be published online and was told to call back later. “I don’t understand why you’re not seeing the urgency of this. Unless we do something, then people’s lives are at risk,” Assange said on **the call, which was recorded in the documentary *Risk* by Laura Poitras.**

Summers said the evidence does not support the US government claim that Assange was reckless in his leaking when he made every effort to protect sources.

‘Abuse of process’

Shortly before midday, the public gallery was closed off to journalists, causing some confusion among journalists. The court rose for a short time to deal with the issue, before resuming again.

After lunch, Summers told the court that he had broken his glasses during the break and might be a bit slower for the second half of the hearing.

The defense continued to argue that documents Manning leaked on Iraq were “non-sensitive,” would be of no use to an enemy and included no names. What’s more, the defense claimed that Manning didn’t require a username and passport to access the

database where she obtained the Iraq and Afghanistan war logs, making the US government's hacking charge false.

To bolster the argument that Manning did not require help from Assange to access classified documents, Summers said that **members of Manning's army unit and even one of her superiors had asked her to crack admin passwords so they could instal video games and other programs on their computers.**

Summers continued attempting to punch holes in the extradition request, saying it must be fair and accurate in its claims, but that in Assange's case the US government was acting in bad faith and engaging in "abuse of process."

'Straw man arguments'

Lewis, prosecutor for the US, rose to respond at around 3:35pm. He accused Summers of employing the "kitchen sink method" in his defense.

He argued that since a US grand jury indicted Assange, there is a "clear unequivocal legal basis" for charging him and that Summers presented "straw man" arguments which were irrelevant.

He said WikiLeaks' general request for bulk classified documents from the public qualifies as the solicitation from Manning referred to in the extradition request. He argued that it was not the function of a British court to determine these "factual issues" anyway. He also referred to Manning's 2013 statement to court as the "self-serving statement" of a "co-conspirator" which cannot be relied upon.

As Lewis spoke, Judge Baraitser paused proceedings to ask if Assange was feeling well enough to continue. Through another one of his lawyers Assange said he was struggling and having trouble concentrating.

Court adjourned shortly before 4pm and will resume at 10am on Wednesday when the 2003 UK-US extradition treaty will be examined.

<https://www.rt.com/news/481662-assange-extradition-hearing-day-two/>

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Behandlingen av Assange – ett svenskt misslyckande

*Anne Ramberg
Blogg
Februari 25, 2020*

Assange är ett varnande exempel på där det svenska rättsväsendet har misslyckats.

I dagarna ska en brittisk domstol avgöra om Julian Assange ska utlämnas till USA, där han är misstänkt för dataintrång och spioneri. Bakgrunden är som alla minns Wikileaks avslöjanden om amerikanska krigsbrott, tortyr och kidnappningar av misstänkta terrorister.

Assange blev en uppburen kändis som försåg de världsledande nyhetsredaktionerna med hemligt stoff. Han inbjöds till Sverige för att tala och inledde sexuella kontakter

med två kvinnor. Dessa polisanmälde honom för bl.a. våldtäkt. En förundersökning inleddes så småningom. Assange var i landet i fem veckor. Ingen besvärade sig med att kalla honom till förhör. Han kontaktade åklagaren och meddelade att han var tvungen att lämna Sverige. Därefter önskade han inte återvända varför åklagaren utfärdade en s.k. arresteringsorder. Redan här finns skäl att reagera. **Att det överhuvudtaget inleddes en förundersökning kan starkt ifrågasättas. Att förundersökningen inte fördes framåt är anmärkningsvärt. Att domstolarna inte ställde krav på åklagaren var släppt. Att nedläggningsbeslutet dröjde så många år var oförsvarligt. Sammantaget har svenskt rättsväsende skäl att känna skam.**

Det är föga smickrande för ett land som Sverige, som brukar tala med hög röst när det gäller andra länders tillkortakommanden vad avser rättssäkerhet och brott mot mänskliga rättigheter, att så totalt misslyckas som vi gjort i fallet Julian Assange. **Konsekvenserna för Assange är ohjälpliga. Effekterna för tilltron till rättssamhället är skadliga. Nu står yttrandefriheten på spel.**

Fallet Assange handlar nämligen ytterst om yttrandefrihet och rättsstatliga principer. Det handlar om rätten och den moraliska skyldigheten för envar att avslöja krigsbrott, alldeles oavsett hur informationen åtkommit. Det gjorde Assange och Wikileaks. Avslöjandena om USAs övergrepp var chockerande och synnerligen angelägna. Enligt min mening handlar yttrande- och tryckfrihet inte bara om rätten att uttrycka en åsikt. Med rättigheten följer att ansvar. Assange och Snowden är exempel på personer som tagit det ansvaret och vågat avslöja förhållanden som de ansett innefatta grova brott. Genom deras berättelser fick världen reda på de utomordentligt allvarliga krigsförbrytelser som ägde rum från USAs sida.

Det behövs personer som Bob Woodward och Carl Bernstein, Jan Guillou och Peter Bratt, Edward Snowden och Julian Assange. De har medvetet riskerat att hamna i fängelse för att avslöja allvarliga brister i det demokratiska systemet. De utgör en viktig del i demokratin. Och därför behöver de skydd. Ett skydd som svenskt rättsväsende inte tillhandahållit. Och såvitt kan förstås inte heller det brittiska. Hur kunde det gå så?

FN:s särskilda rapportör om tortyr, Nils Meltzer, beskriver i en av sina rapporter behandlingen av Julian Assange med orden "There has been a relentless and unrestrained campaign of public mobbing". Något, som sannolikt bidragit till att Sverige liksom Storbritannien fullständigt misslyckats med att upprätthålla rättsstatens principer. Hanteringen av misstankarna mot Assange lever inte upp till de krav som regeringsformen, Europakonventionen och internationella konventioner uppställer. Och här har inte heller den svenska och internationella pressen heller gjort sitt jobb. Man har moraliserat över Assange kvinnosyn och gottat sig i frågan om vad som utspelade sig i de olika sängar som Assange tillbringade några av sina nätter i Sverige. Spaltmeter har skrivits om Assange mindre sympatiska personlighet. Med åren har en tydlig fokusförskjutning ägt rum från de extraordinära avslöjandena till huruvida Assange har sig själv att skylla. **Någon principiell granskning av det haveri som Assangeutredningen är ett uttryck för har med några få undantag skett.**

FN:s kommissionär för mänskliga rättigheter krävde redan 2015 att Assange skulle släppas från vad han beskrev som godtycklig och olaglig internering. Något som han på goda grunder upprepade 2018, dock utan framgång. Assange har under den tid som han hållits i brittiskt fängelse inledningsvis utsatts för en omänsklig behandling. Assange riskerar nu att utlämnas till den galne presidenten Trumps USA, där han enligt uppgift riskerar upp till 175 års fängelse. Ansvaret för den omänskliga behandlingen av Assange vilar tungt på Sverige.

Your Man in the Public Gallery — Assange Hearing Day 2

Craig Murray
26 Feb. 2020

This afternoon Julian's Spanish lawyer, Baltasar Garzon, left court to return to Madrid. On the way out he naturally stopped to shake hands with his client, proffering his fingers through the narrow slit in the bulletproof glass cage. Assange half stood to take his lawyer's hand. The two security guards in the cage with Assange immediately sprang up, putting hands on Julian and forcing him to sit down, preventing the handshake.

That was not by any means the worst thing today, but it is a striking image of the senseless brute force continually used against a man accused of publishing documents. That a man cannot even shake his lawyer's hand goodbye is against the entire spirit in which the members of the legal system like to pretend the law is practised. I offer that startling moment as encapsulating yesterday's events in court.

Day 2 proceedings had started with a statement from Edward Fitzgerald, Assange's QC, that shook us rudely into life. **He stated that yesterday, on the first day of trial, Julian had twice been stripped naked and searched, eleven times been handcuffed, and five times been locked up in different holding cells. On top of this, all of his court documents had been taken from him by the prison authorities, including privileged communications between his lawyers and himself, and he had been left with no ability to prepare to participate in today's proceedings.**

Magistrate Baraitser looked at Fitzgerald and stated, in a voice laced with disdain, that he had raised such matters before and she had always replied that she had no jurisdiction over the prison estate. He should take it up with the prison authorities. Fitzgerald remained on his feet, which drew a very definite scowl from Baraitser, and replied that of course they would do that again, but this repeated behaviour by the prison authorities threatened the ability of the defence to prepare. He added that regardless of jurisdiction, **in his experience it was common practice for magistrates and judges to pass on comments and requests to the prison service where the conduct of the trial was affected, and that jails normally listened to magistrates sympathetically.**

Baraitser flat-out denied any knowledge of such a practice, and stated that Fitzgerald should present her with written arguments setting out the case law on jurisdiction over prison conditions. **This was too much even for prosecution counsel James Lewis, who stood up to say the prosecution would also want Assange to have a fair hearing, and that he could confirm that what the defence were suggesting was normal practice. Even then, Baraitser still refused to intervene with the prison.** She stated that if the prison conditions were so bad as to reach the very high bar of making a fair hearing impossible, the defence should bring a motion to dismiss the charges on those grounds. Otherwise they should drop it.

Both prosecution and defence seemed surprised by Baraitser's claim that she had not heard of what they both referred to as common practice. Lewis may have been genuinely concerned at the shocking description of Assange's prison treatment yesterday; or he may have just had warning klaxons going off in his head screaming "mistrial". But the net result is Baraitser will attempt to do nothing to prevent Julian's physical and mental abuse in jail nor to try to give him the ability to participate in his defence. **The only realistic explanation that occurs to me is that Baraitser has been warned off, because this continual mistreatment and confiscation of documents is on senior government authority.**

A last small incident for me to recount: having queued again from the early hours, I was at the final queue before the entrance to the public gallery, when the name was called out of Kristin Hrnafsson, editor of Wikileaks, with whom I was talking at the time. Kristin identified himself, and was told by the court official he was barred from the public gallery.

Now I was with Kristin throughout the entire proceedings the previous day, and he had done absolutely nothing amiss — he is rather a quiet gentleman. When he was called for, it was by name and by job description — they were specifically banning the editor of Wikileaks from the trial. Kristin asked why and was told it was a decision of the Court.

At this stage **John Shipton, Julian's father, announced that in this case the family members would all leave too, and they did so**, walking out of the building. They and others then started tweeting the news of the family walkout. This appeared to cause some consternation among court officials, and fifteen minutes later Kristin was re-admitted. We still have no idea what lay behind this. Later in the day journalists were being briefed by officials it was simply over queue-jumping, but that seems improbable as he was removed by staff who called him by name and title, rather than had spotted him as a queue-jumper.

None of the above goes to the official matter of the case. All of the above tells you more about the draconian nature of the political show-trial which is taking place than does the charade being enacted in the body of the court. There were moments today when I got drawn in to the court process and achieved the suspension of disbelief you might do in theatre, and began thinking "Wow, this case is going well for Assange". Then an event such as those recounted above kicks in, a coldness grips your heart, and you recall **there is no jury here to be convinced. I simply do not believe that anything said or proved in the courtroom can have an impact on the final verdict of this court.**

So to the actual proceedings in the case.

For the defence, Mark Summers QC stated that the USA charges were entirely dependent on three factual accusations of Assange behaviour:

- 1) Assange helped Manning to decode a hash key to access classified material. Summers stated this was a provably false allegation from the evidence of the Manning court-martial.
- 2) Assange solicited the material from Manning. Summers stated this was provably wrong from information available to the public.
- 3) Assange knowingly put lives at risk.

Summers stated this was provably wrong both from publicly available information and from specific involvement of the US government.

In summary, Summers stated the US government knew that the allegations being made were false as to fact, and they were demonstrably made in bad faith. This was therefore an abuse of process which should lead to dismissal of the extradition request. He described the above three counts as “rubbish, rubbish and rubbish”.

Summers then walked through the facts of the case. He said the charges from the USA divide the materials leaked by Manning to Wikileaks into three categories:

- a) Diplomatic Cables
- b) Guantanamo detainee assessment briefs
- c) Iraq War rules of engagement
- d) Afghan and Iraqi war logs

Summers then methodically went through a), b), c) and d) relating each in turn to alleged behaviours 1), 2) and 3), making twelve counts of explanation and exposition in all. **This comprehensive account took some four hours** and I shall not attempt to capture it here. I will rather give highlights, but will relate occasionally to the alleged behaviour number and / or the alleged materials letter. I hope you follow that — it took me some time to do so!

On 1) Summers at great length demonstrated conclusively that Manning had access to each material a) b) c) d) provided to Wikileaks without needing any code from Assange, and had that access before ever contacting Assange. Nor had Manning needed a code to conceal her identity as the prosecution alleged — the database for intelligence analysts Manning could access — as could thousands of others — did not require a username or password to access it from a work military computer. Summers quoted testimony of several officers from Manning’s court-martial to confirm this. Nor would breaking the systems admin code on the system give Manning access to any additional classified databases. **Summers quoted evidence from the Manning court-martial, where this had been accepted, that the reason Manning wanted to get in to systems admin was to allow soldiers to put their video-games and movies on their government laptops**, which in fact happened frequently.

Magistrate Baraitser twice made major interruptions. She observed that if Chelsea Manning did not know she could not be traced as the user who downloaded the databases, she might have sought Assange’s assistance to crack a code to conceal her identity from ignorance she did not need to do that, and to assist would still be an offence by Assange.

Summers pointed out that Manning knew that she did not need a username and password, because she actually accessed all the materials without one. Baraitser replied that this did not constitute proof she knew she could not be traced. Summers said in logic it made no sense to argue that she was seeking a code to conceal her user ID and password, where there was no user ID and password. **Baraitser replied again he could not prove that.** At this point Summers became somewhat testy and short with Baraitser, and took her through the court martial evidence again. Of which more...

Baraitser also made the point that even if Assange were helping Manning to crack an admin code, even if it did not enable Manning to access any more databases, that still

was unauthorised use and **would constitute the crime of aiding and abetting computer misuse, even if for an innocent purpose.**

After a brief break, Baraitser came back with a real zinger. She told Summers that he had presented the findings of the US court martial of Chelsea Manning as fact. But she did not agree that her court had to treat evidence at a US court martial, even agreed or uncontested evidence or prosecution evidence, as fact. Summers replied that agreed evidence or prosecution evidence at the US court martial clearly was agreed by the US government as fact, and what was at issue at the moment was whether the US government was charging contrary to the facts it knew. Baraitser said she would return to her point once witnesses were heard.

Baraitser was now making no attempt to conceal a hostility to the defence argument, and seemed irritated they had the temerity to make it. This burst out when discussing c), the Iraq war rules of engagement. Summers argued that these had not been solicited from Manning, but had rather been provided by Manning in an accompanying file along with the Collateral Murder video that showed the murder of Reuters journalists and children. Manning's purpose, as she stated at her court martial, was to show that the Collateral Murder actions breached the rules of engagement, even though the Department of Defense claimed otherwise. Summers stated that by not including this context, the US extradition request was deliberately misleading as it did not even mention the Collateral Murder video at all.

At this point Baraitser could not conceal her contempt. Try to imagine Lady Bracknell saying "A Handbag" or "the Brighton line", or if your education didn't run that way try to imagine Priti Patel spotting a disabled immigrant. **This is a literal quote: "Are you suggesting, Mr Summers, that the authorities, the Government, should have to provide context for its charges?"**

An unfazed Summers replied in the affirmative and then went on to show where the Supreme Court had said so in other extradition cases. **Baraitser was showing utter confusion that anybody could claim a significant distinction between the Government and God.**

The bulk of Summers' argument went to refuting behaviour 3), putting lives at risk. This was only claimed in relation to materials a) and d). **Summers described at great length the efforts of Wikileaks with media partners over more than a year to set up a massive redaction campaign on the cables. He explained that the unredacted cables only became available after Luke Harding and David Leigh of the Guardian published the password to the cache as the heading to Chapter XI of their book Wikileaks, published in February 2011.**

Nobody had put 2 and 2 together on this password until the German publication Der Freitag had done so and announced it had the unredacted cables in August 2011. Summers then gave the most powerful arguments of the day.

The US government had been actively participating in the redaction exercise on the cables. They therefore knew the allegations of reckless publication to be untrue.

Once Der Freitag announced they had the unredacted materials, Julian Assange and Sara Harrison instantly telephoned the White House, State Department and US Embassy to warn them named sources may be put at risk. Summers read from the transcripts of telephone conversations as Assange and Harrison attempted to convince US officials of the urgency of enabling source protection procedures — and expressed

their bafflement as officials stonewalled them. This evidence utterly undermined the US government's case and proved bad faith in omitting extremely relevant fact. It was a very striking moment.

With relation to the same behaviour 3) on materials d), Summers showed that the Manning court martial had accepted these materials contained no endangered source names, but showed that Wikileaks had activated a redaction exercise anyway as a "belt and braces" approach.

There was much more from the defence. For the prosecution, James Lewis indicated he would reply in depth later in proceedings, but wished to state that the prosecution does not accept the court martial evidence as fact, and **particularly does not accept any of the "self-serving" testimony of Chelsea Manning, whom he portrayed as a convicted criminal falsely claiming noble motives.** The prosecution generally rejected any notion that this court should consider the truth or otherwise of any of the facts; those could only be decided at trial in the USA.

Then, to wrap up proceedings, Baraitser dropped a massive bombshell. She stated that although Article 4.1 of the US/UK Extradition Treaty forbade political extraditions, this was only in the Treaty. That exemption does not appear in the UK Extradition Act. **On the face of it therefore political extradition is not illegal in the UK, as the Treaty has no legal force on the Court. She invited the defence to address this argument in the morning.**

<https://www.craigmurray.org.uk/archives/2020/02/your-man-in-the-public-gallery-assange-hearing-day-2/>

With Wikileaks, Julian Assange Did What All Journalists Should Do

*Patrick Cockburn
CounterPunch
February 26, 2020*

I was in Kabul in 2010 when Julian Assange and WikiLeaks first released a vast archive of classified US government documents, revealing what Washington really knew about what was happening in the world. I was particularly interested in one of these disclosures which came in the shape of a video that the Pentagon had refused to release despite a Freedom of Information Act request.

When WikiLeaks did release the video, it was obvious why the US generals had wanted to keep it secret. Three years earlier, I had been in Baghdad when a US helicopter machine-gunned and fired rockets at a group of civilians on the ground, who its pilots claimed were armed insurgents, killing or wounding many of them.

Journalists in Iraq were disbelieving about the US military claim because the dead included two reporters from the Reuters news agency. Nor was it likely that insurgents would have been walking in the open with their weapons when a US Apache helicopter was overhead.

We could not prove anything until WikiLeaks made public the film from the Apache. Viewing it still has the power to shock: the pilots are cock-a-hoop as they hunt their

prey, which included people in a vehicle who stopped to help the wounded, saying, "Oh yeah, look at those dead bastards" and "Ha, ha, I hit them." Anybody interested in why the US failed in Iraq should have a look.

The WikiLeaks revelations in 2010 and in 2016 are the present-day equivalent of the release by Daniel Ellsberg in 1971 of the Pentagon Papers, unmasking the true history of the US engagement in the Vietnam War. They are, in fact, of even greater significance because they are more wide-ranging and provide an entry point into the world as the US government really sees it.

The disclosures were probably the greatest journalistic scoop in history and newspapers like The New York Times recognised this by the vast space they gave to the revelations. Corroboration of their importance has been grimly confirmed by the rage of US security establishment and its allies abroad and the furious determination with which they have pursued Julian Assange as the co-founder of Wikileaks.

Daniel Ellsberg is rightly treated as a hero who revealed the truth about Vietnam, but Julian Assange, whose actions were very similar to Ellsberg's, is held in Belmarsh high security prison. He faces a hearing in London this week to decide on his extradition from the UK to the US on spying charges. If extradited, he stands a good chance of being sentenced to 175 years in the US prison system under the Espionage Act of 1917.

Ever since Assange orchestrated the release of documents through WikiLeaks, he has been the target of repeated official attempts to discredit him or, at the very least, to muddy the waters in a case that should be all about freedom of speech.

The initial bid to demonise Assange came immediately after the first release of documents, claiming that they would cost the lives of people named. The US government still argues that lives were put at risk by WikiLeaks, though it has never produced evidence for this.

On the contrary, in 2013 the US counter-intelligence official who was in charge of the Pentagon's investigation into the impact of the WikiLeaks' disclosures admitted in evidence that there was not a single instance of an individual being killed by enemy forces as a result of what WikiLeaks had done.

Brigadier General Robert Carr, head of the Pentagon's Information Review Task Force, told the sentencing hearing for Chelsea Manning that his initial claim that an individual named by WikiLeaks had been killed by the Taliban in Afghanistan was untrue. "The name of the individual was not in the disclosures," he admitted.

On the day the WikiLeaks revelations were made public I had a pre-arranged meeting in Kabul with a US official who asked what the coding on the top of the leaked papers was. When I read this out, he was dismissive about the extent to which the deep secrets of the US state were being revealed.

I learned later the reason for his relaxed attitude. The database Manning had accessed was called SIPRNet (Secret Internet Protocol Router) which is a US military internet system. After 9/11 it was used to make sure that confidential information available to one part the US government was available to others. The number of people with the right security clearance who could theoretically access SIPRNet was about three million, though the number with the correct password, while still substantial, would have been much fewer.

The US government is not so naïve as to put real secrets on a system whose purpose was to be open to so many people, including a low-ranking sergeant like Chelsea Manning. **Sensitive materials from defence attaches and the like were sent through alternative and more secure channels. Had the US security services really been sending the names of those whose lives would be in danger if their identity was disclosed in a system as insecure as SIPRNet, then they soon would have run short of recruits.**

The false accusation that lives had been lost or could have been lost because of WikiLeaks damaged Assange. More damaging by far are the allegations he has faced of the rape and sexual molestation of two women in Sweden in 2010. He denies the allegation, but it has condemned him to permanent pariah status in the eyes of many. The Swedish prosecutor discontinued the rape investigation last year because of lapse of time, but this makes no difference for those who feel that anything Assange has said or done is permanently tainted and that the WikiLeaks disclosures are only a tangential issue. **Much of the media likewise views Assange's character and alleged behaviour as the only story worth covering.** Though information about SIPRNet and General Carr's evidence was published long ago, few journalists seem to be aware of this.

But it is not because of anything that may have happened in Sweden that Assange is threatened with extradition to the US to face prosecution under the Espionage Act. **The charges all relate to the release of government secrets, the sort of thing that all journalists should aspire to do,** and many have done on a regular basis in Britain and the US, though without being subject to official sanctions.

Compare the British government's eagerness to detain Assange with its lack of interest in pursuing whoever leaked the secret cables of the British Ambassador to the US, Kim Darroch, to the Mail on Sunday last year. His negative comments about Donald Trump provoked an angry reaction from the president that forced Darroch to resign his job.

Assange has made disclosures about the activities of the US government that are more significant than the revelations in the Pentagon Papers. That is why he has been pursued to this day and his punishment is so much more severe than anything inflicted on Daniel Ellsberg.

Patrick Cockburn is the author of The Rise of Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution.

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2020/02/26/with-wikileaks-julian-assange-did-what-all-journalists-should-do/>

Press freedom will be 'thing of the past' if British help Americans get their way with Assange — Irish MEP

RT
26 Feb. 2020

Irish MEP Mick Wallace slammed US prosecutors for “undermining” international law” during Julian Assange extradition hearings and warned that, if the whistleblower is extradited, freedom of the press will be a “thing of the past.” Speaking outside Woolwich Crown Court on the third day of the preliminary hearings, Wallace said James Lewis QC, acting for the US government, was putting international law and freedom of the press “under serious threat.”

Lewis argued on Wednesday that British courts can’t apply rights from international treaties which have not been established in English domestic law. He was making the case that a US-UK extradition treaty which prohibits extradition for “political offenses” is superseded by the UK’s Extradition Act of 2003, which does not contain the same provision.

Wallace said that Assange’s case was clearly an international one and that international law cannot be ignored or undermined. He said the case would likely go to multiple appeals and questioned whether the WikiLeaks founder, who has suffered ill health and alleged inhumane treatment in the top-security Belmarsh Prison, would survive more years locked up.

“His only crime is exposing the truth about US war crimes. You cannot shout it loudly enough,” he said.

Assange’s father John Shipton also spoke outside the court after the third day of hearings wrapped up, asking journalists to “advance the case that Julian get bail immediately.”

A spokesperson for Reporters Without Borders said the press freedom organization was concerned that the prosecution was arguing the international law does not apply in Assange’s case. She said it “does apply” and Assange faces “politically motivated” charges in the US.

<https://www.rt.com/uk/481753-mick-wallace-julian-assange-extradition/>

‘Can’t participate, can’t communicate’: Day 3 of Assange’s US extradition hearing as it happened

RT

26 Feb. 2020

The third day of Julian Assange’s extradition hearing saw lawyers honing in on the particulars of a US-UK extradition treaty, and unexpected drama as the whistleblower spoke to complain about lack of access to his defense team.

Proceedings began with a note of housekeeping from Judge Vanessa Baraitser, who said a photograph had been taken in court earlier in the week. She reminded attendees that this is a criminal offense, and said she would consider the culprit “in contempt” of court.

For the third day running, Assange sat in the glass-fronted dock, wearing a suit jacket, inspecting his notes and **able to communicate with his lawyers only through holes**

in the glass. At the outset, his lawyers cautioned that he was on medication and may need occasional breaks.

The crux of the defense's argument was that, since Assange is charged under the US Espionage Act, he is wanted for "political offenses," and extraditing under these circumstances would be unlawful under the 2003 US-UK extradition treaty.

Edward Fitzgerald QC argued that the exception for political offenses under the treaty is an essential and "fundamental" protection which the US includes in all of its extradition treaties to protect their own citizens abroad. This protection seems to fall by the wayside, however, when the US wants a foreign citizen extradited, he said.

Fitzgerald worked to establish that Assange's extradition for political offenses is illegal under English domestic law, as well as under the European Convention on Human Rights (Article 5) and the bilateral treaty. **Unless the charges relate to terrorism or violence, a person should not be extradited for political offenses. This fact is "virtually universal," he said.**

There was a back-and-forth between Fitzgerald and the judge, who said the "political offenses" provision was removed from the UK's Extradition Act of 2003. Fitzgerald argued that this was "not determinative" and that it is still included in the treaty itself.

Observing proceedings, Italian journalist Stefania Maurizi, who has worked with WikiLeaks for over a decade, tweeted to complain that **Baraitser was speaking so quietly that even reporters very close to the judge could hardly hear. "How can Julian Assange hear her words, considering he is 5 meters from her in a glass wall box?" she wrote.**

The defense also sought to establish that the US charge of "conspiracy to commit computer fraud" is an espionage offense and that this is a political offense, not a criminal one. Obtaining information that a state wants hidden is a "pure political crime," he said.

He asked Baraitser to consider the scenario of an NGO worker in China uncovering and making public information on executions by the Chinese government and then being charged by that state with espionage.

Fitzgerald noted that Republican lawmakers in the US had accused Assange of "treason," and **asked how an Australian citizen could possibly commit treason against the US.**

Following an hour's lunch break, James Lewis QC for the prosecution rose to respond and accused Fitzgerald of making "fundamental errors" in his argumentation.

He contended that Assange can't derive legal rights under the UK-US treaty since it was not incorporated into domestic law and challenged Fitzgerald's claim that the whistleblower is wanted for "political offenses."

Lewis argued that British courts cannot apply rights from international treaties that are not established in English law and that the 2003 UK Extradition Act supersedes the treaty.

The most dramatic moment of the day came around 2:30pm when Baraitser asked Assange if he felt well enough to continue. He complained that he was unable to

privately communicate with his lawyers, claiming there were guards in the glass dock with mics.

The magistrate interrupted to say he was only permitted to speak to the court through his lawyers. When he began to speak again, she told him no exception would be made and called a five-minute recess to allow him confer with his team.

“This case already has enough spying on my lawyers as it is,” Assange added. The complaint was consistent with grievances aired by his defense team for months about lack of access to Assange at Belmarsh Prison and US spying at the Ecuadorian Embassy, where he spent seven years after seeking asylum in fear of extradition.

When court resumed, Fitzgerald said the defense would make an application for Assange, who is “no threat” and a “gentle man,” to be allowed to sit with his lawyers on the benches outside the dock going forward.

Baraitser was reluctant to agree, arguing that release from the dock would require an application of bail. To the surprise of some journalists, **Lewis took a more lenient position than the magistrate, saying the prosecution maintained a neutral stance on Assange being allowed to sit with his lawyer** — if flanked by security and not released from custody. It was decided that an application for Assange to sit with his lawyers would be considered overnight.

Proceedings resumed for a final 30 minutes, with Lewis arguing that there is no such thing as a “political crime” in English domestic law.

Court adjourned shortly after 4pm, after Assange indicated that he couldn't concentrate any longer. He looked to his supporters in the public gallery and raised his fist above his head as he exited the dock.

The extradition hearing is set to resume at 10am on Thursday.

<https://www.rt.com/uk/481756-assange-extradition-hearing-treaty/>

Interview With Jérémie Zimmermann, Assange Collaborator and Friend, on the Travesty at Woolwich Crown Court

Cathy Vogan
Cnsortium News
February 26, 2020

Leaving the inhospitable grounds of Belmarsh Prison's Woolwich Crown Court, one couldn't fail to notice the protestor who was madly blowing a whistle. It was Jérémie Zimmermann, computer science engineer, friend of Julian Assange and Cypherpunk guest on the 2012 Assange TV series: “The World Tomorrow.” Zimmermann was a contributor to Assange's book *Cypherpunks: Freedom and the Future of the Internet* (OR Books).

He spoke of how the internet had changed for the worse over the last decade, and how the people holding Assange were “using the Magna Carta as toilet paper.”

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1bCYj5e6_I&feature=emb_logo

<https://consortiumnews.com/2020/02/26/assange-extradition-interview-with-jeremie-zimmermann-assange-collaborator-and-friend-on-the-travesty-at-woolwich-crown-court-2/>

AB-Debatt: 2020-02-26

Regeringen, kräv att Julian Assange friges

Vi kräver att Julian Assange friges. Och vi förutsätter att den svenska regeringen skyndsamt verkar i samma anda, skriver Sven Britton, Marcello Ferrada de Noli, Anders Romelsjö och Arne Ruth.

Just nu pågår rättegången i London mot Julian Assange. Han är en av grundarna av Wikileaks som publicerat avslöjande dokument om USA:s krigsbrott i Afghanistan och Irak.

Wikileaks har nominerats till Nobels Fredspris sju gånger, senast 2019.

Genom filmen "Collateral murder" 2007 nådde Wikileaks och Assange världsrykte. Där återges hur amerikansk militär skrattande bedriver krypskytte på civila i Bagdad.

Några år senare publiceras genom Wikileaks de dokument som den samvetsömme amerikanske soldaten Bradley/Chelsea Manning kommit över och som i detalj återger de förfärliga krigsbrott den amerikanska armén var skyldig till under krigen i Afghanistan och Irak.

Det var som en ikon för yttrandefriheten, uppmärksammas och hyllad bland annat i The Guardian, The New York Times och Der Spiegel som Julian Assange inbjöds till Sverige 2010.

Här hemma är han nu bara känd som en misstänkt våldtäktsman. Under sitt besök i Sverige, dit han inbjudits av den socialdemokratiska sidosorganisationen Tro och solidaritet, är det klarlagt att han hade sex med två kvinnor vid två olika tillfällen.

Kvinnorna har båda anklagat honom för sexuellt ofredande och våldtäkt. *[Fel. Jämfor med Nils Melzers redogörelse i intervjun ovan i Republik den 31 januari. –A.B.]* Tre förundersökningar kring detta har genomförts men ingendera har lett till åtal, som nu är definitivt nedlagt av brist på bevis.

I samband med förundersökningen 2010 utfärdade rätten en häktningsorder. Julian Assange befann sig då i London. Inför risken att bli utlämnad till USA, där han riskerar ett tresiffrigt fängelsestraff för spioneri, sökte han asyl på Ecuadors Ambassad i London. Både Sverige och Storbritannien har utlämningsavtal med USA med det har inte Ecuador.

Inget förhör hölls med Assange på sex år vilket anses som en exceptionell och oansvarig fördröjning, enligt juridisk expertis såsom överåklagare Sven-Erik Alhem och advokatsamfundets förre ordförande Anne Ramberg.

FN:s rapportör om tortyr och mänskliga rättigheter, den schweiziske juridikprofessorn Nils Melzer, har i flera uttalanden, även framförda till dåvarande utrikesministern Margot Wallström, angivit att både svenska och brittiska myndigheter utsatt Assange för psykologisk tortyr och att den svenska juridiska handläggningen varit en "unbelievable scandal".

Efter sju års vistelse på Ecuadors Ambassad i London släpades Julian Assange, numera medborgare både i Australien och Ecuador, ut ur ambassaden med hjälp av brittisk polis efter beslut av den nyttillträdde och mer USA-orienterade presidenten i Ecuador, Lenin Moreno.

Han fängslades omedelbart och dömdes till ett års fängelse i isoleringscell för att ha brutit mot ett borgensavtal 2012.

En begäran om utlämning har kommit från USA och där väntar i så fall ett åtal med 17 åtalpunkter som bygger på en spionakt från 1917 med en sammanlagd straffsats på 170 år.

Storbritanniens nye inrikesminister, Sajid Javid, har skriftligen godkänt en utlämning till USA vilket givetvis riskerar att påverka domslutet, då det i en ny domstolsförhandling ska avgöras om Assange kan dömas för spionage.

Fallet Assange gäller alltså inte i första hand en svensk rättsskandal utan betydelsen av yttrandefrihet för demokrati och mänskliga rättigheter. Andra visselblåsare som Bradley/Chelsea Manning, Edward Snowden, Dawit Isaak, Gui Minhai har tagit stora risker för yttrandefriheten. Utan sådana tystnar friheten och makten kan härja ostörd.

Vi kräver därför i likhet med bland annat Amnesty International, International Federation of Journalists inklusive Svenska journalistförbundet, Svenska och Internationella Pen och Europarådet att Julian Assange frigges.

Hans hälsa har försämrats avsevärt det sista året vilket påtalats i en petition från över 100 brittiska läkare, däribland 10 från Sverige. First amendment till den amerikanska konstitutionen ger rätt till yttrandefrihet och den bör gälla även för icke amerikanska medborgare som Assange.

Vi förutsätter att den svenska regeringen skyndsamt verkar i ovanstående anda.

Sven Britton, professor emeritus, medlem i Tro och solidaritet (S)

Marcello Ferrada de Noli, professor emeritus,

ordförande i Swedish Professors & Doctors for Human Rights (SWEDHR)

Anders Romelsjö, professor emeritus, aktiv i "Stödgruppen för Julian Assange"

Arne Ruth, f.d. kulturchef på Dagens Nyheter

<https://www.aftonbladet.se/debatt/a/XgLBvm/regeringen-krav-att-julian-assange-friges>

AB-Debatt: 2020-02-26

Advokat: USA ville kidnappa eller döda Assange

Oskar Forsberg

USA planerade att döda Julian Assange när han gömde sig på Ecuadors ambassad.

Man skulle få mordet att se ut som en olycka.

Det hävdar Wikileaks — grundarens advokat, enligt New York Post.

Agenter från amerikansk underrättelsetjänst ska ha träffat anställda från det spanska säkerhetsföretaget UC Global.

Det spanska företaget var kontrakterade för säkerheten på Ecuadors ambassad i London, där Julian Assange gömde sig. Amerikanerna och spanjorerna ska ha övervakat ambassaden och Wikileaks-mannen dygnet runt.

Det hävdar Assanges advokat Edward Fitzgerald, utan att lägga fram några bevis.

Advokaten uppgav också under ett framträdande i veckan att hans möten med Assange övervakades och spelades in.

Övervakningen ska ha gjort att Assange slutligen sov i ett tält i sitt sovrum, enligt tidningen The Telegraph.

Enligt advokat Fitzgerald var övervakningen en del av en större plan.

– Det fördes konversationer om mer extrema åtgärder skulle genomföras. Man talade om att förgifta eller kidnappa Julian Assange på ambassaden, sa han i en domstol i USA i måndags.

Enligt Fitzgerald ska UC Globals ägare, David Morales, ha uppgett att amerikanerna "var desperata och föreslog mer extrema metoder som skulle avsluta hela situationen".

Bland annat föreslog man att en dörr skulle lämnas öppen "av misstag" och att man på så sätt skulle kunna kidnappa Assange.

Julian Assange kom till Ecuadors ambassad i London 2012 för att undvika att bli utlämnad till Sverige. Han stannade kvar efter att USA offentliggjort 18 åtalpunkter mot honom.

Ecuador sparkade till slut ut honom i våras och han greps då omedelbart av brittisk polis.

<https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/LAGGbR/advokat-usa-ville-kidnappa-eller-doda-assange>

Your Man in the Public Gallery — The Assange Hearing Day 3

Craig Murray
27 Feb. 2020

In yesterday's proceedings in court, the prosecution adopted arguments so stark and apparently unreasonable I have been fretting on how to write them up in a way that does not seem like caricature or unfair exaggeration on my part. What has been happening in this court has long moved beyond caricature. All I can do is give you my personal assurance that what I recount actually is what happened.

As usual, I shall deal with procedural matters and Julian's treatment first, before getting in to a clear account of the legal arguments made.

Vanessa Baraitser is under a clear instruction to mimic concern by asking, near the end of every session just before we break anyway, if Julian is feeling well and

whether he would like a break. She then routinely ignores his response. Yesterday he replied at some length he could not hear properly in his glass box and could not communicate with his lawyers (at some point yesterday they had started preventing him passing notes to his counsel, which I learn was the background to the aggressive prevention of his shaking Garzon's hand goodbye).

Baraitser insisted he might only be heard through his counsel, which given he was prevented from instructing them was a bit rich. This being pointed out, we had a ten minute adjournment while Julian and his counsel were allowed to talk down in the cells — presumably where they could be more conveniently bugged yet again.

On return, Edward Fitzgerald made a formal application for Julian to be allowed to sit beside his lawyers in the court. Julian was “a gentle, intellectual man” and not a terrorist. Baraitser replied that releasing Assange from the dock into the body of the court would mean he was released from custody. To achieve that would require an application for bail.

Again, the prosecution counsel James Lewis intervened on the side of the defence to try to make Julian's treatment less extreme. He was not, he suggested diffidently, quite sure that it was correct that it required bail for Julian to be in the body of the court, or that being in the body of the court accompanied by security officers meant that a prisoner was no longer in custody. **Prisoners, even the most dangerous of terrorists, gave evidence from the witness box in the body of the court next to the lawyers and magistrate.** In the High Court prisoners frequently sat with their lawyers in extradition hearings, in extreme cases of violent criminals handcuffed to a security officer.

Baraitser replied that Assange might pose a danger to the public. It was a question of health and safety. How did Fitzgerald and Lewis think that she had the ability to carry out the necessary risk assessment? It would have to be up to Group 4 to decide if this was possible.

Yes, she really did say that. Group 4 would have to decide.

Baraitser started to throw out jargon like a Dalek when it spins out of control. “Risk assessment” and “health and safety” featured a lot. She started to resemble something worse than a Dalek, a particularly stupid local government officer of a very low grade. “No jurisdiction” — “Up to Group 4”. Recovering slightly, she stated firmly that delivery to custody can only mean delivery to the dock of the court, nowhere else in the room. If the defence wanted him in the courtroom where he could hear proceedings better, they could only apply for bail and his release from custody in general. She then peered at both barristers in the hope this would have sat them down, but both were still on their feet.

In his diffident manner (which I confess is growing on me) **Lewis said “the prosecution is neutral on this request, of course but, err, I really don't think that's right”.** He looked at her like a kindly uncle whose favourite niece has just started drinking tequila from the bottle at a family party.

Baraitser concluded the matter by stating that the Defence should submit written arguments by 10 am tomorrow on this point, and she would then hold a separate hearing into the question of Julian's position in the court.

The day had begun with a very angry Magistrate Baraitser addressing the public gallery. Yesterday, she said, a photo had been taken inside the courtroom. It was a criminal offence to take or attempt to take photographs inside the courtroom. Vanessa **Baraitser looked at this point very keen to lock someone up**. She also seemed in her anger to be making the unfounded assumption that whoever took the photo from the public gallery on Tuesday was still there on Wednesday; I suspect not. Being angry at the public at random must be very stressful for her. I suspect she shouts a lot on trains.

Ms Baraitser is not fond of photography — she appears to be the only public figure in Western Europe with no photo on the internet. Indeed the average proprietor of a rural car wash has left more evidence of their existence and life history on the internet than Vanessa Baraitser. Which is no crime on her part, but I suspect the expunging is not achieved without considerable effort. Somebody suggested to me she might be a hologram, but I think not. Holograms have more empathy.

I was amused by the criminal offence of attempting to take photos in the courtroom. How incompetent would you need to be to attempt to take a photo and fail to do so? And if no photo was taken, how do they prove you were attempting to take one, as opposed to texting your mum? I suppose “attempting to take a photo” is a crime that could catch somebody arriving with a large SLR, tripod and several mounted lighting boxes, but none of those appeared to have made it into the public gallery.

Baraitser did not state whether it was a criminal offence to publish a photograph taken in a courtroom (or indeed to attempt to publish a photograph taken in a courtroom). I suspect it is. Anyway *Le Grand Soir* has published a translation of my report yesterday, and there you can see a photo of Julian in his bulletproof glass anti-terrorist cage. Not, I hasten to add, taken by me.

We now come to the consideration of yesterday’s legal arguments on the extradition request itself. Fortunately, these are basically fairly simple to summarise, because although we had five hours of legal disquisition, it largely consisted of both sides competing in citing scores of “authorities”, e.g. dead judges, to endorse their point of view, and thus repeating the same points continually with little value from exegesis of the innumerable quotes.

As prefigured yesterday by magistrate Baraitser, the prosecution is arguing that Article 4.1 of the UK/US extradition treaty has no force in law.

The UK and US Governments say that the court enforces domestic law, not international law, and therefore the treaty has no standing. This argument has been made to the court in written form to which I do not have access. But from discussion in court it was plain that the prosecution argue that the Extradition Act of 2003, under which the court is operating, makes no exception for political offences. All previous Extradition Acts had excluded extradition for political offences, so it must be the intention of the sovereign parliament that political offenders can now be extradited.

Opening his argument, Edward Fitzgerald QC argued that the Extradition Act of 2003 alone is not enough to make an actual extradition. **The extradition requires two things in place; the general Extradition Act and the Extradition Treaty with the country or countries concerned. “No Treaty, No Extradition” was an unbreakable rule. The Treaty was the very basis of the request. So to say that the extradition was not governed by the terms of the very treaty under which it was made, was to create a legal absurdity and thus an abuse of process.** He cited examples of judgements

made by the House of Lords and Privy Council where treaty rights were deemed enforceable despite the lack of incorporation into domestic legislation, particularly in order to stop people being extradited to potential execution from British colonies.

Fitzgerald pointed out that while the Extradition Act of 2003 did not contain a bar on extraditions for political offences, it did not state there could not be such a bar in extradition treaties. And the extradition treaty of 2007 was ratified after the 2003 extradition act.

At this stage Baraitser interrupted that it was plain the intention of parliament was that there could be extradition for political offences. Otherwise they would not have removed the bar in previous legislation. Fitzgerald declined to agree, saying the Act did not say extradition for political offences could not be banned by the treaty enabling extradition.

Fitzgerald then continued to say that **international jurisprudence had accepted for a century or more that you did not extradite political offenders. No political extradition was in the European Convention on Extradition, the Model United Nations Extradition Treaty and the Interpol Convention on Extradition. It was in every single one of the United States' extradition treaties with other countries, and had been for over a century, at the insistence of the United States.** For both the UK and US Governments to say it did not apply was astonishing and would set a terrible precedent that would endanger dissidents and potential political prisoners from China, Russia and regimes all over the world who had escaped to third countries.

Fitzgerald stated that all major authorities agreed there were two types of political offence. The pure political offence and the relative political offence. A "pure" political offence was defined as treason, espionage or sedition. A "relative" political offence was an act which was normally criminal, like assault or vandalism, conducted with a political motive. Every one of the charges against Assange was a "pure" political offence. All but one were espionage charges, and the computer misuse charge had been compared by the prosecution to breach of the official secrets act to meet the dual criminality test. The overriding accusation that Assange was seeking to harm the political and military interests of the United States was in the very definition of a political offence in all the authorities.

In reply Lewis stated that a treaty could not be binding in English law unless specifically incorporated in English law by Parliament. This was a necessary democratic defence. Treaties were made by the executive which could not make law. This went to the sovereignty of Parliament. Lewis quoted many judgements stating that international treaties signed and ratified by the UK could not be enforced in British courts. "It may come as a surprise to other countries that their treaties with the British government can have no legal force" he joked.

Lewis said there was no abuse of process here and thus no rights were invoked under the European Convention. It was just the normal operation of the law that the treaty provision on no extradition for political offences had no legal standing.

Lewis said that the US government disputes that Assange's offences are political. In the UK/Australia/US there was a different definition of political offence to the rest of the world. We viewed the "pure" political offences of treason, espionage and sedition as not political offences. Only "relative" political offences — ordinary crimes committed with a political motive — were viewed as political offences in our tradition. In this tradition, the definition of "political" was also limited to supporting a

contending political party in a state. Lewis will continue with this argument tomorrow.

<https://www.craigmurray.org.uk/archives/2020/02/your-man-in-the-public-gallery-the-assange-hearing-day-3/>

Assange Extradition: Proceedings so Far

This was originally an update to our discussion thread on Julian Assange's arrest and "trial", but as that post was two days old many readers seemed to miss the updated information. In light of that, we decided it was better suited to a separate article.

*Off-Guardian
Feb. 27, 2020*

Some are calling it the "trial of the century" but, to this point, it seems more a piece of badly-staged political theatre. Day 3 of Assange's trial closes, and so far it's painting a grim picture of the British legal system.

Anybody interested in a detailed run-down of each day of the Julian Assange's trial, Craig Murray has been attending and writing up reports on a day-by-day basis. They make interesting reading.

Day 1 saw something perverse taking place, an acknowledgement that this is a piece of performance art as much as a trial:

James Lewis QC made the opening statement for the prosecution. It consisted of two parts, both equally extraordinary. The first and longest part was truly remarkable for containing no legal argument, and for being addressed not to the magistrate but to the media. It is not just that it was obvious that is where his remarks were aimed, he actually stated on two occasions during his opening statement that he was addressing the media, once repeating a sentence and saying specifically that he was repeating it again because it was important that the media got it.

Along with examples of the mainstream media totally failing in their public duty...again:

There was a separate media entrance and a media room with live transmission from the courtroom, and there were so many scores of media I thought I could relax and not worry as the basic facts would be widely reported. In fact, I could not have been more wrong. I followed the arguments very clearly every minute of the day, and not a single one of the most important facts and arguments today has been reported anywhere in the mainstream media.

Day 2 saw the defence protesting Assange's treatment in prison,

Day 2 proceedings had started with a statement from Edward Fitzgerald, Assange's QC, that shook us rudely into life. He stated that yesterday, on the first day of trial, Julian had twice been stripped naked and searched, eleven times been handcuffed, and five times been locked up in different holding cells. On top of this, all of his court documents had been taken from him by the prison authorities, including privileged communications between his lawyers and himself, and he had been left with no ability to prepare to participate in today's proceedings.

Which lead to a classic example Judicial bias when the defense asked the Magistrate Vanessa Baraitser to intercede with the prison on Assange's behalf:

Baraitser flat-out denied any knowledge of such a practice, and stated that Fitzgerald should present her with written arguments setting out the case law on jurisdiction over prison conditions. This was too much even for prosecution counsel James Lewis, who stood up to say the prosecution would also want Assange to have a fair hearing, and that he could confirm that what the defence were suggesting was normal practice. Even then, Baraitser still refused to intervene with the prison.

And another addition to the ever-growing pile of evidence that Assange doesn't stand a chance:

Then, to wrap up proceedings, Baraitser dropped a massive bombshell. She stated that although Article 4.1 of the US/UK Extradition Treaty forbade political extraditions, this was only in the Treaty. That exemption does not appear in the UK Extradition Act. On the face of it therefore political extradition is not illegal in the UK, as the Treaty has no legal force on the Court.

You can't help but agree when he concludes:

There were moments today when I got drawn into the court process and achieved the suspension of disbelief you might do in theatre, and began thinking "Wow, this case is going well for Assange". Then an event such as those recounted above kicks in, a coldness grips your heart, and you recall there is no jury here to be convinced. I simply do not believe that anything said or proved in the courtroom can have an impact on the final verdict of this court.

You can read Craig's full, detailed reports on his blog:

<https://www.craigmurray.org.uk>

<https://off-guardian.org/2020/02/27/assange-extradition-proceedings-so-far/>

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Prosecution of WikiLeaks' Julian Assange violates First Amendment

Judge Andrew P. Napolitano

Fox News

27 February 2020

In the oral argument of the famous U.S. Supreme Court cases known collectively as the Pentagon Papers Case, the late Justice William O. Douglas asked a government lawyer if the Department of Justice views the "no law" language in the First Amendment to mean literally no law. The setting was an appeal of the Nixon administration's temporarily successful efforts to bar The New York Times and The Washington Post from publishing documents stolen from the Department of Defense by Daniel Ellsberg.

*"Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech."
-- First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution*

The documents were a history of the Vietnam War, which revealed that President Lyndon B. Johnson and his secretaries of defense and state and the military's top brass materially misrepresented the status of the war to the American people. Stated differently, **they regularly, consistently and systematically lied to the public and the news media.**

Though LBJ was retired, Nixon did not want this unvarnished version of the war he was still fighting to make its way into the public arena. The Nixon DOJ persuaded a federal district court judge to enjoin the publication of the documents because they contained classified materials and they had been stolen.

In a landmark decision, **the court ruled that all truthful matters material to the public interest that come into the hands of journalists — no matter how they get there — may lawfully be disseminated.** That does not absolve the thief — though the case against Ellsberg was dismissed because the FBI committed crimes against him during his prosecution — but it does insulate the publisher absolutely against civil and criminal liability.

The Pentagon Papers Case is a profound explication of one of the great values underlying the freedom of speech; namely, **the government cannot lawfully punish those who publish truths it hates and fears.**

After his administration lost the case and the Times and the Post published the documents, Nixon attempted to distinguish his presidency and administration of the war from LBJ's, but he did not challenge the truthfulness of the publications.

Regrettably, **the Trump administration is pretending the Pentagon Papers Case does not exist.** It is manifesting that pretense in its criminal pursuit of international gadfly and journalist Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks.

Sometime in 2010, Assange and his colleagues began receiving classified U.S. Department of Defense materials from an Army intelligence officer now known as Chelsea Manning.

Manning committed numerous crimes, for which she pleaded guilty, and was sentenced to 45 years in prison. Her sentence was commuted by President Barack Obama, whose Department of Justice publicly declined to prosecute Assange in deference to the once universal acceptance of the Pentagon Papers Case and the numerous court rulings that have followed it.

The Trump DOJ, however, sought and obtained two indictments of Assange, who is now charged with 17 counts of espionage and faces 175 years in prison. Assange is currently being held in a maximum-security prison outside of London. The U.S. has sought his extradition at a proceeding that began in a British courtroom this week.

When lawyers blatantly reject well-accepted law for some political gain, they violate their oaths to uphold the law. When government lawyers do this, they also violate their oaths to uphold the Constitution. For them, there is no escaping the Pentagon Papers Case. While the case turned on the concept of prior restraint of speech, it clearly reflects the views of the court that it matters not how the publisher obtained the secrets that he published.

WikiLeaks revealed — in partnership with major international publications, including the two involved in the Pentagon Papers Case— videos of American troops murdering

civilians and celebrating the murders (a war crime) as well as documentary proof of American complicity in torture (also a war crime).

Just as in the Pentagon Papers revelations, **neither the Obama nor the Trump administration has questioned the truthfulness of the WikiLeaks publication** — even though they revealed murderous wrongdoing, duplicity at the highest levels of government and the names of American intelligence sources (which some mainstream publications declined to make known).

Assange fears that he cannot get a fair trial in the United States. The government says he can and will. **When the government suddenly became interested in fair trials remains a mystery.** Yet, arguments about fairness miss the point of this lawless prosecution. A journalist is a gatherer and disseminator of facts and opinions. The government's argument that because he communicated with Manning and helped Manning get the data into WikiLeaks' hands, Assange somehow crossed the line from protected behavior to criminal activity shows a pitiful antipathy to personal freedom.

Democracy dies in darkness. The press is the eyes and ears of an informed public. And those eyes and ears need a nose, so to speak. They need breathing room. It is the height of naïveté to think that Ellsberg just dropped off the Pentagon Papers at the Times and the Post, without some coordination with those publications — **coordination that the courts assume exist and implicitly protect.**

Might all of this be part of the Trump administration's efforts to chill the free speech of its press critics — to deny them breathing room? After all, it has referred to them as “sick,” “dishonest,” “crazed,” “unpatriotic,” “unhinged” and “totally corrupt purveyors of fake news.”

Yet the whole purpose of the First Amendment is to assure open, wide, robust debate about the government, free from government interference and threats. How can that debate take place in darkness and ignorance?

If “no law” doesn't really mean no law, we are deluding ourselves, and freedom is not reality. It is merely a wished-for fantasy.

Andrew P. Napolitano, a former judge of the Superior Court of New Jersey, is the senior judicial analyst at Fox News Channel.

<https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/judge-andrew-napolitano-julian-assange-first-amendment>

Montreal: Demonstration outside US consulate demands freedom for Julian Assange

*World Socialist Web Site
27 February 2020*

Supporters of Julian Assange held a spirited demonstration Monday outside the US consulate in Montreal to demand freedom for the award-winning journalist and publisher, and the release of whistleblower Chelsea Manning. The event, which was the first of its kind anywhere in Canada, drew approximately 20 people. It was co-

organized, on short notice, by independent journalist Elizabeth Leier and the Socialist Equality Party (Canada).

Participants carried placards in both French and English with slogans including “Free Julian Assange!,” “Defend free speech,” and “No to imperialist war.”

The building housing the US consulate is located on a busy downtown street. Many passers-by took leaflets from SEP members and supporters detailing the legal and political issues in the Assange case and the mounting global movement demanding his freedom.

Opening the rally, Leier declared that she called the protest to “show solidarity with WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.” She continued, “We are gathered here in front of the United States Consulate to expose and denounce the unjust persecution he now faces.”

Leier summarized Assange’s courageous work in exposing the war crimes of US imperialism in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the torture practiced at Guantanamo Bay. WikiLeaks’ releases were of “undeniable collective importance,” she stressed.

“Julian Assange is today being blamed for having revealed the crimes of empire. He is being prosecuted for having the journalistic integrity and courage to reveal the truth of US criminality around the world,” declared Leier. “It is the war criminals, those who allowed the cold-blooded murder of two Reuters journalists as seen in the famous Collateral Murder video, in addition to thousands of civilians, they are the ones who deserve to be in prison—not the man who had the courage to expose these crimes.”

If Assange is prosecuted, commented Leier, it will have grave implications for freedom of speech and press freedom around the world.

She also criticized Assange’s vicious persecution, denouncing the “decade of arbitrary detention” he has been exposed to. During his seven years locked up in the Ecuadorian embassy, he had no access to sunlight or proper medical care, added the speaker.

In conclusion, Leier emphasized that the rally was an important first step in building support for Assange’s freedom. **“We may be a small gathering today, however we are part of a large and growing movement** which demands loud and clear that the persecution of Julian Assange cease immediately and that he be granted his rights and his freedom,” she said.

Richard Dufour, a leading member of the SEP (Canada), also addressed the protesters. He began by pointing to the fact that the picket of Washington’s Montreal consulate was part of a global movement for the freedom of Assange and Manning. Dufour denounced Assange’s show trial in London as a “legal travesty” aimed at “gutting basic democratic rights,” including freedom of speech and freedom of the press.

“Currently held in solitary confinement in a high security prison in Britain, Assange is facing extradition to the United States and a show trial on charges of espionage, with the prospect of a life sentence of 175 years,” he said. “Assange has already undergone what United Nations official Nils Melzer said was psychological torture at the hands

of the governments pursuing him. He now faces the prospect of being treated as a terrorist in the darkest reaches of a US prison for the rest of his life.”

Dufour explained that Assange is being persecuted because he helped “inform the public about the war crimes and diplomatic intrigues of their governments,” above all those committed by US imperialism in its wars of aggression.

He also denounced the “complicity” of Canada’s ruling elite in the journalist’s persecution. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and all of the parties who claim to be “progressive,” from the New Democrats to the Greens, Bloc Quebecois, and Quebec Solidaire, have “maintained a complicit silence about the prosecution and persecution of Assange.”

“The reason for this deafening silence is not hard to find,” continued Dufour. “The Canadian ruling elite, which is more reliant than ever on its military-strategic partnership with US imperialism to advance its own predatory interests on the global stage, fears the impact of WikiLeaks’ exposures.”

The SEP speaker stressed that the only social force capable of freeing Assange and Manning, defending democratic rights, and stopping the drive to authoritarianism around the world is the international working class. He summarized the growing upsurge of workers’ strikes and protests across the globe, from last fall’s national strike by US autoworkers, the first in four decades, to the Yellow Vest movement in France and last Friday’s one-day strike of 200,000 teachers in Ontario against the Ford government’s sweeping public education cuts.

“It is the urgent task of socialists to endow this movement with a revolutionary socialist perspective to transform the world on an egalitarian basis, free of war and dictatorship,” concluded Dufour. “We call on you to join the global struggle to secure the freedom of Assange and Manning, and become a regular reader of the World Socialist Web Site.”

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/02/27/mont-f27.html>

Assange's UK extradition hearing paused until May

*Joe Jackson
Digital Journal
Feb. 27, 2020*

A British judge on Thursday paused Julian Assange's extradition hearing following **four days** of intense legal wrangling over Washington's request for the WikiLeaks founder to stand trial there on espionage charges.

Judge Vanessa Baraitser, who will ultimately rule on the controversial case, ordered the legal teams for the 48-year-old Australian and the US government to reconvene for brief case management hearings in March and April.

The full extradition hearing is then set to resume for three weeks in mid-May, when witnesses will be called and cross-examined, with an eventual ruling expected by August at the latest.

The judge refused a request Thursday by Assange's lawyers to let him sit with his defence team, and not in the secure glass-walled dock area of the courtroom, when the hearing resumes.

The one-time hacker has repeatedly stood up and interrupted this week's proceedings to complain about being unable to hear the arguments or confer confidentially with his lawyers.

"I'm not able to guide them," Assange said Thursday, in his latest courtroom outburst -- which Baraitser has repeatedly advised him against making.

Arguing the current set-up could impinge on Assange's right to a fair hearing, defence lawyer Mark Summers invited the judge to "permit him confidential, discreet access to his lawyers" by letting him sit alongside them.

"Someone can be in custody in this room without being in that glass cabin," he said.

But Baraitser refused the application, arguing various "sensible, proportionate measures" -- such as Assange passing notes to his team and requesting regular breaks -- would ensure he could participate.

"It's quite apparent to me... that you've had no difficulty at all attracting the attention of your legal team," she said.

Assange faces charges under the US Espionage Act for the 2010 release of a trove of secret files detailing aspects of US military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as a single computer hacking charge.

He spent much of the past decade holed up in Ecuador's London embassy to avoid extradition to Sweden to face allegations of rape and sexual assault -- since dropped -- that he and his supporters argue were politically motivated.

His extradition hearing inside Woolwich Crown Court, next to the high-security Belmarsh prison where Assange is being held, began on Monday.

Making the US government case, lawyer James Lewis accused the WikiLeaks founder of risking the lives of intelligence sources by publishing the classified US government documents.

He also detailed the US claims that Assange helped US intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning to steal the documents before recklessly releasing them.

In response, lawyers for Assange argued the charges were "political", and that his extradition would violate international law and numerous treaties.

They also accused the United States of "boldly and blatantly" misstating facts about his conduct, calling some of their claims "lies, lies and more lies".

A ruling against Assange could see him jailed for 175 years if convicted on all 17 US Espionage Act charges and the hacking count.

Support Growing in France for Assange Asylum Bid

*Nicolas Pinault
VOA News
February 27, 2020*

A British court is still considering whether Julian Assange should be extradited to the U.S. to face espionage charges. The WikiLeaks founder could benefit from a growing wave of support across Europe among those who oppose his possible transfer to the United States to face trial. Assange's European legal team intends to seek political asylum in France for him.

The high-profile case of Julian Assange has brought a number of lawyers who claim to defend the man who considers himself a whistleblower. In France, one the members of this legal team wants President Emmanuel Macron to grant asylum to Assange, who is jailed in London and faces extradition to the United States. Eric Dupond-Moretti, a well-known French lawyer, claims the current process is unfair. Assange could spend the rest of his life in a U.S. prison, if convicted.

He explained that the United States wants to have a political process and that freedom of press is threatened with this case. He said the Constitution of the United States would prevent the prosecution of a U.S. citizen for such facts. This case is a concern for all journalists, non U.S. citizen around the world. Dupond-Moretti said the U.S. Supreme Court stated clearly in different decisions that freedom of expression cannot be prosecuted as it is case with Assange.

In London, a lawyer for the United States accused Julian Assange of risking the lives of intelligence sources by publishing classified U.S. government documents. Assange faces charges under the U.S. Espionage Act for the 2010 release via his website of a trove of files detailing the realities of U.S. military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Organizations supporting the Wikileaks founder call it a bogus argument. Rebecca Vincent is the Britain Bureau Director for Reporters without borders.

"Whether it should be a matter of criminal offense to leak information, the question of public's interest defense is very important. Of course, it is the prerogative of states and some information action must be confidential. But when the information leaked is in the public interest, when it contributes to journalism, and, in fact, political change on the basis of revelations that the public has a right to know. We consider a matter of press freedom and we will defend it. That is very much the case with Mr. Assange," she said.

In 2010, WikiLeaks also released hundreds of thousands of documents in their original form -- including the secret identities of diplomats and local sources. It was a shocking revelation that brought to light some US intelligence operations, including spying on leaders from foreign countries, such as France or Germany. For that specific reason, some French lawmakers think Julian Assange should be rewarded with asylum in France.

Jean-Christophe Lagarde, a centrist French representative, is one of them. He said that even if the United States has been an ally of France, before Donald Trump came to power, the French cannot trust them because, to defend their own interests, the [Americans] can spy on foreign leaders. Lagarde said he thinks it is a red flag between democracies. For that, he said, some countries should give Julian Assange the proper recognition for releasing American secrets.

Julian Assange's legal battle in Britain is far from over as the hearing is expected to take several weeks before the judge makes a decision on his case.

<https://www.voanews.com/europe/support-growing-france-assange-asylum-bid>

Julian Assange, Political Offences and Legal Restraints: Day Three

Binoy Kampmark
Off-Guardian
Feb. 27, 2020

Wednesday, February 26, Woolwich Crown Court. Today, the focus shifted to the protagonist himself and the nature of the US-UK Extradition Treaty of 2003, a contentious document that shines all too favourably for US citizens.

Julian Assange, whose deteriorating condition has been noted for months by psychologists, doctors and UN Special Rapporteur on torture Nils Melzer, has been making a fist of it in the dock, despite being in Kafkaesque isolation. Exhaustion, however, is manifest.

Judge Vanessa Baraitser has been keeping an eye on Assange's demeanour, prodding his lawyers at one point to inspect him. His eyes had closed, his attention seemingly wavering. A point of permanent frustration for the WikiLeaks founder has been the distance the hearings are causing and the distance, physical and symbolic, from his legal team.

"I am as much a participant in these proceedings I am at Wimbledon."

The structural impediments he has had to face have been profound, a point he was keen to make to the bench.

"I cannot meaningfully communicate with my lawyers. There are unnamed embassy officials in this court room. I cannot communicate with my lawyers to ask them for clarifications without the other side seeing."

The singular nature of Assange's case has not struck the judge as sufficient grounds to accept special measures. The defence team insists, not unreasonably, that legal advice given to him be kept privileged. This is a particularly sore point, given the surveillance efforts conducted by UC Global SC in Assange's place of abode for some seven years, London's Ecuadorian embassy.

This involved audio and film footage on lawyers visiting and discussing case matters with Assange relayed to servers accessible to the Central Intelligence Agency. **"There**

has been enough spying on my lawyers already. The other side has about 100 times more contact with their lawyers per day. What is the point of asking if I can concentrate if I cannot participate?"

To these points the judge remained dismissive, annoyed at his intervention in the absence of testifying. "I can't make an exception in your case." A brief recess did follow, permitting Assange to leave the dock for a backroom consultation with his legal team. True to form in this entire charade, security officers were in their company.

The defence team then attempted to convince the bench to adjust future seating arrangements which would permit Assange to sit with them. This led to a technical lunacy: Did the request, pondered the judge, constitute a bail application in which Assange would technically be out of the court's custody? The legal team representing the United States did not object, as security officers would be present on either side of him.

"I'm not sure it's so technical as that," came the assessment from James Lewis QC. The judge, torn by convention and legal minutiae, was tart in response. "I'm not you're right Mr Lewis." An application will be heard to that effect on Thursday, though Lewis did make it clear that any bail application would be opposed.

As for the extradition treaty itself, Article 4 stipulates that, "Extradition shall not be granted if the offense for which the extradition is requested is a political offense."

The team representing the US government suggested that the judge have recourse to substantive UK domestic law, not the Treaty itself. Whether Assange was wanted for political reasons or not was irrelevant as he was "not entitled to derive any rights from the [US-UK Extradition] Treaty".

The prosecution effectively relied on a peculiarity of the Westminster system: the Treaty, ratified in 2007, had not been incorporated into UK domestic law. That domestic law can be found in the Extradition Act 2003, which does not feature political offenses as a bar to extradition. "There's no such thing as a political offense in ordinary English law", something that only arose in the context of extradition.

Assange's team took issue with the contention: the Extradition Treaty as ratified in the US in 2007, in not removing the political offense provision, was intended to have legal effect. **"It is an essential protection," argued Edward Fitzgerald QC, "which the US puts in every single one of its extradition treaties."**

It followed that, "Both governments must therefore have regarded Article 4 as a protection for the liberty of the individual whose necessity continues (at least in relations between the USA and the UK)."

While the 2003 Extradition Act did not include a political offence bar, "authority establishes that it is the duty of the court, not the executive, to ensure the legality of extradition under the terms of the Treaty."

This placed an onus on the judge, submitted Fitzgerald, to follow **a practice set by over a century of extradition treaties which consider the political offence exemption.**

Resort should also be had to the Magna Carta and Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights (the "right to liberty and security" provision) to reach

a conclusion that extraditing an individual for a political offence would constitute an abuse of process.

The defence also turned to the issue of espionage itself, arguing that there was little doubt that it was political in nature, or, as Fitzgerald contended, “a pure political offence” within the meaning of the US-UK Extradition Treaty and relevant case law. The conspiracy to commit computer intrusion, the 18th charge being levelled at Assange, also suggested that it be treated as an espionage offence.

In fact, the entire case and effort against Assange had been political from the start, with US politicians, commentators and members of the media branding him “hostile” and “treasonous” despite not being a US citizen.

Fitzgerald also furthered the legal principle – “virtually universal”, he contended – that non-violent individuals should not be extradited for political offences.

“If it is not a terrorist case, a violence offence, you should not be extradited for a political offence.”

More in keeping with the work of non-governmental organisations, extraditing Assange would embolden other powers to consider this pathway to seek those responsible for “disclosures that are uncomfortable or threatening.” Governments of all political hues will be taking heed from this.

<http://c.newsnow.co.uk/A/1021612717?-26033:12974>

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AB: 2020-02-27

Ni lovade att stå upp för Assanges publiceringar

Johannes Wahlström rapporterar från rättegången i Englands Guantanamo

En timmas bilresa från centrala London, på den plats där staden efter en rad kolerautbrott i slutet av 1800-talet förlagt sitt avloppssystem, där idag resterna av trasproletariatet tillsammans med nyanlända flyktingar spikar igen spruckna fönsterrutor med plankor, och där dubbelbiliga motorvägar möts av en strid ström av lågt passerande flygplan, ligger Englands ökända motsvarighet till Guantanamo: fängelset Belmarsh.

I Belmarsh har Wikileaksgrundaren Julian Assange suttit det senaste året i väntan på utlämning till USA. Beslutet att utlämna honom har redan undertecknats av den brittiska regeringen, men Assange har vänt sig till brittisk domstol för att bestrida det.

— Jag kan knappt tro att det är sant att Assange hålls här i Belmarsh, i denna skithåla, bland de farligaste mördarna, galningarna och terroristerna i landet, säger en ung brittisk åklagare som fått i uppdrag att bistå de amerikanska myndigheterna med att få Julian Assange utlämnad till USA.

Åklagaren sitter i ett väntrum utanför rätten och pratar med låg stämma med en fängsväktare. **Väktaren, som har östafrikanska rötter ser sig omkring som för att försäkra sig om att ingen överordnad hör honom.**

— Min pappa var politiskt engagerad och fick ruttna i fängelse för det i sitt hemland, så tro inte att jag inte fattar. Vi fattar alla att det här är ett politiskt spektakel inte en rättegång. Det här är ju Assange, en hjälte som Snowden, inte en kallblodig mördare.

Här i Woolwich Crown Court, som egentligen är ett annex till Belmarshfängelset, avgörs nu Assanges öde, och här är fångarna skyldiga tills motsatsen är bevisad. Med stöd av anti-terrorlagstiftning sitter många fångar här på obestämd tid, utan åtal, och utan dom. De som får sin sak prövad i rätten leds in från sina celler i Belmarsh genom underjordiska tunnelsystem och hamnar i en parallell del av rätten, i en bunker omgärdad av skottsäkert glas.

Denna glasbunker kommer under veckan att vikas till en av världens mest kända journalister, min vän och kollega Julian Assange, Wikileaksgrundaren som under de senaste tio åren avslöjat fler korruptionshärvor och krigsbrott än någon publikation i världen.

När Assange leds in av vakterna placeras en lunta dokument på hans bänk, det är bland annat åtalspunkterna. Assange tar fram ett par trasiga läsglasögon och försöker med märkbar svårighet tyda vad rätten har lagt fram mot honom och som hans advokater framför glasmuren nu försöker skydda honom från. Genom gluggarna i glasets har han dessutom svårt att höra och **gestikulerar till domaren, som låtsas om att hon inte förstår.**

I den publika kammaren bakom ett annat skottsäkert glas sitter jag tillsammans med Wikileaks chefredaktör, EU-parlamentariker, en delegation från Reportrar utan gränser, PEN-klubben, Regissörer och familjemedlemmar. När Assange tittar upp mot oss knyter vi gemensamt våra nävar i solidaritet, för vi har just fått höra vad Trump-administrationens åklagare lagt fram till den brittiska rättens anti-terrordomare.

— Assange har gjort sig skyldig till att ha mottagit hemliga amerikanska uppgifter från en källa inom den amerikanska militären. Detta är olagligt handskande med hemliga uppgifter. Vidare har han olagligen tillgängliggjort dessa hemliga uppgifter till allmänheten och därmed äventyrat amerikanska intressen.

Åklagaren säger att dessa skäl räcker mer än väl för att domaren ska godkänna en utlämning till USA och tillägger att Assange dessutom hjälpt sin källa, samt att hans publiceringar utsatt amerikanska informanter för fara, även om inget konkret materialiserades av den faran.

När domaren frågar om åklagarens tolkning av lagstiftningen kan innebära att journalister som handskas med hemliga uppgifter också kan omfattas av repressalier, så svarar denne helt öppet efter en viss betänketid — Ja, det omfattar mycket riktigt alla som olovligen tagit emot eller publicerat hemliga amerikanska uppgifter.

Samtidigt som åklagaren släpper sitt bombnedslag om att alla journalister står på tur, så letar sig en välklädd amerikansk tjänsteman genom raderna i rätten och delar ut pressutskick tryckta på miljövänligt papper. Med samma bestämda vänlighet som en dammsugarförsäljare ger han en var till journalisterna i rätten. I pressutskicket står det att åtalet mot Assange på intet sätt är ett angrepp på journalistiken, Assange är ju inte ens en journalist.

Efter att på nära hand ha bevittnat den utdragna processen som malt ned Assange och efter att ha arbetat med honom och hans avslöjanden sedan tio år tillbaka så kan jag inte annat än att slås av en djupt obehaglig déjà vu-känsla. Inte bara för att åklagaren för tio år sedan i samma domstol, med samma övertygande ton bedyrade att det dåvarande åtalet inte hade något med Assanges avslöjanden att göra. Och inte heller bara för att **en stor del av presskåren okritiskt återrapporterade pressutskick istället för att bedriva journalistik**. Utan framförallt för att hela spektaklet känns så riggat.

I tio års tid har jag hört mina kollegor säga att fallet Assange inte handlat om publiceringarna. Alla som varit med och publicerat genom åren, alla journalister och redaktörer på Aftonbladet, SVT, SVD, DN, SR, alla professionella yttrandefrihetskämpar, människorättsorganisationer och fackförbund lovade och bedyrade att stå upp för Assange den dagen det handlade om publiceringarna.

Och nu hålls Assange fången i Belmarsh, snart överlämnas han till Trumps USA där han väntas dömmas till 175 års fängelse för publiceringar som tusentals av oss gjort tillsammans. **Om idag inte är den dagen då alla måste resa sig upp, då finns inte den dagen.**

<https://www.aftonbladet.se/kultur/a/XgL77E/ni-lovade-att-sta-upp-for-assanges-publiceringar>

Julian Assange's lawyers: US files were leaked for political ends

Legal team say treaty prevents extradition of WikiLeaks founder for political offences

Frances Perraudin
The Guardian
27 Feb. 2020

Julian Assange's legal team has rejected a suggestion by lawyers for US authorities that his actions were not "political offences", arguing that the WikiLeaks founder had published classified documents to highlight human rights abuses.

On the fourth day of Assange's extradition hearing in London, before proceedings were adjourned until May, his barrister, Edward Fitzgerald QC, said the motives for publishing confidential information about Guantánamo Bay and the actions of the US military in Iraq and Afghanistan were political.

Assange faces 18 charges in the US of attempted hacking and breaches of the Espionage Act over the publication of classified US cables a decade ago. His defence argues that he should be protected from extradition because the US-UK treaty rules it out for political offences.

James Lewis QC, a barrister for the US authorities, argued earlier on Thursday that Assange's actions were not inherently political as they did not have the direct purpose of overthrowing the US government or changing US government policy. "Any bare assertion that WikiLeaks was engaged in a struggle with the US government ... needs to be examined far more," he told Woolwich crown court.

Fitzgerald responded that Assange didn't only seek to change US government policy, but that he succeeded. "WikiLeaks didn't just seek to induce change, it did induce change," he said, referring to the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq.

"What other purpose can there be publishing the Apache helicopter strike [video, showing the killing of 12 people] and [US] rules of engagement than to show that the war was being waged in a way that conflicted with fundamental human rights?

"What other point can there be to releasing the Guantánamo Bay files than to induce a government change of policy? And the same for revealing civilian deaths in the Iraq war -- [it] was to induce a change in government policy."

Assange is accused of working with the former US army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning to leak hundreds of thousands of classified documents, which the US authorities say put the lives of their informants in danger.

The extradition hearing began on Monday. After an initial week of legal argument, the proceedings were adjourned and will continue with three weeks of evidence scheduled to begin on 18 May.

Assange's lawyers are expected to call a former employee of a Spanish security company to give evidence. The person claims surveillance was carried out on Assange while he was living in Ecuador's London embassy, on behalf of the US, and that conversations had turned to potentially kidnapping or poisoning him.

Assange complained on Wednesday that he was unable to communicate with his lawyers from his position in the dock. "I am as much a participant in these proceedings as I am watching Wimbledon," he said.

Mark Summers QC argued on Thursday that his client should be allowed to sit with his lawyers during May's hearings. He said that secure docks – in which defendants sit behind bulletproof glass – were a relatively recent phenomenon in English courts and had been criticised for their impact on a fair trial.

During Summers's submissions, Assange twice stood up to try to communicate with his lawyers, but wasn't immediately noticed. "That is exactly the problem. You see when I'm worried about something," he said.

The judge, Vanessa Baraitser, rejected the argument, saying Assange should tell the court if he was struggling to hear. She told Assange it had been clear over the previous few days that he had had no difficulty attracting the attention of his legal team and communicating with them via notes.

Assange has been on remand in Belmarsh prison since last September after serving a 50-week jail sentence for breaching his bail conditions by taking refuge in Ecuador's London embassy in 2012. He did so to avoid extradition to Sweden over sexual assault allegations.

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/feb/27/julian-assanges-lawyers-us-files-were-leaked-for-political-ends>

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Prosecution in Assange Extradition Hearing: US-UK Treaty Does Not Apply To Wikileaks' Publisher

As his defense team argues U.S. effort to get their hands on Assange is clearly political in nature, the defendant complains to court he is being prevented from meeting privately to consult with his lawyers.

*Kevin Gosztola
Shadowproof
February 27, 2020*

The prosecution in Julian Assange's extradition hearing in London Wednesday maintained a magistrate court has the authority to flout an international norm enshrined in treaties and approve the extradition of the WikiLeaks founder to the United States.

Arguments on the third day of the hearing focused on the issue of "political offenses" and whether an extradition treaty between the U.S. and the U.K. applies to the case. If it does, the defense believes extradition should be denied because the allegations against Assange involve the publication of state secrets and are "purely political offenses."

Assange is accused of 17 counts of violating the Espionage Act and one count of violating a computer crime law that, as alleged in the indictment, is also an espionage offense. Espionage is widely recognized as an "offense directed against the state itself."

An extradition treaty signed by both the U.S. and the U.K. in 2003 contains a section that explicitly applies to political offenses. It states, "Extradition shall not be granted if the offense for which extradition is requested is a political offense."

However, in 2003, the U.K. Parliament passed the Extradition Act and omitted a section on political offenses. The prosecution argues Parliament did not include a right related to political offenses, therefore, Assange cannot invoke the protection to prevent his extradition.

Why the political offense exception was omitted from the 2003 law is unclear. But at the time of passage, it was early in the global war on terrorism.

Christopher Joyner, a professor of international law at Georgetown University, articulated what was a prevalent concern at the time.

"Perhaps most problematic for extradition cases involving acts of terrorism is the political offense exception. Many modern extradition treaties specifically exempt political offenses from extradition, since liberal and democratic governments developed a strong antipathy toward the idea of surrendering dissidents into the hands of a despotic government."

Joyner continued, "There are, however, no recognized criteria as to what constitutes a 'political' offense, nor is there a rule of international law prohibiting the extradition of political offenders. As a result, the decision whether to extradite rests on subjective criteria, as determined by the holding government."

"Accordingly, the bilateral extradition system can provide only partial remedies for bringing international terrorists to justice. The consequence is that, while governments might agree that terrorist acts rise to being criminal offenses against the international community, strict multilateral enforcement through extradition in prosecuting such acts may still be lacking."

The U.S.-U.K. treaty dealt with this issue by specifically listing violent offenses that were to be excluded from the political offense exception.

Judge Vanessa Baraitser seemed receptive to the prosecution's argument for disregarding the treaty. Before James Lewis, the lead prosecutor, responded to the defense, Baraitser instructed the defense to stop their argument about political offenses and focus on whether the treaty is relevant to proceedings.

To this, defense attorney Edward Fitzgerald told the judge the treaty is the basis of the extradition request. "To have an extradition request, you've got to have a treaty."

The Magna Carta of 1215 banned arbitrary detention and granted defendants rights of habeas corpus. Fitzgerald emphasized that such due process protections have been enshrined for centuries, and in fact, the U.S. Constitution contains them as well. But as the "Don't Extradite Assange Campaign" observed, **the judge acted like Parliament overrode the Magna Carta**, as the defense outlined why a person should not be subject to arbitrary detention.

The defense offered several salient examples that related to the matter of political offenses.

"It is ultimately no different [than] the extradition request concerning MI5 agent David Shayler, prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act 1989 for passing top secret documents to The Mail on Sunday in 1997," the defense recalled. That included "disclosing the names of agents who had been put in fear of their lives by his actions."

The French Court of Appeals rejected extradition in 1998 because it was covered by the "political offense exception."

As the defense described, "Shayler disclosed that MI5 kept files on prominent politicians, including Labour Ministers, that the bombings of the City of London in 1993 and the Israeli embassy in 1994 could have been avoided, and that MI6 were involved in a plot to assassinate" Libyan Leader Muammar Gaddafi.

The case of Katharine Gun was mentioned, a GCHQ whistleblower who revealed a pressure campaign against UN member countries to coerce support for the invasion of Iraq.

Also, the judge heard about how prosecutors, intelligence officials, politicians, and others have attributed motivation and purpose to Assange that strongly suggests he was committed to damaging the work of U.S. security and intelligence agencies and that he wanted to damage the "capability of the armed forces of the [U.S.] to carry out their tasks" and sought to "endanger the interests" of the U.S. abroad."

U.S. government officials "freely, publicly, and regularly ascribe motives 'hostile' to the U.S. government to Assange, which the defense believes is evidence he is charged with political offenses.

Ultimately, what the defense detailed may make little difference if the judge agrees with prosecutors that the extradition treaty does not matter. What takes priority is what is in domestic law, and in domestic law, Assange deserves no protection from this specific violation of his rights.

Standing outside the Woolwich courthouse adjacent to the Belmarsh prison where Assange is detained, WikiLeaks editor-in-chief Kristinn Hrafnsson said, "This is an anti-terrorist court here beside Belmarsh, and Julian is treated as a terrorist. He is strip-searched. He is handcuffed ten or 11 times a day. His [legal] material is taken away from him. It is totally unacceptable."

Hrafnsson was speaking about the toll the proceedings and confinement are taking on Assange. In the afternoon, when the judge asked Assange if he needed a break, he stood up to address the court. He complained yet again about the lack of access to his attorneys and how there are security guards around him any time he wants to have a privileged conversation.

Assange suggested there were unnamed officials from the Ecuador embassy in the courtroom. "I cannot communicate with my lawyers or ask them for clarifications without the other side seeing. There has been enough spying on my lawyers already. The other side has about 100 times more contact with their lawyers per day."

These remarks came near the end of the day, and the defense informed the judge they would like Assange to be able to sit with them in the well instead of the glass box. She opposed the request, contending it was unreasonable to think she could approve that without a "risk assessment" from personnel involved in security.

When the defense made it clear they would make a formal request, she seemed to think they would have to ask for bail, which the prosecution would oppose. That prompted Lewis, the prosecutor, to inform the judge they took a "neutral stance." He did not think a bail application was appropriate **nor did he think it was as complicated as the judge was making it**. Assange could have a security guard stand by him while he sat with his attorneys.

Shadowproof editor Kevin Gosztola is in London for WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange's week-long extradition hearing.

<https://shadowproof.com/2020/02/26/prosecution-us-uk-treaty-does-not-apply-to-assange-extradition/>

They Came First for Assange

*Maj. Danny Sjursen, USA (ret.)
AntiWar.com
February 27, 2020*

Back in the day, not so long ago, The Donald loved him some WikiLeaks. He said so on at least five occasions out on the campaign trail -- in Pennsylvania, Florida, Ohio, and Michigan. That was when WikiLeaks, ostensibly at least, served his purposes by

releasing hacked DNC emails that were rather unflattering to his opponent, Hillary Clinton. The MAGA crew must've agreed with him regarding the Julian Assange-headed web publication at the time: Trump carried all four battleground states, which propelled him into the White House. He's had more than three years, now, to acclimate to his new digs and, somewhere along the way, pulled a 180 on Assange, whom his administration now labels "an enemy of the state who must be brought down." So it is that this week, Assange began the fight — perhaps, quite literally, for his life — in the UK against the Justice Department's stated intent to extradite and try him in the United States.

A journalist, a publisher, has been labeled by the U.S. Government as an "Enemy of America." Now that's dangerous language with scary historical precedent in America and abroad. Recall that the term has been used against "unfriendly" press elements by others: the military junta in Myanmar; Venezuela's Hugo Chavez; Russia's Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin, President Richard "The press is your enemy" Nixon; and, you know, Cambodia's Pol Pot, and Soviet Premier Josef Stalin, for starters. In our own history, press suppression, especially in times of war, is as American as apple pie. During World War I, the (still on the books) 1917 Espionage Act was used to wage all-out combat against any and all critical media sources. Sometimes persecution bordered on the Orwellian absurd. For example, in September 1918, even *The Nation* was banned from the mail for four days by the US Postal Service simply for criticizing the pro-war labor leader Samuel Gompers.

The relatively muted coverage of this press-freedom fight-of-our-times in the mainstream American media is as remarkable as it is disturbing. But it isn't surprising. Besides a few brief spikes in coverage — often focused as much on her transgender status or that blatantly accused her of treason —, the same can be said of Assange's alleged co-conspirator, former army intelligence analyst, Chelsea Manning. Consider Manning, herself a longtime — and still unfree — political prisoner, collateral damage in the ongoing Assange martyrdom saga.

For her role in passing the documents in question to WikiLeaks, the Obama Justice Department slapped her with a 35-year federal prison sentence — one of the most draconian ever handed down for a leaker. She served seven years before receiving an eleventh-hour commutation (but, notably, not a full pardon) from President Obama. Now, Chelsea, in an admirable, high-risk, display of courage, has refused to testify against Assange. That show of integrity landed her back in jail a time or two, where, notably, she remains at the time of writing.

For his "sins," Assange likely faces even harsher punishment if extradited to and — almost invariably, in this political climate — convicted in a US court. He could serve 75 years if found guilty on the 18 counts — most under the archaic Espionage Act — he's been charged with. That's a long bid. It seems the US Government has lost all sense of scale, maybe even sanity. For example, the just nine convicted perpetrators of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq — a global scandal that, empirically, created far more "terrorists, and thus contributed to more American deaths than anything Assange has been accused of — were all enlisted soldiers, none higher ranking than a staff sergeant. The top prison sentence meted out was ten years; the rest ranged from 0-3 years. Sure, a few officers received verbal or written reprimands — slap-on-the-wrist admonishments, these — and one female brigadier general was relieved and reduced one rank. As for Assange, though, 75 years is warranted? Give me a break.

Some of the more remarkable revelations, so far, from this week's hearing have involved the totally believable (given the agency's sordid history) Assange-defense-team claims of US Intelligence (read: CIA) threats and shenanigans against the defendant. These include allegations that U.S.-induced Spanish security company employees conducted surveillance on Assange whilst he was in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, and, potentially even discussed kidnapping or poisoning him. It all reads like a bad John le Carre spy novel -- which is precisely why I wouldn't rule it out.

The case against Assange, meanwhile is rather weak. It hinges on vague, furtive, and unproven allegations, according to the administration lawyers, that he "knowingly placed lives at risk," by publishing the leaked files. Specifically, James Lewis, acting for US authorities, told the court that: "The US is aware of sources, whose redacted names and other identifying information was contained in classified documents published by WikiLeaks, who subsequently disappeared." Sounds ominous, huh? Well, wait for it -- Lewis then continued with the stunning admission: "although the US can't prove at this point that their disappearance was the result of being outed by WikiLeaks."

Sounds like hearsay. Isn't that inadmissible in court? And the US government can't prove that WikiLeaks had these detrimental effects? Call me crazy, but I was under the silly impression that "proof" was the name of the game in the legal system. Bottom line, even after the egregious record of Intelligence community lies peddled during the run-up to the Iraq War and regarding the CIA torture program (for starters), the American people are expected to just blindly trust these clowns. Count me out.

Furthermore, British law states that extradition may not move forward if the requesting nation's criminal charges are "politically-motivated," which, the defense team asserts the case against Assange is. Of course, it is patently politically-motivated. However much the administration's lawyers deny it -- "the lady doth protest too much?" -- Assange's real crime, from the perspective of the government, was to embarrass them by exposing widespread US war crimes and concomitant coverups. All information, mind you, that We the People had a right to know.

What is at stake here, absent any hyperbole, is the very existence of a free press. And, in today's increasingly globalized information sphere, it matters not, really, that Julian Assange happens to be an Australian national. See, in an even aspirational free society, the benefit of the doubt in such cases ought go to the publisher, the journalist, the writer. **As Thomas Jefferson wrote the very year the current US Constitution was crafted, "Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter."** Given such "radical" -- especially for the 18th century--sentiment, can there be much doubt where our third president would (at least theoretically) fall on the Assange issue?

These complaints, mind you, aren't simply a low-hanging-fruit Trump-swipe either. Saint Obama set the precedent and foundations of press censorship that Trump is now running with. Recall that Obama went after more whistleblowers under the Espionage Act than all other previous presidents (over the course of a century) combined. Furthermore, his wanna-be, aspirational successor, Joe Biden is on the record calling Assange a "high-tech terrorist." So, if Obama can be said to have set up the pins, Trump is poised to roll a strike. The Donald has, however, taken matters a dangerous

step further that could, in the near future, pose an existential threat to the very existence of permissive publication of sensitive information.

This all sets a rather dangerous precedent. Leakers have long been prosecuted and punished by the US Government. Publishers? Not so often. That's a line few administrations will cross. Even Espionage Act-enthusiast Obama flinched, and decided not to charge Assange. Regarding the Obama Justice Department's thinking the Washington Post reported, in 2013, that:

Justice officials said they looked hard at Assange but realized that they have what they described as a "New York Times problem." If the Justice Department indicted Assange, it would also have to prosecute the New York Times and other news organizations and writers who published classified material, including The Washington Post and Britain's Guardian newspaper.

So, mainstream American publishers -- of newspapers, online sites, and even cable news producers -- really ought to brush up on their Evelyn Beatrice Hall; you know her oft-quoted, but rarely practiced profession: "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

Ultimately, it matters not whether one likes Assange, shares his worldview, or even approves of his tactics. The name of the civil libertarian game must instead be a press-sovereignty solidarity that transcends the person of Mr. Assange. Love him or hate him; like WikiLeaks or loathe it; the most powerful American press organizations must close ranks with Assange. Almost assuredly, the Washington Post, New York Times, and the rest of their establishment ilk will not. Mark my words: they will rue the day they didn't.

For when Trump -- or whatever potential monster that follows him -- pulls out the legal precedent from a past Assange conviction to prosecute, say, the New York Times, when that paper someday publishes something that embarrasses or angers the governing administration, who will be there to speak up for the nation's "newspaper of record?" Reflecting on Nazi state oppression and his conclusion that common Germans' complicity made it possible, Martin Niemoller famously wrote about how:

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out -- because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out -- because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out -- because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me- -- and there was no one left to speak for me.

As in mid-20th Century Germany, so today, in 2020 America. Only, let me propose a modified version of Niemoller's quote that's highly relevant to the mainstream press:

First they came for (that's right) Antiwar.com WikiLeaks. Then WikiLeaks. Then Max Blumenthal's The Grayzone...then, well, you know how this ends...

Danny Sjursen is a retired U.S. Army officer and contributing editor at antiwar.com. His work has appeared in the LA Times, The Nation, Huff Post, The Hill, Salon, Truthdig, Tom Dispatch, among other publications. He served combat tours with reconnaissance units in Iraq and Afghanistan and later taught history at his alma mater, West Point. He is the author of a

memoir and critical analysis of the Iraq War, Ghostriders of Baghdad: Soldiers, Civilians, and the Myth of the Surge. His forthcoming book, Patriotic Dissent: America in the Age of Endless War is now available for pre-order. Follow him on Twitter at @SkepticalVet. Check out his professional website for contact info, scheduling speeches, and/or access to the full corpus of his writing and media appearances.

https://original.antiwar.com/danny_sjursen/2020/02/26/first-they-came-for-assange/

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Australia: Workers and youth call for intensification of Assange and Manning defence campaign

*World Socialist Web Site
28 February 2020*

Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) members and supporters have been campaigning for this Saturday's Brisbane rally to demand the immediate and unconditional release of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and US whistle blower Chelsea Manning.

On Thursday, IYSSE club members at Griffith University appealed to students and staff at the Nathan campus Market Day to join the forthcoming rally.

IYSSE club president Gulshan said: "All the students and academics around the world should unite to continue the legacy of Julian Assange and free media." She said the information revealed by Chelsea Manning and WikiLeaks was vital "for human health and safety and for respect of the basic dignity of every civilian around the world."

Gulshan issued an appeal: "Unite for Assange! Unite for a safe future! Unite for prosperity of the countries around the world! The time has come and the time is NOW!"

Another IYSSE member, an international student, said: "We should defend Assange and Manning, because they are on the front line against the conspiracy of imperialism. We can see how Assange was deprived of his rights during this period of detention, and how his personal safety was deprived."

Speaking of the extradition hearing underway in London, he commented: "It shows that this is a trial full of lies and tells everyone that there is no justice in the capitalist courts. This is undoubtedly a warning to everyone: everything that Assange and Manning suffer today will be intensified and repeated on us. The experiences of Manning and Assange show how imperialist war traffickers hate free speech. The ruling class want people to lose sight of the truth and the voices of opposition."

"This is why we defend Assange and Manning. The more the imperialists want us to forget, the more we should remember; the more the imperialists want us to keep silent, the louder we should shout out. Assange and Manning have made great contributions in the struggle against imperialist war, but this has never been the cause of one person, and it should be done by all of us..."

"It is time for us to stand up: all students, youth and workers — all those who support justice, truth and peace. The future of the world is up to us."
SEP book stall in Parramatta

This weekend's forthcoming rally in Brisbane follows successful protests organised last weekend by the SEP in Melbourne and Parramatta, in western Sydney.

Workers, students and youth from across New South Wales attended the Parramatta rally. Many of those attending purchased literature, t-shirts, bumper stickers and left their contact details to participate in future campaigns.

Marilyn, a retired age-care nurse, decided to join the rally as she was walking past Parramatta Town Hall.

"I think what they are doing to Assange is horrible. The upcoming hearing is a kangaroo court. **I wasn't even fully aware of what was happening until I spoke to you guys today. People can watch the news, but they are not told the real truth,**" she said.

"Assange is being used as an example. We have a right to the information Assange revealed. There is a lot of cover-up. Look at how the ABC was raided. Once again, the raid is the same as what is happening with Julian. There was information being revealed, the government didn't want the information revealed, so they raided it.

"I've not been a pro-active political person before. I'd seen Assange on TV but it didn't really gel for me. Now I can see that this is an absolute threat for all of us."

Nate, a 16-year-old TAFE student, said: "I support Assange because he is speaking out about important issues that matter. He's a great icon for freedom of speech and this is what brought me to the rally today. Assange is being subjected to inhumane conditions. He is being locked up and tortured.

"Freedom of speech is a very important issue that we have to fight for. We can't be silent. The working class needs freedom of speech to be able to express their thoughts and concerns to the government. It is crucially important and an essential part of democracy."

Assange is being attacked, he continued, because "governments are scared of change, they're scared of revolution, and they're scared of the power getting into the hands of the people instead of the rich.

"Young people need to support Assange. This is our future that we have to fight for. So many issues tie in with Assange, climate change and the looming threat of extinction, the bushfires and the drive to war, nuclear war, that will be catastrophic for the entire earth. So much money is spent on the military. There are advertisements everywhere trying to get young people to join, telling us all of these benefits. They just want us to fight wars for the rich."

Suny, a University of New South Wales student said: "What Assange is doing is good for citizens because he's exposed the big people who did the wrong things.

"What is going on with him is totally wrong—that he is getting physically and mentally tortured by government. We need to do something to take him back. Scott

Morrison is preventing an initiative because he thinks that our relations with the US will get destroyed. So that is why we have to take action.

“We have to stand up for Assange. Otherwise, no-one else can take the initiative or steps to expose the politicians.”

Jodie said it was the second SEP rally she had attended in defence of Assange and Manning.

“It’s a fundamental democratic principle. If we can’t criticise our governments and be informed about what they are doing, then we’re not in a democracy. Particularly journalists, they have to be able to report wrongdoings of the government and criticise them without fear of being imprisoned for 175 years,” she said

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/02/28/sepi-f28.html>

Julian Assange, Political Offences and Legal Restraints

BINOY KAMPMARK
CounterPunch
FEBRUARY 28, 2020

... Thursday, February 27, Woolwich Crown Court. The first round of extradition hearings regarding Julian Assange’s case **concluded a day early, to recommence on May 18th**. It ended on an insensible note very much in keeping with the woolly-headed reasoning of Judge Vanessa Baraitser, who is of the view that a WikiLeaks publisher in a cage does not put all heaven in a rage. On Wednesday, Assange’s defence had requested whether he would be able to leave the confines of his glass cage and join his legal team. As Assange had explained in response to his nodding off during proceedings, “I cannot meaningfully communicate with my lawyers.” There was little point in “asking” if he could follow proceedings without enabling his participation.

This was not a point that fell on reasonable ears. The judge felt it came too close to a bail application, and was initially refused as posing a potential risk to the public. Gibberish was duly thrown at counsel for both sides, with “health and safety”, “risk assessment” and “up to Group 4” featuring as meaningless terms on the obvious: that Assange could pose no threat whatsoever, as he would be in the continuous company of security guards. As former UK diplomat Craig Murray observed, “She started to resemble something worse than a Dalek, a particularly stupid local government officer of a very low grade.”

According to the judge, to permit such a measure of access between Assange and his team effectively constituted a departure from court custody, a striking nonsense of Dickensian dimensions. Not even the prosecution felt it unreasonable, suggesting that one need not be so “technical” in granting such applications.

Thursday’s proceedings reaffirmed Judge Baraitser’s stubborn position. Her first gesture was to permit Assange a pair of headphones to better enable him to hear the proceedings, followed by a brief adjournment to see if his hearing had, in fact, improved. Assange was unimpressed, removing them after 30 minutes.

Her stretched reasoning found Assange sufficiently accessible to his lawyers despite his glassed surrounds; he could still communicate with them via notes passed through the barrier. "It is quite apparent over the past four days that you have had no difficulty communicating with your legal team." The judge was willing to permit Assange a later start in proceedings to enable a meeting with the legal team and adjourn should the defence wish to meet their client in a holding cell.

That so complex a case as extradition can be reduced to sporadic notes passed to legal counsel and staggered adjournments suggests the continued hobbling of the defence by the authorities. Its invidiousness lies in how seemingly oblivious the judicial mind is to the scope of the case, complexity reduced to a matter of meetings, small points of procedure and law.

The defence team submitted that the process of consultation suggested by the judge unduly prolonged proceedings, rendering them cumbersome and insensible. The court might have to adjourn ever three minutes for a 20-minute break. **To constantly take Assange to and from his holding cell would unnecessarily lengthen proceedings and complicate matters. Judge Baraitser was dismissive of such argument, claiming that the defence was merely exaggerating.**

The legal issues discussed on the fourth day centred on quibbling over the issue of espionage and its nexus with political activity. Espionage, suggested James Lewis QC for the US-driven prosecution, need not be political. Nor did it seem that Assange was intent on bringing down the US government. "It can't possibly be said that there is a political struggle in existence between the American government and opposing factions."

Lewis, as has been his approach from the start, preferred a more restrictive interpretation about what a "political" offence might be, notably in connection with extradition. "Extradition is based on conduct, it is not anymore based on the names of offences." In a rather crude, end-of-history line of thought, Lewis argued that political offences were "dated" matters, hardly applicable to modern societies which no longer see dissidents upholding the values of liberal democracy. (It seems that the tree of liberty, according to the US prosecution, no longer needs urgent refreshment.)

Besides, argued Lewis, the court did "not need to resolve these issues, but they demonstrate that any bare assertion that Wikileaks was engaged in a struggle with the US government was in opposition to it or was seeking to bring about a policy change would need to be examined far more closely."

That is exactly what the defence contended. Assange's core activities in publishing had been based on altering US policy, with Iraq and Afghanistan being key theatres. "Why was he seeking to publish the rules of engagement?", posed the defence. "They were published to show that war crimes were being committed, to show they breached their own rules of engagement." Ditto the publication of the Guantanamo files, an act done to reveal the extent of torture being undertaken during the course of the "war on terror". All these, contended Edward Fitzgerald QC for the defence, did change government policy. "WikiLeaks didn't just seek to induce change, it did induce change."

The documentary record on Assange's political activity in this regard is thick, much of it from the contentions of US officials themselves. **The US State Department preferred to see him, as former spokesman PJ Crowley did in 2010, a "political actor" with "a political agenda", rather than being a journalist.**

Incidentally, Crowley's link with WikiLeaks has a curious end, with his resignation in 2011 following comments made about the treatment of Chelsea (then Bradley) Manning at the Quantico marine base in Virginia. "What is being done to Bradley Manning," he claimed at an MIT seminar that March, "is ridiculous and counterproductive and stupid on the part of the department of defence." Not an entirely bad egg, then.

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2020/02/28/julian-assange-political-offences-and-legal-restraints/>

Assange Hearing Day Four

Craig Murray
28 Feb. 2020

Please try this experiment for me. Try asking this question out loud, in a tone of intellectual interest and engagement: "Are you suggesting that the two have the same effect?"

Now try asking this question out loud, in a tone of hostility and incredulity bordering on sarcasm: "Are you suggesting that the two have the same effect?"

Firstly, congratulations on your acting skills; you take direction very well. Secondly, is it not fascinating how precisely the same words can convey the opposite meaning dependent on modulation of stress, pitch, and volume?

Yesterday the prosecution continued its argument that the provision in the 2007 UK/US Extradition Treaty that bars extradition for political offences is a dead letter, and that Julian Assange's objectives are not political in any event. James Lewis QC for the prosecution spoke for about an hour, and Edward Fitzgerald QC replied for the defence for about the same time. **During Lewis's presentation, he was interrupted by Judge Baraitser precisely once. During Fitzgerald's reply, Baraitser interjected seventeen times.**

In the transcript, those interruptions will not look unreasonable:

"Could you clarify that for me Mr Fitzgerald..."

"So how do you cope with Mr Lewis's point that..."

"But surely that's a circular argument..."

"But it's not incorporated, is it?..."

All these and the other dozen interruptions were designed to appear to show the judge attempting to clarify the defence's argument in a spirit of intellectual testing. But if you heard the tone of Baraitser's voice, saw her body language and facial expressions, it was anything but.

The false picture a transcript might give is exacerbated by the courtly Fitzgerald's continually replying to each obvious harassment with **"Thank you Madam, that is very helpful"**, which again if you were there, plainly meant the opposite. But what a transcript will helpfully nevertheless show was the bully pulpit of Baraitser's tactic in interrupting Fitzgerald again and again and again, belittling his points and very

deliberately indeed preventing him from getting into the flow of his argument. The contrast in every way with her treatment of Lewis could not be more pronounced.

So now to report the legal arguments themselves.

James Lewis for the prosecution, continuing his arguments from the day before, said that Parliament had not included a bar on extradition for political offences in the 2003 Act. It could therefore not be reintroduced into law by a treaty. "To introduce a Political Offences bar by the back door would be to subvert the intention of Parliament."

Lewis also argued that these were not political offences. The definition of a political offence was in the UK limited to behaviour intended "to overturn or change a government or induce it to change its policy." Furthermore the aim must be to change government or policy in the short term, not the indeterminate future.

Lewis stated that further the term "political offence" could only be applied to offences committed within the territory where it was attempted to make the change. So to be classified as political offences, Assange would have had to commit them within the territory of the USA, but he did not.

If Baraitser did decide the bar on political offences applied, the court would have to determine the meaning of "political offence" in the UK/US Extradition Treaty and construe the meaning of paragraphs 4.1 and 4.2 of the Treaty. To construe the terms of an international treaty was beyond the powers of the court.

Lewis perorated that the conduct of Julian Assange cannot possibly be classified as a political offence. "It is impossible to place Julian Assange in the position of a political refugee". The activity in which Wikileaks was engaged was not in its proper meaning political opposition to the US Administration or an attempt to overthrow that administration. Therefore the offence was not political.

For the defence Edward Fitzgerald replied that the 2003 Extradition Act was an enabling act under which treaties could operate. **Parliament had been concerned to remove any threat of abuse of the political offence bar to cover terrorist acts of violence against innocent civilians. But there remained a clear protection, accepted worldwide, for peaceful political dissent.** This was reflected in the Extradition Treaty on the basis of which the court was acting.

Baraitser interrupted that the UK/US Extradition Treaty was not incorporated into English Law.

Fitzgerald replied that the entire extradition request is on the basis of the treaty. It is an abuse of process for the authorities to rely on the treaty for the application but then to claim that its provisions do not apply.

"On the face of it, it is a very bizarre argument that a treaty which gives rise to the extradition, on which the extradition is founded, can be disregarded in its provisions. It is on the face of it absurd."

Fitzgerald added that English Courts construe treaties all the time. He gave examples.

Fitzgerald went on that the defence did not accept that treason, espionage and sedition were not regarded as political offences in England. **But even if one did accept Lewis's too narrow definition of political offence, Assange's behaviour still met the test.** What on earth could be the motive of publishing evidence of government war crimes and corruption, other than to change the policy of the government? Indeed, the evidence would prove that Wikileaks had effectively changed the policy of the US government, particularly on Iraq.

Baraitser interjected that to expose government wrongdoing was not the same thing as to try to change government policy. Fitzgerald asked her, finally in some exasperation after umpteenth interruptions, what other point could there be in exposing government wrongdoing other than to induce a change in government policy?

That concluded opening arguments for the prosecution and defence.

MY PERSONAL COMMENTARY

Let me put this as neutrally as possible. If you could fairly state that Lewis's argument was much more logical, rational and intuitive than Fitzgerald's, you could understand why Lewis did not need an interruption while Fitzgerald had to be continually interrupted for "clarification". **But in fact it was Lewis who was making out the case that the provisions of the very treaty under which the extradition is being made, do not in fact apply,** a logical step which I suggest the man on the Clapham omnibus might reason to need rather more testing than Fitzgerald's assertion to the contrary. Baraitser's comparative harassment of Fitzgerald when he had the prosecution on the ropes was straight out of the Stalin show trial playbook.

The defence did not mention it, and I do not know if it features in their written arguments, but I thought Lewis's point that these could not be political offences, because Julian Assange was not in the USA when he committed them, was breathtakingly dishonest. **The USA claims universal jurisdiction. Assange is being charged with crimes of publishing committed while he was outside the USA.** The USA claims the right to charge anyone of any nationality, anywhere in the world, who harms US interests. They also in addition here claim that as the materials could be seen on the internet in the USA, there was an offence in the USA. At the same time to claim this could not be a political offence as the crime was committed outside the USA is, as Edward Fitzgerald might say, on the face of it absurd. Which curiously Baraitser did not pick up on.

Lewis's argument that the Treaty does not have any standing in English law is not something he just made up. Nigel Farage did not materialise from nowhere. There is in truth a long tradition in English law that even a treaty signed and ratified with some bloody Johnny Foreigner country, can in no way bind an English court. Lewis could and did spout reams and reams of judgements from old beetroot faced judges holding forth to say exactly that in the House of Lords, before going off to shoot grouse and spank the footman's son. Lewis was especially fond of the Tin Council case.

There is of course a contrary and more enlightened tradition, and a number of judgements that say the exact opposite, mostly more recent. This is why there was so much repetitive argument as each side piled up more and more volumes of "authorities" on their side of the case.

The difficulty for Lewis — and for Baraitser — is that this case is not analogous to me buying a Mars bar and then going to court because an International Treaty on Mars Bars says mine is too small.

Rather the 2003 Extradition Act is an Enabling Act on which extradition treaties then depend. You can't thus extradite under the 2003 Act without the Treaty. So the Extradition Treaty of 2007 in a very real sense becomes an executive instrument legally required to authorise the extradition. For the executing authorities to breach the terms of the necessary executive instrument under which they are acting, simply has to be an abuse of process. So the Extradition Treaty owing to its type and its necessity for legal action, is in fact incorporated in English Law by the Extradition Act of 2003 on which it depends.

The Extradition Treaty is a necessary precondition of the extradition, whereas a Mars Bar Treaty is not a necessary precondition to buying the Mars Bar.

That is as plain as I can put it. I do hope that is comprehensible.

It is of course difficult for Lewis that on the same day the Court of Appeal was ruling against the construction of the Heathrow Third Runway, partly because of its incompatibility with the Paris Agreement of 2016, despite the latter not being fully incorporated into English law by the Climate Change Act of 2008.

VITAL PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

It is intensely embarrassing for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) when an English court repudiates the application of a treaty the UK has ratified with one or more foreign states. For that reason, in the modern world, very serious procedures and precautions have been put into place to make certain that this cannot happen. Therefore the prosecution's argument that all the provisions of the UK/US Extradition Treaty of 2007 are not able to be implemented under the Extradition Act of 2003, ought to be impossible.

I need to explain I have myself negotiated and overseen the entry into force of treaties within the FCO. The last one in which I personally tied the ribbon and applied the sealing wax (literally) was the Anglo-Belgian Continental Shelf Treaty of 1991, but I was involved in negotiating others and the system I am going to describe was still in place when I left the FCO as an Ambassador in 2005, and I believe is unchanged today (and remember the Extradition Act was 2003 and the US/UK Extradition Treaty ratified 2007, so my knowledge is not outdated). Departmental nomenclatures change from time to time and so does structural organisation. But the offices and functions I will describe remain, even if names may be different.

All international treaties have a two stage process. First they are signed to show the government agrees to the treaty. Then, after a delay, they are ratified. This second stage takes place when the government has enabled the legislation and other required agency to implement the treaty. This is the answer to Lewis's observation about the roles of the executive and legislature. **The ratification stage only takes place after any required legislative action.** That is the whole point.

This is how it happens in the FCO. Officials negotiate the extradition treaty. It is signed for the UK. The signed treaty then gets returned to FCO Legal Advisers, Nationality and Treaty Department, Consular Department, North American

Department and others and is sent on to Treasury / Cabinet Office Solicitors and to Home Office, Parliament and to any other Government Department whose area is impacted by the individual treaty.

The Treaty is extensively vetted to check that it can be fully implemented in all the jurisdictions of the UK. If it cannot, then amendments to the law have to be made so that it can. These amendments can be made by Act of Parliament or more generally by secondary legislation using powers conferred on the Secretary of State by an act. If there is already an Act of Parliament under which the Treaty can be implemented, then no enabling legislation needs to be passed. International Agreements are not all individually incorporated into English or Scottish laws by specific new legislation.

This is a very careful step by step process, carried out by lawyers and officials in the FCO, Treasury, Cabinet Office, Home Office, Parliament and elsewhere. Each will in parallel look at every clause of the Treaty and check that it can be applied. All changes needed to give effect to the treaty then have to be made – amending legislation, and necessary administrative steps. Only when all hurdles have been cleared, including legislation, and Parliamentary officials, Treasury, Cabinet Office, Home Office and FCO all certify that the Treaty is capable of having effect in the UK, will the FCO Legal Advisers give the go ahead for the Treaty to be ratified. You absolutely cannot ratify the treaty before FCO Legal Advisers have given this clearance.

This is a serious process. That is why the US/UK Extradition Treaty was signed in 2003 and ratified in 2007. That is not an abnormal delay.

So I know for certain that ALL the relevant British Government legal departments MUST have agreed that Article 4.1 of the UK/US Extradition Treaty was capable of being given effect under the 2003 Extradition Act. That certification has to have happened or the Treaty could never have been ratified.

It follows of necessity that the UK Government, in seeking to argue now that Article 4.1 is incompatible with the 2003 Act, is knowingly lying. There could not be a more gross abuse of process.

I have been keen for the hearing on this particular point to conclude so that I could give you the benefit of my experience. I shall rest there for now, but later today hope to post further on yesterday's row in court over releasing Julian from the anti-terrorist armoured dock.

<https://www.craigmurray.org.uk/archives/2020/02/your-man-in-the-public-gallery-assange-hearing-day-four/>

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Attending the Assange trial -- day four

*Tim Dawson
National Union of Journalists
28 February 2020*

"We are in an Alice In Wonderland world where the UK has entered into a treaty, that gives rise to this (extradition) request, and yet we are told that the terms of the treaty itself have nothing to do with the legality of its implementation" said Edward

Fitzgerald QC, exasperation clear in his voice. Appearing for Julian Assange at his extradition hearing at Woolwich crown court, Fitzgerald was responding to a sustained argument that the terms of the treaty were irrelevant to this case.

His ire is easily understood. The US/UK extradition treaty of 2003 is a short and apparently straightforward document, article 4.1 says: "Extradition shall not be granted if the offense for which extradition is requested is a political offense."

Fitzgerald had made a vigorous case that it was impossible to interpret the Wikileaks' publications on which this case turns -- the Afghan and Iraqi war logs, the diplomatic cables and the rules of engagement -- as anything other than deeply political acts.

"Exposing government wrongdoing and seeking to change policy are intimately entwined; these revelations not only sought to change US policy, they succeeded", Fitzgerald told the hearing.

James Lewis QC for the US government argued that the protection from extradition for those who commit 'political offences' dates from a time when struggles to overthrow governments could be painted in 'clear, vivid colours'. Today such protection has been systematically removed from both domestic laws and treaties. It was necessary for a court to enforce applications made under the treaty, but a court could not 'derive rights' from such treaty if they exceed rights defined in domestic law, he said.

Lewis further argued that even if this were not the case, Assange's alleged offences did not meet any reasonable definition of 'political acts'. "One cannot say that there is a struggle in the United States between the government and other factions, so one cannot say that a political offence has been committed", he told the hearing.

It was a day when the creaking technology of Britain's courts generated as much attention as disputed precedent. Proceedings opened with the Assange being issued with headphones to amplify proceedings behind the bullet-proof glass screen where he sits.

For this to be useful, however, the judge and opposing counsels had to improve their microphone techniques. Boxes of papers that were earlier wheeled into court on sack barrows were stacked up as make-shift microphone stands.

Court staff gamely tried to make the technology work and promised that more effective microphones had been ordered and should be installed when the hearing recommences in May. Improvement was only partial, however. Assange abandoned the headphones within a few minutes.

His legal team made a formal application for their client to sit among his lawyers – a solution they described as 'normal practice for vulnerable defendants'. Judge Vanessa Baraitser turned down the application on the grounds that the solution was unnecessary.

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/news/attending-the-assange-trial-day-four/>

Legal arguments during the first week of Julian Assange's extradition hearing highlight lack of US evidence

Reporters without Borders
February 28, 2020

During the first week of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange's US extradition hearing in London, Reporters Without Borders (RSF — Reporters sans frontières) was concerned by the clear lack of evidence from the US for its charges against Assange. RSF also remains concerned about Assange's wellbeing and inability to participate properly in his hearing, following reports of mistreatment at Belmarsh prison and the judge's rejection of his application to sit with his lawyers in the courtroom. **The hearing will resume from 18 May, when three weeks of evidence will be heard.**

RSF conducted an unprecedented international trial-monitoring mission to the UK for Julian Assange's US extradition hearing from 24-27 February, as the prosecution and defence presented their legal arguments at Woolwich Crown Court in London. RSF Secretary-General Christophe Deloire and RSF Germany Director Christian Mihr joined RSF UK Bureau Director Rebecca Vincent for the hearing, and Vincent was able to systematically monitor each sitting over the four days. RSF staff from London, Paris, and Berlin also staged an action outside the adjacent Belmarsh Prison -- where Assange is being held -- on 23 February, and joined protests outside the court on 24 February.

District judge Vanessa Baraitser presided over the hearing. James Lewis QC acted for the US government, and barristers Edward Fitzgerald QC and Mark Summers QC argued in Assange's defence. US government representatives were present, but did not speak during the hearing. Assange did not take the stand, and his several attempts to speak from the secure dock he was held in at the back of the courtroom were interrupted by the judge, who stated that as he was "well represented," he must speak through his lawyers.

Assange is being pursued under a US indictment on the basis of 17 charges under the Espionage Act and one charge under the Computers Fraud and Abuse Act, related to Wikileaks' publication in 2010 and 2011 of several hundred thousand military documents and diplomatic cables leaked by Chelsea Manning. These charges carry a combined possible sentence of up to 175 years in prison. The publication of the leaked documents resulted in extensive media reporting on matters of serious public interest including actions of the US in Guantánamo Bay, Iraq and Afghanistan.

In the course of the prosecution's argument, it became **clear that the US still has no evidence for its claim that Assange had put sources at "serious and imminent risk,"** but are pursuing the charges based on the risks that he is accused of knowingly causing. At one point the prosecution said the publication of the leaked documents had led to the disappearance of some sources -- but with no apparent evidence in support of this claim. The prosecution argued that Assange had damaged the US' defence and intelligence capabilities and hurt US interests abroad.

However, the defence argued that these proceedings constitute an abuse of process as the case is being pursued for ulterior political motives and fundamentally misrepresents the facts. They outlined that Wikileaks had worked for months with a partnership of professional media organisations to redact the leaked documents. The defence explained that as redaction was in progress, one of the media partners had

published a book containing the password to the unredacted dataset, which led to its access and publication by other parties. The defence outlined how Assange had attempted to mitigate any risk to sensitive sources by notifying the White House and State Department that publication outside of Wikileaks' control was potentially forthcoming, imploring them to take action to protect the named individuals.

"We were not surprised by the prosecution's argument, which again confirmed the lack of evidence for the charges against Mr Assange. **This week's hearing confirmed our belief that he has been targeted for his contributions to public interest reporting.** We call again for the UK not to extradite Mr Assange to the US, for the charges against him to be dropped, and for him to be released as a matter of urgent priority," said RSF Secretary-General Christophe Deloire.

In arguments around extradition, the defence argued that the Anglo-US Extradition Treaty expressly prevents extradition on the basis of political offences, presenting a bar to Assange's extradition. They presented that these rights were protected by domestic law as they constituted a cornerstone of the constitution and were enshrined in the Magna Carta, and **were further protected by international law, including the European Convention on Extradition, the Model United Nations Extradition Treaty and the Interpol Convention on Extradition.**

The prosecution countered that the Extradition Act 2003 contains no provision for extradition to be barred on the basis of political offences -- and that Assange's actions could not be interpreted as political under English law. They argued that as the Extradition Treaty had not been incorporated by parliament, rights could not be derived from it, with James Lewis QC stating at one point that it might surprise other states to know that treaties meant very little when signed by the British government; parliamentary sovereignty meant the rights were only enforceable in a domestic context if ratified by parliament.

RSF observers remain concerned for Assange's wellbeing, as **he appeared very pale and tired throughout the hearing**, and complained several times that he could not follow proceedings properly or communicate easily with his legal team from the glass-partitioned dock. On day two, Assange's lawyer reported that he had been mistreated at Belmarsh prison; after the first day of the hearing, he was strip-searched twice, handcuffed 11 times, moved holding cells five times, and had his legally privileged documents confiscated on entering and exiting the prison. The judge stated it was not a matter within her jurisdiction. On day four, she rejected his application to be allowed to sit with his lawyers in the courtroom when evidence is given in May, despite the fact that the prosecution did not object to the request.

"We remain extremely concerned for Mr Assange's treatment and wellbeing, as he was clearly not well this week and struggled to participate properly in his own hearing. The reports of mistreatment at Belmarsh prison are alarming, and we expect that to be addressed as a matter of urgent priority. We also call for Mr Assange to be allowed to sit next to his legal team in the courtroom in accordance with international standards, and not held in a glass cage like a violent criminal. He is in a vulnerable position and presents no physical threat to anyone, and his rights under the European Convention must be respected," said RSF UK Bureau Director Rebecca Vincent.

Two short procedural hearings are scheduled in the coming weeks: a mandatory call-in on 25 March to be heard at Westminster Magistrates' Court with Assange joining via video link; and a hearing at Woolwich Crown Court on 7 April where case management and the issue of anonymity of two witnesses will be discussed. Assange

will be required to attend the latter in person. Evidence is then expected to be heard over three weeks from 18 May at Woolwich Crown Court.

The UK and US are respectively ranked 33rd and 48th out of 180 countries on RSF's 2019 World Press Freedom Index.

Press contact: Rebecca Vincent on rvincent@rsf.org or +44 (0)207 324 8903.

<https://rsf.org/en/news/uk-legal-arguments-during-first-week-julian-assanges-extradition-hearing-highlight-lack-us-evidence>

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Assange's UK extradition hearing paused until May, judge decides

The full extradition hearing is set to resume for three weeks in mid-May.

*TheJournal.ie
Feb. 28, 2020*

A BRITISH JUDGE has paused Julian Assange's extradition hearing following four days of intense legal wrangling over Washington's request for the WikiLeaks founder to stand trial there on espionage charges.

Judge Vanessa Baraitser, who will ultimately rule on the controversial case, ordered the legal teams for the 48-year-old Australian and the US government to reconvene for brief case management hearings in March and April.

The full extradition hearing is then set to resume for three weeks in mid-May, when witnesses will be called and cross-examined, with an eventual ruling expected by August at the latest.

The judge refused a request yesterday by Assange's lawyers to let him sit with his defence team, and not in the secure glass-walled dock area of the courtroom, when the hearing resumes.

The one-time hacker [??] has repeatedly stood up and interrupted this week's proceedings to complain about being unable to hear the arguments or confer confidentially with his lawyers.

"I'm not able to guide them," Assange said yesterday, in his latest courtroom outburst – which Baraitser has repeatedly advised him against making.

Arguing the current set-up could impinge on Assange's right to a fair hearing, defence lawyer Mark Summers invited the judge to "permit him confidential, discreet access to his lawyers" by letting him sit alongside them.

"Someone can be in custody in this room without being in that glass cabin," he said.

But Baraitser refused the application, arguing various "sensible, proportionate measures" — such as Assange passing notes to his team and requesting regular breaks — would ensure he could participate.

"It's quite apparent to me ... that you've had no difficulty at all attracting the attention of your legal team," she said.

Assange faces charges under the US Espionage Act for the 2010 release of a trove of secret files detailing aspects of US military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as a single computer hacking charge.

He spent much of the past decade holed up in Ecuador's London embassy to avoid extradition to Sweden to face allegations of rape and sexual assault — since dropped—that he and his supporters argue were politically motivated.

His extradition hearing inside Woolwich Crown Court, next to the high-security Belmarsh prison where Assange is being held, began on Monday.

Making the US government case, lawyer James Lewis accused the WikiLeaks founder of risking the lives of intelligence sources by publishing the classified US government documents.

He also detailed the US claims that Assange helped US intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning to steal the documents before recklessly releasing them.

In response, lawyers for Assange argued the charges were "political", and that his extradition would violate international law and numerous treaties.

They also accused the United States of "boldly and blatantly" misstating facts about his conduct, calling some of their claims "lies, lies and more lies".

A ruling against Assange could see him jailed for 175 years if convicted on all 17 US Espionage Act charges and the hacking count.

<https://www.thejournal.ie/julian-assange-extradition-pushed-back-5026883-Feb2020/>

ASSANGE EXTRADITION HEARING ADJOURNED UNTIL MAY 18

Consortium News
February 29, 2020

Consortium News is in London to cover the formal extradition process of WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange and has provided updates throughout the week.

MONDAY (February 24)

[Time in reverse order]

6:45 pm London time: WikiLeaks tweets that the defense will present its case "in earnest" on Tuesday at Woolwich Crown Court. Consortium News will continue its Live Updates Tuesday unless it gets a place inside the courtroom, in which case we will present a report at the end of the day.

Assange's lawyer tells court prosecution cares little for justice and is politically motivated. Says extradition should be barred because of prosecutions' "political

motives.” Judge is told that Assange will not likely give testimony during this opening week of the hearing.

3:10 pm London time: U.S. lawyer in court is trying to turn normal journalistic practice into a crime by confusing Assange’s attempts to help Chelsea Manning (who had top secret clearance and legal access to the documents she leaked) hide her identity by logging in as an administrator, not to help her hack the material, which she didn’t need to do. The two indictments against Assange make it perfectly clear that that is what happened and that Assange was not engaged in hacking.

2:55 pm London time: The hundreds of people demonstrating outside Woolwich Crown Court are making so much noise that it is making it difficult to hear inside the courtroom. Even Assange said so.

2:50 pm London time: WikiLeaks Editor-in-Chief Kristinn Hrafnsson has left the courthouse and addressed the media. **He asked why the court was discussing the alleged harm done by the releases on Afghanistan and Iraq in 2010 and not the war crimes that those documents revealed.** “That is what we should be talking about in a courtroom in this country.

12:08 pm London time: Julian Assange’s father, John Shipton, spoke with the press outside the courthouse during a break and denounced the prosecutors’ allegation that Assange had endangered the lives of U.S. informants:

“The essential part of the argument of the prosecutors’ case is that WikiLeaks publications endangered sources. This is simply not true. The Pentagon admitted, under oath, in Chelsea Manning’s trial that nobody had been hurt by the releases.

“Robert Gates, ex-secretary of defense, in testimony before Congress said it’s awkward, it’s embarrassing, but no damage was done. I’ll note that **the prosecutor didn’t give one example of a broken fingernail.** He just said sources were endangered. Well it’s simply not true.”

11:45 am London time: The formal hearing to determine whether Julian Assange will be extradited to the United States to stand trial on 17 counts of the Espionage Act has begun in London on Monday morning. Assange’s lawyers arrived at Woolwich Crown Court with stacks of evidence that will be presented during the first week of the hearing, which will resume in May.

Yellow Vests, who’ve traveled to London from Paris to protest outside the courthouse, present a vest to John Shipton to give to his son Julian Assange.

U.S. prosecutors began by arguing that Assange is not a journalist and that he risked the lives of U.S. informants.

Revealing the names of U.S. informants is not a crime and is not listed on Assange’s indictment as a statute U.S. prosecutors are alleging Assange has violated. After more than ten years, there is absolutely no evidence that any informant’s life was harmed by WikiLeaks revelations, [said WikiLeaks Editor-in-Chief Kristinn Hrafnsson](#) at a press conference on Wednesday.

TUESDAY

11:45 pm London time: Consortium News was in the courtroom for the full hearing on Tuesday. Editor-in-Chief Joe Lauria filed this report:

With the sound of protestors permeating the walls of Woolwich Crown Court, Assange's defense presented the first part of its case, demolishing the U.S. government's extradition submission:

- regarding Assange helping Chelsea Manning crack a password; i.e. allegedly participating in the theft of government documents;
- the use of WikiLeaks Most Wanted List of stories as a way to supposedly "solicit" stories from Manning,
- that Assange recklessly endangered the lives of U.S. informants.

Assange attorney Mark Summers revealed that Assange's supposed attempt to help Manning "hack" a government computer for secret documents was actually an attempt to help her crack a password to download video games, movies and music videos, forbidden on military computers.

Summers says Manning had legal access to classified material and did not need a user name or a password to get into the database. The Espionage Act indictment says Assange helped Manning sign in under an administrator's password in order to help get secrets, not the latest video game.

The U.S. government's case is based on "lies, lies and more lies," Summers told the court. Summers said that there's no evidence Manning ever saw WikiLeaks' wish list, and she provided material that wasn't asked for. Manning gave WikiLeaks the U.S. Rules of Engagement in Iraq to show that the Collateral Murder video had violated those rules, not because Assange had asked for it, Summers said.

It is difficult to understand how a journalist asking sources to provide the information, even classified information, can be construed as a crime.

Summers also gave a detailed explanation about why the government's assertion that Assange had endangered the lives of U.S. informants was false. He explained that **Assange had instituted a Harm Mitigation Program to redact the names of informants and other people that might be at risk, a program so stringent that David Leigh of The Guardian complained to Der Spiegel, two publications partnering with WikiLeaks, that too much time was being wasted.**

A Spiegel journalist said it was the extreme measures he had ever experienced. Summers also told the court that The Guardian was responsible for publishing the password for the encrypted, un-redacted State Department cables that WikiLeaks and its media partners were slowly and carefully running out. When The Guardian made the entire archive available, Assange called the State Department to warn them.

"You might think that would be something you would have known when the government submitted the extradition request," Summers told Baraister.



In the extradition hearing, America's QC claimed Julian #Assange failed to redact names and risked lives. In fact, the Guardian reporters, Leigh and Harding, revealed the secret password in their book: a truth the Guardian now distorts. Read this [...twitter.com/khrafnsnson/sta...](https://twitter.com/khrafnsnson/sta...)

Kristinn Hrafnsson @khrafnsnson

David Leigh again dismisses his responsibility for the release of the unredacted cables. He posted a password for its encrypted file - in his book. Now claims Assange told him the password was temporary. Leigh himself writes in his book about a temporary WEBSITE. Not the same.

Before the hearing began Tuesday a court officer instructed Kristinn Hrafnsson, WikiLeaks editor-in-chief, that he had been instructed to bar the “head of WikiLeaks” from entering the public gallery, a glassed-in room with two rows of seats high above the small courtroom.

John Shipton, Assange’s father, and Assange’s brother Gabriel and Hrafnsson protested and left the cramped area where 18 people lined up to get into the gallery. A few minutes later they returned. Hrafnsson said sending out a few tweets got the court authorities to change their mind. He said **no explanation for why the court wanted him barred was given.**

The family sat down to hear Assange’s lawyers complaining that on Monday Assange had been intimidated by prison authorities, being strip searched, handcuffed 11 times, made to stay in five different cells and had legal documents he was studying taken away from him. Judge Vanessa Baraister told the court she had no jurisdiction over how Assange is being mistreated.

During the hearing Assange is separated from his lawyers in room at the back of the court behind bullet-proof glass. He wore a gray jumper and blazer and looked to have aged well beyond his 48 years. He appeared mostly able to focus on the proceedings, at times intensely. He sent word to the judge through one of his lawyers that he wished to sit among his attorneys in the courtroom.

WEDNESDAY

4:45 pm London time: Julian Assange’s attorney Edward Fitzgerald QC is arguing in Woolwich Crown Court that the U.S. charges against Assange are political, as espionage is a political crime, and thus in violation of Article 4.1 of the U.S.-British extradition treaty. However the prosecution is putting forth the argument that the UK Extradition Act, the implementing domestic legislation for the treaty, does not preclude political offenses. Further, the U.S. is arguing in court that the charges are not political in nature.

For the first time, Assange spoke directly to the court, saying he wanted to leave the bullet-proof glass cage and sit with his lawyers. “I am as much a participant in these proceedings as a spectator at Wimbledon,” Assange told the judge, who replied that

his attorneys could apply for bail so that he may leave the cage. Fitzgerald told the court: "This is a gentle man of intellectual nature, there is no reason why he should not sit with us."

 **M. A. E.**
@MEImaazi

... its in EU convention on extradition, its on the Interpol convention. The US of course writes it in to every treaty, but then when someone invokes this the other way they say [sorry] well that we say is inconsistent..." - Edward Fitzgerald QC submitting for the defence

♡ 29 12:20 PM - Feb 26, 2020



 **Kevin Gosztola** ✓
@kgosztola

Under the umbrella of "abuse of process," defense is putting a lot in the record that would be useful at High Court, Appeal Court, Supreme Court, or European Court of Human Rights. Because the judge may not be receptive to much of their defense case.
[#Assange](#)

♡ 93 12:49 PM - Feb 26, 2020



THURSDAY

11:30 pm London time: The judge has adjourned the hearings a day earlier than planned. It will resume in Woolwich Crown Court on May 18.

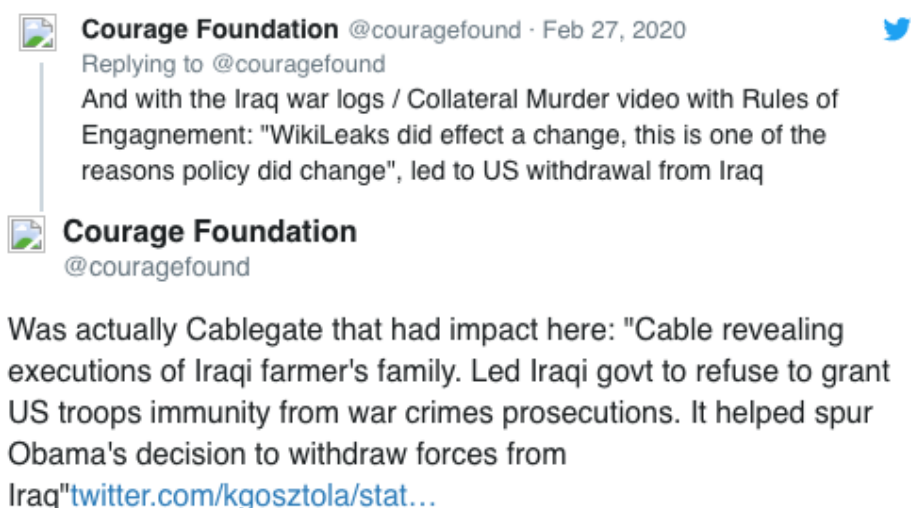
The defense this week seriously undermined the prosecutors' case that Assange had endangered lives of informants, had "solicited" classified material from Chelsea Manning, and had helped Manning crack a password to enter a government computer. The defense showed Manning had legal access to the database and did not need a user name or password. Assange was helping her download video games and movies forbidden to U.S. soldiers.

The defense also laid out its evidence that Assange actually worked to protect informants; and that Manning had not responded to WikiLeaks' solicitations, a charge that ignores that asking sources for classified information is a routine journalistic practice.

The last two days of the hearings were consumed by the question of whether Assange was being accused of political offenses, and whether the British-U.S. extradition treaty or British domestic law on extraditions would apply. The question of whether Assange was being given a fair trial also arose, given that he is cut off from communication with his attorneys during the proceedings, while being locked in a glass cage behind them....

6:00 pm London time: The argument continued from Wednesday about whether Britain's domestic Extradition Act of 2003 or the 2007 U.S.-British Extraction Treaty takes precedence....

Back to the argument whether WikiLeaks has had an effect on policy, defense made this point:



1:20 pm London time: Defense is arguing that WikiLeaks work is to affect change in policy....

12:10 pm London time: Assange is back in his glass cage at the back of the courtroom. The court gave him headphones to help him hear what is going on, but he soon after took them off. The spectacle on Wednesday, in which Assange said he was no more a participant in his own hearing that "a spectator at Wimbledon," underscored the pettiness and even sadism of the governor of Belmarsh prison. What other reason to separate Assange from his attorneys in the courtroom, when murder suspects routinely sit with their lawyers, what other reason to strip search him, handcuff him 11 times, put him five different cells and take away his legal papers on Monday than to simply humiliate him and show that his life is in their abusive hands?

12:00 pm London time: The prosecution resumed its argument from Wednesday that Assange's offense against the United States is not political. Ironically, James Lewis QC, arguing for the U.S., says Assange's aim would have had to have been to change the U.S. government, for his "crime" to be political offense. Ironical, because most Assange critics believe he tried to change the government by denying Hillary Clinton the presidency. Assange is being charged only for activities in 2010 not 2016. This argument illustrates how the U.S. is grasping at straws in this case.

<https://consortiumnews.com/2020/02/29/live-updates-from-london-assange-extradition-hearing-adjourned-until-may-18/>

Rally in defence of Julian Assange held in Zurich

World Socialist Web Site
2 March 2020

Coinciding with last week's opening of the shameful show trial of Julian Assange in London, opposition is developing across Europe to the extradition of the WikiLeaks founder to the United States.

On February 25, the first rally in Zurich, Switzerland in support of Assange was held. Marianne Arens spoke on behalf of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party — SGP) and called for the mobilisation of the working class in Assange's defence.

Despite the cold and wet weather, some 120 demonstrators gathered at a pavilion on Zurich's Bürkliplatz to put forward their demand for the freedom of the courageous WikiLeaks founder. **The rally was called by the Free Julian Assange Committee Switzerland.**

In her contribution, Arens said the disgraceful show trial in London was a mockery of the rule of law and an outrageous crime. She explained the political issues involved: "The defence of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning requires one thing above all, the mobilisation of working people against capitalism and war."

An example was being made of Assange, she continued. "Anyone who dares to expose war crimes is to be intimidated. And why? Because new wars and new war crimes are being planned and prepared." She referred to the current large NATO military manoeuvres titled "Defender 2020," saying their purpose was "clearly to rehearse war against Russia."

She went on to discuss the scandal involving the Swiss company Crypto AG, with whose help the CIA and the German Federal Intelligence Service (BND) had spied on more than 100 countries of the world for decades.

"The supposedly neutral government of Switzerland knew all about this," Arens said. All the governments, including the German and Swiss governments, were part of a conspiracy in the current show trial in London.

"And this is not a surprise," she continued, "because they all advocate the same policies of war, private enrichment and social attacks on the working population. What we see today is the return of fascism and war."

She spoke of the horrific terrorist attack that had taken place a few days earlier in the German city of Hanau, in the state of Hesse, saying: "In Germany, the grand coalition government has taken over the policies of the AfD [Alternative for Germany] in many areas, thereby strengthening the radical right-wing forces. As in the 1930s, right-wing and fascist forces are needed to enforce a war policy against a population that does not want this at all."

The policies of militarism and extreme social inequality were incompatible with democracy, she explained. That was why there was no constituency for the defence of democratic rights within the ruling elite.

She cited the historical example of the German journalist Carl von Ossietzky, who was convicted and imprisoned for "espionage" and "betrayal of secrets" in 1929 — that is, even before the Nazi regime came to power. He died nine years later as a result of his mistreatment in a fascist concentration camp.

It was important to learn the lessons of this historical precedent, she said, because it was strikingly similar to the London show trial. Assange too was threatened with conviction under the US espionage act. "Therefore, his defence is directly linked to a fight against militarism and war and against capitalist exploitation," she said. "For this it is necessary to mobilize the working class on the basis of an international socialist programme."

Her contribution was interrupted by applause several times. Arens concluded with the appeal: "The only way to prevent Assange's extradition and gain his complete freedom is through the independent mobilization of a politically conscious, international mass movement."

The administrator of the Free Julian Assange Committee Switzerland, Marlene Jost, welcomed each speaker with a personal introduction. In between the speeches, she skilfully provided musical interludes on her violin.

The first speaker of the evening was the **lawyer and journalist Dr. Milosz Matuschek, who supports the Geneva initiative for a humanitarian Swiss visa for Julian Assange**. "For me, the Assange case is the Dreyfus case of our days," he explained, with the conspiracy against Assange being even worse.

"Four states — Ecuador, Sweden, Britain and the United States — have conspired against a single person," he noted. He then warned, "If the powerful are above the law, then we no longer live in a state based on the rule of law. We live in a despotic state."

He continued, "The right of Assange to publish is our right to be informed," and that is why it was so important "to get him out of the cell, because otherwise we will all end up in this cell — perhaps not immediately physically, but certainly spiritually. For who should dare to publish such things in the future when the truth carries such a price tag?"

Matuschek asked his journalist colleagues to draw the appropriate conclusions, saying, "Either journalists are willing to take on the powerful, or they are pure show business."

In his speech, **Zurich lawyer Dr. Philip Stolkin dealt with the importance of investigative journalists for society**. He said they are the only ones who explain to us where our tax money goes and that "our governments are involved when weapons and wars are financed, when bombs explode in Yemen, and when children are torn to shreds." This reference to the fact that the Federal Council (the Swiss government) spends billions of Swiss francs on its own armaments and authorizes huge exports of war weapons was met with strong applause.

Stolkin raised the question: "Should human rights really apply only to holiday speeches in which we celebrate ourselves as wonderful democrats?" He was not ready for that, he said. It was important that investigative journalists continue to speak out, so it was important to free Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning.

The last speaker, **Basel lawyer Dr. Andreas Noll**, addressed the accusation against Assange that WikiLeaks had endangered individuals by publishing thousands of names. He emphasized: "This is wrong! On the contrary, Assange was the only one to take care of the anonymization of tens of thousands of names, while the Guardian and other media outlets had already published the material."

Noll reminded the audience of the time when the Second World War ended in Europe on May 8, 1945, with tens of millions of dead. The wish “Never again war” had been universal, and on this basis the United Nations had adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the four Geneva Conventions.

“Because of these achievements,” he said, “we felt comfortable for a long time. But behind our backs, the secret services have created a very different reality.” It was Julian Assange who had opened people’s eyes “and showed the world that our governments are responsible for systematic war crimes and torture. We have been living in a dream world.”

Since May 2019, Andreas Noll, together with Stolkin and other Swiss lawyers, have been calling on the Federal Council to grant asylum in Switzerland to Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning.

The Federal Council acknowledged that Assange, “as an information technology expert, investigative journalist and political activist,” had indeed contributed to “uncovering cases of human rights violations” by disseminating confidential information. However, it said it “had no intention” of promoting and protecting human rights through the violations he uncovered.

Consequently, “Julian Assange could not be recognised as a human rights defender nor could he receive the protection provided for in the Swiss guidelines” (quoted from a written reply by the Foreign Ministry).

Noll commented on this disgraceful attitude, pointing out that Assange was apparently no longer subject to any fundamental democratic rights, neither the prohibition of torture nor the right to a fair trial, nor freedom of the press, nor the UN Refugee Convention. “The rule of law is behaving in this case no differently from the medieval clergy,” he declared.

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/03/02/zuri-m02.html>

Absurd claims of Julian Assange being Russian tool only made to justify Hillary’s loss to Trump – WikiLeaks founder’s father to RT

RT

5 March 2020

Julian Assange published the DNC leaks in 2016 not because of links to Russia, but because he was always longing for truth, John Shipton said as he recalled key moments of his son’s life in an interview with RT Documentary.

Claims by the US intelligence services that Assange received the leaked 2016 Democratic National Committee emails directly from the Kremlin are “absurd,” Shipton said.

WikiLeaks published the files, which revealed the DNC's bias against candidate Bernie Sanders and eventually cost Hillary Clinton dearly in the presidential race

against Donald Trump. At the time, Assange was holed up in the Ecuadorian embassy in London.

While in the embassy, Julian was “the most surveyed person on the planet,” with anybody entering the facility photographed and recorded by both the British and Ecuadorian secret services. Under such circumstances, it’s just “impossible” to imagine that he could’ve had any contacts with the Russian intelligence, Shipton pointed out.

Shipton said that accusations of his son’s links to Russia were the same as “the Skripal poisoning — another ridiculous MI6 scandal.” Former double agent Sergey Skripal and his daughter were allegedly poisoned with a nerve agent in Salisbury, UK in 2018, with Britain swiftly blaming Russia for the incident, but never bothering to provide any convincing proof for it.

Learning of WikiLeaks over a cup of tea

The whistleblower website WikiLeaks was launched by Assange in 2006, but Shipton knew of his son’s plans beforehand, of course.

“Julian was at my place and we were having a cup of tea. And Julian said I’d like to start a Wiki. And this Wiki would concern itself with leaks,” he told RTD. Assange had no problems getting his dad’s blessing for the risky and ambitious project.

“I thought that was a good idea,” he recalled.

What WikiLeaks did was “very new” as it allowed the public to analyze the original documents themselves — something that was previously only available to intelligence services. Those leaked files really showed the people “how the world is composed.”

In 2012, Assange asked for political asylum in Ecuador and moved in to the country’s embassy in London. He feared that the Swedish arrest warrant for questioning over sexual assault accusations, which he vigorously denied, would eventually lead to political prosecution and extradition to the US.

Julian was given a small room of about “three-and-a-half by three meters” at the embassy. “So he had half of the room to sleep in and half of the room to run WikiLeaks from.”

But this tiny space quickly became a sort of “a cultural center,” Shipton said. **There was a constant stream of “brilliant people” visiting his son,** including “filmmakers and Lady Gaga... politicians...” and others.

It all changed when pro-US president Lenin Moreno replaced Rafael Correa in Ecuador in 2017. Assange’s small room “became exactly like a prison,” his father said.

The Ecuadorian hosts were “turning away lawyers... searching visitors...installing cameras in every room, installing voice devices in every room.” They were often ‘forgetting’ to supply toilet paper or give their guest food. If Julian wanted to have a private meeting, he could only do it in the toilet, Shipton added.

Shipton confessed he was afraid that his son’s stay at the embassy “would end in the worst possible way.” Those fears materialized on April 11 last year when the

Ecuadorian authorities invited the UK police inside to arrest the publisher of whistleblowers.

"To see him, you know, after 18 months of torture and seven years of being locked up and dragged out by those seven policemen. Not the best thing to see," he said of the shots of Assange being put into a police van, which were only captured by RT's Ruptly video agency. "He looked very old yeah. Not at all youthful anymore."

The hearings on Assange's extradition from Britain to the US, where he's wanted on espionage charges over his leaks and faces decades in prison, are currently underway. In the meantime, the UK authorities placed the publisher in the infamous Belmarsh high security prison, which is reportedly taking a heavy toll on his health.

"It's where you keep murderers, and terrorists, and bombers, and brutal people. I don't know why they put Julian there," his father wondered.

Shipton, who last visited his 48-year-old son in late February, said that Julian is "now emaciated, he's thin."

"He is very careful not to show distress in front of me. No, he doesn't want to upset his father. But I can see that his anxiety is high."

WATCH the full interview to learn about Julian Assange's younger years and other facts about him: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KRCw9NKx_QU

<https://www.rt.com/news/482346-assange-father-shipton-wikileaks/>

Australian parliamentary parties endorse British show trial of Julian Assange

*Oscar Grenfell
World Socialist Web Site
5 March 2020*

Senior representatives of the Liberal-National Coalition government, including Foreign Minister Marise Payne, have signalled their complete support for the Trump administration's attempt to extradite WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange from the United Kingdom to the US for his exposure of American war crimes. The leadership of the opposition Labor Party, which has always sided with Washington against WikiLeaks and freedom of speech, remained silent as Assange faced the first week of his extradition hearing in London.

Speaking in the House of Representatives on Monday evening, Coalition MP Dave Sharma complained that "many in Australia are following the case of Julian Assange closely." **He then declared his "faith in the rule of law, due process and the independence of the judiciary in the United Kingdom."**

Sharma's comments were in line with previous government statements, contrasting Britain's supposed "rule of law" and "due process" with the anti-democratic actions of totalitarian regimes. In fact, the first week of Assange's court hearings resembled

nothing so much as the show trials staged by despotic regimes, replete with a denial of fundamental legal rights, a biased judiciary and a preordained conclusion.

In the months leading up to the hearings, Assange was denied the right to prepare, with his access to legal documents and to his own lawyers severely limited. He appeared in a court generally reserved for terrorism suspects, to which he was transported by a tunnel running from the maximum-security Belmarsh Prison where he is detained — despite the fact that he has been convicted of no crime.

Assange was subjected to constant physical and psychological abuse by the Belmarsh and judicial authorities. He was repeatedly strip-searched, shifted from cell to cell and had his documents confiscated by prison guards. During the court proceedings, he was confined in a bullet-proof glass cage that prevented him from hearing most of what was said and interacting with his lawyers. The judge presiding over the case is openly hostile to Assange and repeatedly dismissed clear legal arguments as to why the extradition application should be rejected.

The Australian parliamentarians are all well aware of this outrageous state of affairs. Sharma nevertheless had the gall to state: “Mr Assange has strong legal representation in an open trial and before an impartial judiciary. The charges he faces are known, and he has a spirited defence team acting on his behalf. He will get a fair hearing in court, and justice will ultimately be served.”

Sharma’s dismissive statements in parliament, which were not challenged by any other member, are a greenlight from Canberra for continuing attacks on Assange’s rights. They are in line with the refusal of every government, beginning with the Greens-backed Gillard Labor government in 2010, to defend Assange as a persecuted Australian citizen and journalist.

The week before Sharma’s remarks, Foreign Minister Payne declared on February 25 that the government had “no standing in any of Mr. Assange’s legal proceedings and is unable to intervene in them.” In a question to Payne, Greens’ Senator Peter Whish-Wilson noted that this was patently false. Payne herself had travelled to Thailand last year to secure the freedom of soccer player Hakeem al-Araibi, a soccer player and Australian permanent resident who faced deportation to his native Bahrain. Australian governments have made numerous diplomatic interventions on behalf of Australian citizens, including Al Jazeera journalist Peter Greste who was framed-up in Egypt and falsely imprisoned.

Assange has not been defended solely because of the bipartisan support of the Coalition and Labor for Washington’s persecution of WikiLeaks and its publisher, and the broader assault on all independent and critical journalism.

Underscoring the government’s contempt for democratic rights, Payne rejected the warnings of United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer that Assange would have no prospect of a fair trial if he was dispatched to the US. She brushed aside Melzer’s damning findings that Assange has been subjected to relentless psychological torture. **Payne dismissed the seasoned and highly-informed UN official as just “an individual rapporteur who has made a range of observations, not all of which we agree with.”**

The Australian parliament is flagrantly flouting international laws and institutions to give support to the US-led vendetta against Assange, just as it did when it supported the illegal 2003 invasion of Iraq. Payne refused to even comment on the revelations

that the US Central Intelligence Agency illegally spied on Assange when he was a political refugee in Ecuador's London embassy — a fact that should have seen the extradition application thrown out as soon as the court convened.

The stand of the Coalition and Labor Party flows directly from the unalloyed commitment of the Australian ruling class to the US-Australia military alliance and its role as a junior partner in Washington's relentless aggression to maintain its waning global dominance. Payne and Sharma are both deeply involved in the preparations for Australia to play a frontline role in a US war with China, which were initiated under the Gillard Labor government. **Anthony Albanese has not said a single word about Assange since being installed as Labor leader last May.**

The complicity in Assange's persecution extends across all official establishment. The Greens and other parties represented in the parliament have issued no formal party statements and waged no campaign for Assange's freedom as he is subjected to a legal travesty. While Senator Whish-Wilson posed questions in parliament, Greens leader Adam Bandt, who is ostensibly the most senior figure in the small cross-party grouping of politicians calling for Assange to be "brought home," has only issued one statement.

As for the corporate media, its coverage of Assange's extradition hearing was perfunctory. For years, editorial boards of the print and television news outlets peddled the innumerable slanders against Assange concocted by his persecutors. They ridiculed his warnings that he faced extradition to the US as a "conspiracy theory," in a transparent attempt to isolate him and poison public opinion against him. Now that Assange's warnings have come to pass, they are doing everything possible to prevent the development of a broad political movement in his defence.

The shameful role of the press has allowed the collaboration of the parliamentary establishment with the persecution of Assange to go largely unscrutinised. **Albanese, for example, has not faced a single press question about their refusal to say a word about the extradition hearing.**

The line-up against Assange demonstrates that his freedom will not be won by peddling illusions in, or issuing moral appeals to, any section of the country's political and media establishment. What is required is the development of a mass political movement of the working class in Australia and internationally, fighting to block Assange's extradition to the US, as part of the struggle to defend all democratic rights.

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/03/05/ausa-m05.html>

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Julian Assange Hearing -- Your Help Wanted

Craig Murray
6 March 2020

Here is a list of things you can do to help. Everyone can do at least one of these.

1) Put 18 May firmly in your diary. The hearing stands adjourned until 18 May. Turn up on 18 May and join the protests there all day — show the world this is a political trial, and we know it. Woolwich Crown Court is walking distance from Plumstead

Railway Station in South East London. If you feel able to do so, bring your tent and join the Free Assange Village that sets up on the grass banks around the court – there is loads of available space. But if you can just turn up for the day, that is just as valuable. Protests will roll on every day throughout **the hearing which will continue for a minimum of three weeks.**

Make all the noise you can at the protests. The prosecution is anxious to portray this as an “ordinary criminal case”. Make sure the world, and the judge, know it is not. There was an attempt by the judge to deflect the communication problems caused by Julian being locked inside a bulletproof glass cage, and blame the distant noise of protestors for that instead. Do not be deflected by this arrant nonsense. Make all the noise you can.

2) Write to your elected representatives. This really does have an impact if done en masse. You can do this whichever country you are in. The key points are these:

- Publishing the truth should not be a crime. Wikileaks exposed war crimes and worldwide corruption by governments.
- The prosecution case rests entirely on the argument that the UK/US Extradition Treaty of 2007 is legally enforceable, but that specifically Clause 4.i of the Treaty forbidding extradition for political offences has no standing in law. This is an absurd argument.
- Ask specifically your elected representative whether they personally believe political offences should be extraditable, and what they believe the impact might be worldwide on political dissidents in exile
- Demand they act on the disgraceful conditions in which Julian is held, including entirely unnecessary strip searches and manacling, lack of access to his legal papers and lack of access to his lawyers. Point out he has not been convicted and that these are incompatible with his status as an innocent remand prisoner. Point out he is being treated as the most violent convicted terrorists are treated, but he is unconvicted and accused of a peaceful political offence.

3) Put in a freedom of information request. I explained at great length why it is impossible that the UK could have ratified the US/UK Extradition Treaty in 2007 if it is indeed, as the prosecution claim, incompatible with the UK Extradition Act of 2003. Please read that again.

If you are in the UK

There must be documentary evidence of all the clearance work around Whitehall that was done to ensure the 2007 Treaty is fully compatible with UK law. I therefore need people to submit Freedom of Information Requests to:

- a) Foreign & Commonwealth Office (Specifying Consular Dept, Legal Advisers, North American Dept, Nationality & Treaty Dept, Counter Terrorism Dept or their successors if renamed and any other relevant departments)
- b) Home Office
- c) Treasury Solicitors
- d) Cabinet Office
- e) UK Parliament

Requesting “All materials relating to the ratification and entry into force of the UK/US Extradition Treaty (signed 2003 ratified 2007), and particularly all discussion of the ability of the 2003 Extradition Act to apply all of its provisions, of the need or lack of need for any further statutory provision to incorporate it into English law, including but not exclusively any reference to extradition for political offences or to

clause 4 of the UK US Extradition Treaty.” Materials should be requested from 2002 to 2007.

If you are in the USA, please similarly put in a FOIA request to the Department of Justice and State Department for all material relating to the implementation of the UK/US Extradition Treaty (signed 2003, ratified 2007), and particularly any discussion of the political offences exclusion at Clause 4, in particular but not exclusively with relation to the desirability of the UK implementing that clause and/or the UK’s ability to do so.

I realise I am asking for a bit of work here from you to work out how to do and phrase this. I have never been let down when drawing on the tenacity and perspicacity of our readers before!

4) Research the passing of the 2003 Extradition Act.

In Court the prosecution argued that the 2003 Extradition Act was the first such UK Act not to include an exclusion for political offences. Parliament must therefore deliberately have removed the political offences exclusion and the 2007 Treaty could not put it back in. The defence argued to the contrary that the 2003 Extradition Act is an Enabling Act on which extradition treaties depend. Both the Act and the Treaty are required for extradition, and the Act did nothing to limit Treaties from including a ban on extradition for political offences.

As always, Judge Baraitser ignored the defence argument. She three times asserted as a simple matter of fact that Parliament had intended to allow extradition for political offences when passing the 2003 Extradition Act. Twice she did this in interruption of the defence argument to the contrary.

Normally neither arguments about the intention of parliament, nor quotes from Hansard debates, are taken into consideration by English courts. **With few exceptions, rulings have been that the legislation must be read on its face. But here, Baraitser has herself quoted the intention of parliament — using that very word — to justify dismissing the defence argument.** It must therefore be legitimate to introduce evidence on the intention of parliament, if the judge is going to rely on the concept.

I therefore need people to read through all the Hansards of debates on the 2003 Extradition Act, both in the Commons and the Lords, to see what was said about extradition for political offences, and particular if any distinction was made between terrorists and peaceful political offenders, and whether ministers gave any reassurances. Apart from the debates, there may be parliamentary questions in Hansard on the same topic.

It is of course true that the 2003 Extradition Act was a product of the so-called “War on Terror” and the Iraq and Afghan invasions, passed by Blair, Straw and Blunkett, undoubtedly the most hostile to civil liberty, authoritarian government in modern British history. But even so, I feel fairly confident that to get the Act through the Commons and especially the Lords, ministers will have been obliged to give some reassurance it was not intended to use it against peaceful political dissidents.

I have received quite a clamour from people wanting to know how they can help. Off you go!

This blog will resume its daily coverage of the hearings when proceedings restart on 18 May. On a personal note, my sincere thanks to all those who supported financially. I am happy to report that from the afternoon of Day 3, **an accommodation was made by the Court whereby Julian was given six seats in the public gallery for family and close friends**, and he kindly listed me for one of those, so I no longer had to queue at 6am, and I hope that will continue.

Finally may I say that I am always delighted when readers, and subscribers, introduce themselves personally. I find it really heartwarming and it certainly helped keep my morale up at a very tiring and emotionally draining time. So please do not feel in the least reticent to say hello if you come along from 18 May.

There was a tremendous camaraderie at the hearing among Julian's supporters, and **I believe I met people from well nigh every country in Europe and the Americas**. We kept each other going, and Julian lit up every time he saw friendly faces. It was a very intense week, and even with a wonderful and loving family to go home to, I felt a bit down after we all split up, and everyone who has been back in contact since has said the same thing. I am haunted by the thought of how much more dreadful Julian must feel, back into the bowels of that high tech dungeon and virtual solitary confinement, with very little contact with his legal team or his papers and months to go before anything else happens. Do think of him and pray for him if you have a faith.

<https://www.craigmurray.org.uk/archives/2020/03/julian-assange-hearing-your-help-wanted/>

"Teachers for Assange and Manning" campaign in Melbourne

*Sue Phillips
World Socialist Web Site
7 March 2020*

Teachers and members of the **Committee for Public Education (CFPE)** campaigned in Melbourne last weekend to win support for the freedom of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning. The campaign was organised in the aftermath of the opening week of Assange's US extradition hearing in London, which was exposed as a political show trial aimed at condemning the WikiLeaks founder to life imprisonment for exposing US war crimes.

"Teachers for Assange and Manning" was initiated by the CFPE as a result of a series of resolutions passed at Footscray City Secondary College moved by Will Marshall, a longstanding Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and CFPE member. The resolutions opposed the ongoing persecution of Assange and demanded the Morrison government do everything in its powers to secure the safe freedom of Assange. The resolution also called for a broadening of the campaign to other schools and workplaces.

Following the political lead given by Footscray educators, a meeting of the Hills Association of the New South Wales Teachers Federation in northwest Sydney unanimously passed a similar resolution moved by Erika Laslett, a secondary teacher and SEP member.

Last week, the same resolution was again passed unanimously by more than 30 teachers at a meeting of the Illawarra Teachers Association in Wollongong.

The resolution read: “That this meeting of teachers opposes the ongoing persecution of journalist publisher and founder of WikiLeaks, Julian Assange and courageous whistleblower, Chelsea Manning. The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer warns specifically that ‘Assange’s continued exposure to arbitrariness and abuse may soon end up costing his life.’ We insist that the federal Morrison government use its diplomatic powers to organise the safe return of Assange to Australia. We resolve to send this resolution to other schools and workplaces.”

In moving the resolution, Pietro Mascetti, a secondary teacher, said he felt compelled to raise the resolution because “a great travesty of justice is being committed which has extremely serious consequences for teachers, for our children and for the world. We are in the business of educating, of informing our students and developing critical thinking attitudes, all of which are being attacked in the persecution of Julian Assange.”

The active intervention of teachers and education support staff at workplaces and schools is just one indication of the growing concern among millions of people that a terrible injustice is being carried out and that Assange’s persecution has immense implications.

This was evident on the Melbourne campaign, as workers and students stopped to talk to the campaign team, took leaflets, made comments, donated and signed up for more information.

Alan said: “I’ve followed Assange for a long time. I have researched this and the Five Eyes [surveillance] network which was set up to counter the Soviet Union. Now it’s being used for economic espionage on an industrial scale. The US wants to use it and Australia is a minor partner. Assange has exposed things like that. But his prosecution opens up the floodgates to other journalists. He didn’t break any laws. He’s not a US citizen. This is draconian.”

Yvon, a retired worker, said: “We need to save him. If Julian Assange goes, then freedom of speech is gone. He has committed no crime. He has published the truth.” Liz a disability worker added: “Because of Assange, any journalist today is going to be vulnerable.”

The fight for Assange and Manning has coincided with an upsurge of workers struggles internationally. Teachers have been at the forefront of this growing movement, battling the assault on public education and fighting for decent working conditions.

Last month 200,000 teachers in Ontario went on strike to oppose the austerity program of the provincial government. This was followed by a national strike by 200,000 teachers in Sri Lanka. This week, teachers in the US walked out in Salt Lake City while graduate students at the University of California continued wildcat strikes. Some 50,000 academics in Britain took industrial action and maintained picket lines against casualisation and increasing workloads.

Several teachers stopped to discuss freedom for Assange, the suppression of democratic rights and the assault on public education.

Jude, a retired art teacher said: "I don't know all the ins-and-outs of what has happened to Julian Assange, but I do know he is in jail in the UK and faces extradition to the US. I know his health is not good and I am very concerned about both his physical and mental health.

"The Australian government should be doing something about his situation. This is all about freedom of speech and censorship. Assange is doing an important job by exposing war crimes. If people like him don't stand up or can't stand up, then we are living in a fascist state."

Jude was aware of the teacher strikes in the US over the last two years and commented on the retrogressive changes being imposed in public education. She commented: "I have a friend who is a middle school teacher in Texas. He is an art teacher and has 50 students in class. He is a fantastic teacher and gives the students great art projects, but this is impossible."

Mandy, who is a primary teacher and CFPE member, explained why she had joined the campaign: "The more I learn about the situation with Assange, the more outraged I become and the more I feel the need to tell other people. Others have to understand and become outraged too, and together we need to do something. The government won't do anything, but we need to. Assange's freedom can only come from what ordinary people do.

"Teachers rights are being suppressed. We don't have a voice in what happens in education. Assange's situation is a very extreme example of that same process. There is a link between democratic rights and suppression of freedom of speech and that is what attracts teachers. If we stand by and let this happen to Assange it will get worse for everyone."

Kate a secondary teacher and CFPE campaigner, said: "There is a lot of support out there for Julian Assange. Many people want to find a way forward. There is real concern about what his prosecution means for democratic rights. People are concerned that the truth is being concealed. They don't like it that governments are hiding what is going on. One man said to me on the campaign that Assange is the last bastion of democratic rights. That really stood out in my mind."

Phoebe, who works in the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sector and took part in the campaign, said: "I joined the team because if Assange is extradited to the US and sentenced for publishing the truth, it will create a precedent for anyone to be persecuted by the ruling elite for going against their narrative and their secrecy. This is a grave miscarriage of justice.

"I found a lot of people to be very open towards the campaign. You could see that they had respect for teachers being at the forefront of this campaign. Teachers taking a stand is important as it is also against the ruling elite, who feel threatened by the power of public education and intellectualism."

In contrast to the positive and enthusiastic response of teachers and other workers to the campaign for freedom of Assange, **the trade union apparatuses, including the teacher unions, are maintaining a complicit silence** — as is the official media and the official political parties.

To secure the freedom of Assange and Manning, educators, workers and young people need to act independently of the official organisations. Pass resolutions at your

school, establish a defence committee, and send delegations to other workplaces. Teachers and education support staff who wish to take forward this critical fight contact the CFPE.

For further information:

Email: Cfpe.aus@gmail.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/commforpubliceducation/

Twitter: @CFPE_Australia

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/03/07/cfpe-m07.html>

The Truth About Anna Ardin, Assange's Main Accuser

AngelFox

March 7, 2020

Upon reading the latest article regarding Anna Ardin, (Assange accuser), on [spiegel.de](https://www.spiegel.de), I made the decision to write yet another article including all the information I have found on the web regarding her person. It seems she has written an email to Nils Melzer, U.N. rapporteur on torture, on his response to the Swedish allegations. Here is the article in full:

<https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/julian-assange-opfer-von-wikileaks-gruender-kritisiert-uno-folterexperten-nils-melzer-a-5d1882b7-945f-42fd-a7a0-ec3012dd886b>

In the above article, once again, Anna Ardin plays a victim:

She has never felt “so much abused” as by him, writes the Swede Anna A. in a dossier that she sent to Melzer’s office and which SPIEGEL could see. Melzer had spoken of manipulation by the Swedish investigators and claimed the invention of a “rape story”.

So he blames the victims, the woman writes; it was “a classic patriarchal technique to define the conditions for how ‘a real rape victim’ should behave”. It also accuses the lawyer of personally slandering her and, in part, spreading the untruth about the investigation, such as Assange’s willingness to testify about the incidents. This is “completely unacceptable, shocking and a reason to quit his job at the UN”.

Anna Ardin plays her part very well considering her obvious [??] links to the CIA. In an article by *Shadow Proof* seen [here](#), it shows how Ardin is linked to the American spy agency who also spied on Assange while in the Ecuador embassy.

In Cuba she interacted with the feminist anti-Castro group Las damas de blanco (the Ladies in White). This group receives US government funds and the convicted anti-communist terrorist Luis Posada Carriles is a friend and supporter. Wikipedia quotes Hebe de Bonafini, president of the Argentine Madres de Plaza de Mayo as saying that “the so-called Ladies in White defend the terrorism of the United States.”

Who is Luis Posada Carriles? He's a mass murderer, and former CIA agent. . . .

Luis Clemente Faustino Posada Carriles (born February 15, 1928) (nicknamed Bambi by some Cuban exiles)[1] is a Cuban-born Venezuelan anti-communist extremist. A former Central Intelligence Agency agent,[2] Posada has been convicted in absentia of involvement in various terrorist attacks and plots in the Americas, including: involvement in the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner that killed seventy-three people;[3][4] admitted involvement in a string of bombings in 1997 targeting fashionable Cuban hotels and nightspots;[5][6][7] involvement in the Bay of Pigs invasion; [and] involvement in the Iran-Contra affair...

Wait, this seemingly innocent woman from Sweden is linked [???] to a terrorist?

Who is Julian Assange's chief accuser in Sweden? She's a gender equity officer at Uppsala University – who chose to associate with a US funded group openly supported by a convicted terrorist and mass murderer.

Anna Ardin is no victim but a plant to put Assange behind bars to see him extradited to the United States where he most likely will face the death penalty. *[There is no clear evidence that Ms. Ardin is a "plant" of any kind. –A.B.]*

If that isn't enough to make you raise your eyebrows, there is more. I am simply going to copy and paste my article from earlier in 2019....

<https://angelof-truth.com/2020/03/07/the-truth-about-anna-ardin-assanges-main-accuser/>

IBAHRI condemns UK treatment of Julian Assange in US extradition trial

*International Bar Association
10 March 2020*

The International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI) condemns the reported mistreatment of Julian Assange during his United States extradition trial in February 2020, and urges the government of the United Kingdom to take action to protect him. According to his lawyers, Mr Assange was handcuffed 11 times; stripped naked twice and searched; his case files confiscated after the first day of the hearing; and had his request to sit with his lawyers during the trial, rather than in a dock surrounded by bulletproof glass, denied.

The UK hearing, which began on Monday 24 February 2020 at Woolwich Crown Court in London, UK, will decide whether the WikiLeaks founder, Mr Assange, will be extradited to the US, where he is wanted on 18 charges of attempted hacking and breaches of the 1917 Espionage Act. He faces allegations of collaborating with former US army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning to leak classified documents, including exposing alleged war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq. The hearing was adjourned after four days, with proceedings set to resume on 18 May 2020.

IBAHRI Co-Chair, the Hon Michael Kirby AC CMG, commented: 'The IBAHRI is concerned that the mistreatment of Julian Assange constitutes breaches of his right to a fair trial and protections enshrined in the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, to which the UK is party. **It is deeply shocking that as a mature democracy in which the rule**

of law and the rights of individuals are preserved, the UK Government has been silent and has taken no action to terminate such gross and disproportionate conduct by Crown officials. As well, we are surprised that the presiding judge has reportedly said and done nothing to rebuke the officials and their superiors for such conduct in the case of an accused whose offence is not one of personal violence. Many countries in the world look to Britain as an example in such matters. On this occasion, the example is shocking and excessive. It is reminiscent of the Abu Grahb Prison Scandal which can happen when prison officials are not trained in the basic human rights of detainees and the Nelson Mandela Rules.'

In accordance with the Human Rights Act 1998, which came into force in the UK in October 2000, every person tried in the UK is entitled to a fair trial (Article 6) and freedom from torture and inhuman or degrading treatment (Article 3). Similarly, Article 10 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights upholds an individual's right to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal.

IBAHRI Co-Chair, Anne Ramberg Dr jur hc, commented: 'The IBAHRI concurs with the widespread concern over the ill-treatment of Mr Assange. He must be afforded equality in access to effective legal representation. **With this extradition trial we are witnessing the serious undermining of due process and the rule of law.** It is troubling that Mr Assange has complained that he is unable to hear properly what is being said at his trial, and that because he is locked in a glass cage is prevented from communicating freely with his lawyers during the proceedings commensurate with the prosecution.'

A recent report from Nils Melzer, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Inhumane Treatment, presented during the 43rd session of the UN Human Rights Council (24 February – 20 March 2020), argues that the cumulative effects of Mr Assange's mistreatment over the past decade amount to psychological torture. If Mr Assange was viewed as a victim of psychological torture, his extradition would be illegal under international human rights law.

Notes to [editors]

Related material: Watch the interview of Julian Assange given to IBA Executive Director Mark Ellis during the IBA's 2017 Annual Conference in Sydney, Australia. www.ibanet.org/Conferences/238921283.aspx

The International Bar Association (IBA), the global voice of the legal profession, is the foremost organisation for international legal practitioners, bar associations and law societies. **Established in 1947, shortly after the creation of the United Nations**, it was born out of the conviction that an organisation made up of the world's bar associations could contribute to global stability and peace through the administration of justice.

In the ensuing 70 years since its creation, the organisation has evolved from an association comprised exclusively of bar associations and law societies to one that incorporates individual international lawyers and entire law firms. The present membership is comprised of more than 80,000 individual international lawyers from most of the world's leading law firms and some 190 bar associations and law societies spanning more than 170 countries.

The IBA has considerable expertise in providing assistance to the global legal community, and through its global membership, it influences the development of international law reform and helps to shape the future of the legal profession throughout the world.

The IBA's administrative office is in London, United Kingdom. Regional offices are located in: São Paulo, Brazil; Seoul, South Korea; and Washington DC, United States, while the International Bar Association's International Criminal Court and International Criminal Law Programme (ICC & ICL) is managed from an office in The Hague, the Netherlands.

The International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), an autonomous and financially independent entity, works to promote, protect and enforce human rights under a just rule of law, and to preserve the independence of the judiciary and the legal profession worldwide.

For further information please contact:

Romana St. Matthew - Daniel
Press Office
International Bar Association
4th Floor, 10 St Bride Street,
London EC4A 4AD

Mobile: +44 (0)7940 731 915
Direct Line: +44 (0)20 7842 0094
Main Office: +44 (0)20 7842 0090
Fax: +44 (0)20 7842 0091

Email: romana.daniel@int-bar.org
Website: www.ibanet.org

<https://www.ibanet.org/Article/NewDetail.aspx?ArticleUid=c05c57ee-1fee-47dc-99f9-26824208a750>

186 Physicians Now Back Demands to End Julian Assange's 'Torture' and 'Medical Neglect'

Mohamed Elmaazi
Sputnik
11 March 2020

The Lancet medical journal has now officially published, in its March 2020 edition, a letter from an international list of medical practitioners addressing the treatment of Julian Assange. This means that the letter can now be cited properly by other publications as awareness of the treatment of the WikiLeaks founder continues to grow.

Calls for Julian Assange's "torture" and "medical neglect" to be brought to an end are now supported by 186 physicians from around the world, as of 11 March 2020. This is

up from 117 in February 2020 and around 60 in November 2019. The demand is part of a letter published in the British medical journal the Lancet.

"Holding Julian Assange gratuitously in a maximum security prison, with no UK charge or sentence in place, so that the United States can redefine journalism as espionage, has served as a vehicle by which to psychologically torture him, using isolation and denial of a host of human rights", explained Dr Lissa Johnson, one of the key physicians behind the letter.

"His recent extradition hearing, also gratuitously conducted in a high security setting, reflected a continuation of that torture, by needlessly inflicting continued isolation behind bullet-proof glass, helplessness, surveillance, arbitrariness and debasement, denying him even the dignity and agency of sitting with, and communicating with, his lawyers", she added.

During the first set of extradition hearings, held at Belmarsh Magistrates' Court (sitting at Woolwich Crown Court), Judge Vanessa Baraitser was informed by Assange's legal team that prison authorities were mistreating their client. The court heard that in a single day the award-winning journalist and editor was handcuffed 11 times, placed in 5 different cells, strip searched twice and had his privileged legal papers confiscated from him. But Judge Baraitser refused to intervene in anyway with the prison officials. She also refused to permit Assange to leave the dock to sit with his lawyers, despite recognising that she had the legal authority to do so. Assange complained that he was unable to properly follow proceedings and direct his lawyers. He exhibits the symptoms of being psychologically tortured, according to three experts in torture.

Johnson said that Doctors for Assange are gravely concerned for the publisher's life and health, "particularly in light of his brutal treatment at his extradition hearing". The clinical psychologist warned that every day that the extradition process goes on is, "another day of playing Russian roulette with his life".

The letter, drafted by the group Doctors for Assange and demanding his treatment be brought to an end, has been officially published in the Lancet's March 2020 edition (after appearing once on its website in February). This means it is now officially part of the journal's publication and can be cited professionally by other writers and publications.

Doctors 4 Assange continue to request that physicians from around the world review the material on their website and continue adding their name, field of expertise, and location to the growing list of signatories. The key sponsors of the letter include Dr Lissa Johnson, US presidential candidate Dr Gill Stein, and Dr Stephen Frost.

The WikiLeaks founder faces up to 175 years in prison in the US if he is extradited and placed on trial there. All of the charges relate to his role in publishing classified US documents and the diplomatic cables which revealed war crimes and other criminality perpetrated by US-led forces in Iraq, Afghanistan and US-occupied Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. His substantive extradition hearings will restart on 18 May, with two administrative hearings due to be heard on 25 March and 7 April 2020.

<https://sputniknews.com/uk/202003111078537803-186-physicians-now-back-demands-to-end-julian-assanges-torture-and-medical-neglect/>

Chelsea Manning Is Ordered Released From Jail

The former Army analyst had been jailed last year for refusing to testify before a grand jury investigating WikiLeaks and Julian Assange.

Charlie Savage
N.Y. Times
March 12, 2020

WASHINGTON — A federal judge on Thursday ordered the release of Chelsea Manning, the former Army intelligence analyst who in 2010 leaked archives of military and diplomatic documents to WikiLeaks, and who was jailed last year for refusing to testify before a grand jury that is investigating the organization and its founder, Julian Assange.

The release came one day after Ms. Manning tried to kill herself and was hospitalized, according to her lawyers.

In a brief opinion, a Federal District Court judge overseeing the matter, Anthony J. Trenga, said that he also dismissed on Thursday the grand jury that Ms. Manning was refusing to testify before after finding that its business had concluded.

“The court finds that Ms. Manning’s appearance before the grand jury is no longer needed, in light of which her detention no longer serves any coercive purpose,” Judge Trenga wrote.

However, he said, Ms. Manning would still have to pay \$256,000 in fines for her defiance of the subpoena. The judge wrote that “enforcement of the accrued, conditional fines would not be punitive but rather necessary to the coercive purpose of the court’s civil contempt order.”

Ms. Manning was originally jailed a year ago for contempt of court after initially refusing to testify about WikiLeaks and Mr. Assange, but was briefly released when the first grand jury expired. Prosecutors then obtained a new subpoena, and she was locked up again for defying it in May. The moves raise the possibility that prosecutors could start over a third time.

But supporters of Ms. Manning had believed that the grand jury was not set to terminate on March 12, raising the prospect that prosecutors and the judge decided to shut it down early to bring the matter to a close.

“It is my devout hope that she is released to us shortly, and that she is finally given a meaningful opportunity to rest and heal that she so richly deserves,” said her lawyer, Moira Meltzer-Cohen.

Joshua Stueve, a spokesman for the office of the U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, declined to comment.

The archives that Ms. Manning provided to WikiLeaks in 2010, when she was an Army intelligence analyst posted in Iraq, helped vault the antisecrecy organization and Mr. Assange to global fame. The events took place years before their image and actions evolved with the publication of Democratic emails stolen by Russian hackers during the 2016 election.

Ms. Manning admitted sending the files to WikiLeaks in a court-martial trial. She also confessed to interacting online with someone who was probably Mr. Assange, but she said she had acted on principle and was not working for WikiLeaks.

Testimony showed that she had been deteriorating, mentally and emotionally, during the period when she downloaded the documents and sent them to WikiLeaks. Then known as Pfc. Bradley Manning, she was struggling with gender dysphoria under conditions of extraordinary stress and isolation while deployed to the Iraq war zone.

She was sentenced to 35 years in prison — the longest sentence by far in an American leak case. After her conviction, she changed her name to Chelsea and announced that she wanted to undergo gender transition, but was housed in a male military prison and twice tried to commit suicide in 2016.

In January 2017, President Barack Obama commuted most of the remainder of her sentence shortly before he left office. But she was swept back up into legal trouble last year when prosecutors investigating Mr. Assange subpoenaed her to testify before a grand jury about their interactions.

Although prosecutors granted immunity for her testimony, Ms. Manning had vowed not to cooperate in the investigation, saying she had ethical objections, and she was placed in civil detention for contempt of court.

Separately last year, the Justice Department unsealed criminal charges against Mr. Assange, who was living in the Ecuadorean Embassy in London. Prosecutors initially charged him with a narrow hacking conspiracy offense, accusing him of agreeing to try to help Ms. Manning crack a password that would have let her log onto a military computer system under a different user account, covering her tracks.

But prosecutors later significantly expanded the case against Mr. Assange by bringing charges against him under the Espionage Act for soliciting, receiving and publishing classified information — raising novel First Amendment issues. Mr. Assange has been fighting extradition in a London court.

Charlie Savage is a Washington-based national security and legal policy correspondent.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/12/us/politics/chelsea-manning-released-jail.html>



Groundswell of support to free Julian Assange around February extradition hearing

Kevin Rennie
Global Voices
13 March 2020

Wikileaks' founder Julian Assange's hearing for extradition to the United States on February 24, 2020 led many people, both on the streets and online, to rally support for his release....

Assange also has significant backing among mainstream journalists:



Mary Kostakidis
@MaryKostakidis



1200 journals from 98 countries: We urge all journos to speak up in defense of J Assange at this critical time. Dangerous times call for fearless journalism. [#JournalistsSpeakUpForAssange](#).

World-wide journalists condemn court action against Julian Assange pressenza.com/2020/02/world-...

It is nearly eight years since Assange sought asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, and a year since his imprisonment in the United Kingdom's Belmarsh Prison for breaching bail.

In 2006 he launched the Wikileaks website, which has published leaked and classified information from the U.S. government and other sources. Major instances include the Afghanistan and Iraq War Logs, and Cablegate. Assange collaborated with US Army whistleblower Chelsea Manning on these leaks. The extradition case relates to

indictments for conspiracy to commit computer intrusion and espionage. Assange faces up to 175 years imprisonment if convicted of all charges. He has been accused by the American government of putting lives at risk.

Assange is a controversial figure for a number of other reasons. In 2010, Sweden issued an international arrest warrant for him in relation to sexual assault allegations; the charge has now expired. In 2016, the publication of Hillary Clinton's private email archive blotted his copybook in the eyes of many progressives, who accused him of doing Russian President Putin's dirty work and of helping to elect Donald Trump. Assange denies these accusations.

But many netizens dismiss attacks on Assange and Wikileaks. Some believe that what is paramount are the principles involved, not Assange's character....

Others refuse to support him for a range of reasons....

Former Australian ambassador to Israel and now government backbencher, Dave Sharma, has joined numerous politicians who have little time for Assange. Greg Barns, a human rights advocate and advisor to the Assange team, recently took Sharma to task....

There is a small group of pro-Assange members in Australia's federal parliament. Opposition backbencher Julian Hill backed the 'other Julian' in a House of Representatives speech....

Campaigning to #FreeAssange

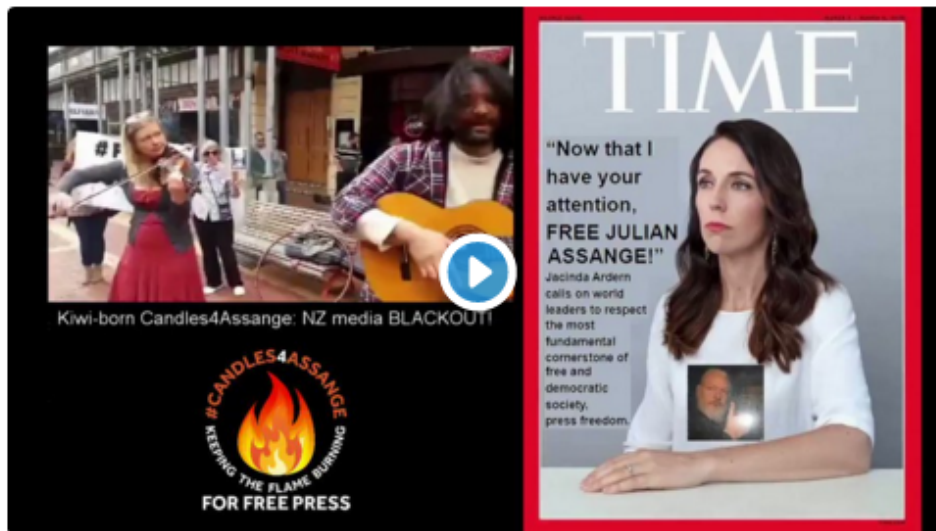
There has been a worldwide resurgence of protest meetings and demonstrations. New Zealand academic Alex Hill is an activist who coordinates Candles4Assange:



120 events being held this week for @DEAcampaign
with 35+ ONGOING weekly or fortnightly events worldwide
(25 cities in Germany!) @Candles4Assange



24 FEB 2020 (37 cities in 22 countries)



♡ 21 10:30 AM - Feb 27, 2020



Catalan separatists, Assemblea Nacional Catalana, posted the photo at the top of the story on Flickr. It depicts a protest in Barcelona on February 24. Part of the caption reads: “L’Assange va donar suport a l’autodeterminació de Catalunya: ara som nosaltres qui li’n donem!” (“Assange supported the self-determination of Catalonia: now we give it to you!”).

Guatemalan lawyer Renata Avila (a member of the Global Voices community) reported from the fourth day of the hearing about the latest issue involving Assange's treatment in the judicial system:



Summary of #Assange extradition case today: the accused cannot "hear" the arguments and the Judge refuses to fix it: he just wants to sit next to his lawyers. Globally reasonable. She refused. She even threatened to extend the process. Due process? Or punishment by process?

♡ 649 5:44 PM - Feb 27, 2020

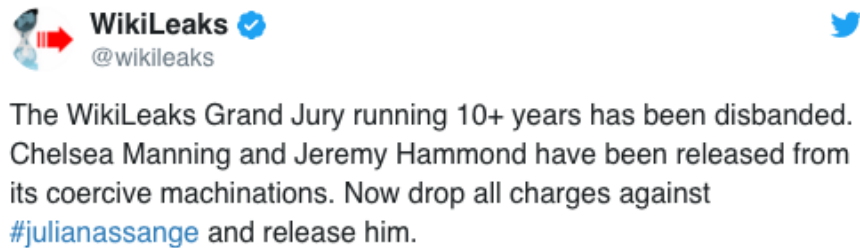


This follows earlier claims by the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Nils Melzer, that Assange “has been tortured & continues to be tortured” in Belmarsh Prison.

There are numerous Facebook pages such as Free Julian Assange and tens of thousands of Instagram posts petitioning for his release.

Meanwhile, Chelsea Manning was reported to have attempted suicide in the US prison where she is being held, after refusing to answer questions before a grand jury about Assange....

In a later development, a court has ordered her release as the grand jury has been disbanded. Wikileaks has responded:



Online petition

Phillip Adams from Brisbane **started an online petition in 2018 which has over 365,000 signatures**. It calls on Australia’s Foreign Minister Marise Payne and Prime Minister Scott Morrison to defend Assange: ‘Julian Assange is an Australian Citizen and as such it is the fundamental responsibility of the Australian Government to protect and ensure his human rights are not violated and to this end the Australian Government has failed.’

The radio broadcaster and media personality of the same name is also in Assange’s corner urging everyone to do more:



People For Assange
@people4assange



In The Weekend Australian Magazine today by @PhillipAdams_1

"It is we who are guilty of treason, treason against our principles.
Not Julian Assange #FreeAssangeNOW #DontExtraditeAssange



The extradition hearing resumes in May.

<https://globalvoices.org/2020/03/13/groundswell-of-support-to-free-julian-assange-around-february-extradition-hearing/>

Julian in the Dock

Israel Shamir
The Unz Review
March 13, 2020

Julian Assange's extradition hearing has had very little media coverage. Even The Guardian and The New York Times barely mentioned it, though these newspapers made a fortune publishing Assange-provided cables. **Unless you had been looking for it, you wouldn't even know that on February 24 to 27, the first stage of Assange's extradition hearing was being adjudicated** in the secretive Woolwich Crown Court embedded within the huge Belmarsh Prison nicknamed "British Gitmo".

Luckily for us, Ambassador Craig Murray, the indomitable truth fighter, went there, waited in line for hours in the rain, underwent searches and discomfort, and wrote an extensive report (12,000 words) on this travesty of justice that went under the name of

a 'trial'. His reports leave nothing out, from the threatening atmosphere to the sinister legal arguments. He captured the menace and the abuse bordering with public torture, and delivered it to the world, something that none of the journalists on the payroll of the mass media had been allowed to do. Here are some insights from his report in my free rendering augmented with other sources.

The Court is designed with no other purpose than to exclude the public, on an island accessible only through navigating a maze of dual carriageways, the entire location and architecture of the building is predicated on preventing public access. It is in truth just the sentencing wing of Belmarsh prison.

The judge, the Magistrate (or District Judge) Vanessa Baraitser is a modern version of the Hanging Judge George Jeffreys, a female Judge Dredd. She is the chief villain by all descriptions of the trial, not just tolerating but exceeding the demands of the prosecution. The lawyers acting for the prosecution did request some niceties if only for the trial to appear fair. Baraitser had no such pretensions. She went straight for the jugular. If she could, she would hang Assange right away.

This Jewish lady [*the writer is also of Jewish extraction –A.B.*] is surrounded by mystery: she has left no trace upon the Internet. **A newly born child has more Internet presence than this middle-aged woman. I doubt such a blank slate could be achieved nowadays without the active assistance of the Secret Services.**

Ambassador Murray writes: “Ms Baraitser is not fond of photography -- she appears to be the only public figure in Western Europe with no photo on the internet. Indeed the average proprietor of a rural car wash has left more evidence of their existence and life history on the Internet than Vanessa Baraitser. Which is no crime on her part, but I suspect the expunging is not achieved without considerable effort. Somebody suggested to me she might be a hologram, but I think not. Holograms have more empathy.”

John Pilger saw Baraitser in action during the previous round of Assange hearings in October 2019. He wrote: “I have sat in many courtrooms and seen judges abuse their positions. This judge, Vanessa Baraitser shocked all of us who were there. Her face was a progression of sneers and imperious indifference; she addressed Julian with cruel arrogance. When Assange spoke, Baraitser contrived boredom; when the prosecuting barrister spoke, she was attentive. When Julian’s barrister described the CIA spying on him, she didn’t yawn, but her disinterest was as expressive. Her knee in the groin was to announce that the next court hearing would be at remote Woolwich, which adjoins Belmarsh Prison and has few seats for the public. This will ensure isolation and be as close to a secret trial as it’s possible to get.”

It turned out to be practically a secret trial. There were MSM journalists, but “not a single one of the most important facts and arguments today has been reported anywhere in the mainstream media.”

On the first day, James Lewis QC for the prosecution tried to drive a wedge between Assange and the media. He claimed that in no way are mainstream outlets like The Guardian and The New York Times threatened by this trial, because Assange was not charged with publishing the cables but only with publishing the names of informants, cultivating Manning and assisting him to attempt computer hacking. The mainstream outlets are not guilty of any crimes, having only published sanitised cables.

But Judge Baraitser didn't accept this vegetarian approach. She thirsted for blood. She referred to the Official Secrets Act 1989, which declares that merely obtaining and publishing any government secret is an offence. Surely, Baraitser suggested, that meant that newspapers publishing the Manning leaks would be guilty of a serious offence?

Lewis agreed with the judge and admitted that indeed, the mainstream journalists also are guilty, **fully denying what he said in his opening statement. In the end, none of this role-play mattered since none of the media reported on this exchange,** as it wasn't inserted into the daily press release. The MSM journalists used only these prepared texts, so convenient for copying and pasting into their own reports.

The main argument of the defence was that the motive for the prosecution was entirely political, and that political offences were specifically excluded under the UK/US extradition treaty. For a normal human judge, that would suffice to dismiss the case. But Baraitser had a trick up her sleeve. Although the US/UK Extradition Treaty forbade political extraditions, this was only the Treaty, and this is not an international court, she said. That exemption does not appear in the UK Extradition Act. Therefore political extradition is not illegal in the UK, as the Treaty has no legal force on her Court. With such a judge, who needs the prosecution?

The defence quickly demolished the judge's devious rationalisations by pointing out that every extradition must satisfy two standards: (1) that of the UK Extradition Act, and (2) the specific Extradition Treaty with the country in question. Both are necessary; no man can be extradited to a specific country without consulting the specific treaty. The UK Extradition Act sets the ground rules. It is the relevant extradition treaty that sets out the conditions by which a prisoner might be extradited to a specific country. The Act allowed for a political extradition, and if the specific extradition treaty allowed it, the prisoner could be extradited. But this specific, namely US/UK extradition treaty does not permit political extraditions. Ergo, Assange could not be extradited by law.

Indeed a sixth-grade student could follow this simple logic. However, the dastardly Ms Baraitser kept repeating her claim that the Act does not forbid political extradition. We do not know what black spots hidden in the murky past of Judge Baraitser required that her history be blotted out by MI5's dark adepts, but I harbour a suspicion that this Jewish lady has had some field practice in the Jewish state, where judges invariably find the accused goy liable and guilty, and every torture is tolerated or even encouraged.

Her main preoccupation seemed to be in arranging Julian's suicide — or at least dishearten him to the point where his death by throttling might be explained away as suicide. He certainly seemed to be dispirited. The distinguished psychiatrist Professor Michael Kopelman provided a psychiatric assessment of Assange to the court:

"Mr Assange shows virtually all the risk factors which researchers from Oxford have described in prisoners who either suicide or make lethal attempts. ... I am as confident as a psychiatrist can ever be that, if extradition to the United States were to become imminent, Mr Assange would find a way of suiciding."

These words are especially poignant today, as it was reported that Manning attempted to commit suicide being locked up since last May at a detention centre in Alexandria, Va for steadfast refusal to bring evidence against Assange. The US/UK Deep State is a vengeful vicious beast that wants to punish Assange and Manning for revealing its nasty secrets. It is only the "whistle-blowers" who accused Trump and exonerated the Thief of Ukraine Biden that are protected.

In order to push Assange deeper into black despair, Baraitser enforced the regime of strict isolation on the prisoner. Assange had been kept in a bulletproof glass cage, unable to hear or to exchange notes with his lawyers. "I believe — wrote Craig Murray — that the Hannibal Lecter style confinement of Assange, this intellectual computer geek, is a deliberate attempt to drive Julian to suicide."

Julian is cruelly mistreated. When his Spanish lawyer left court to return home, on the way out he naturally stopped to shake hands with his client, proffering his fingers through the narrow slit in the glass cage. Assange half stood to take his lawyer's hand. The two security guards in the cage with Assange immediately sprang up, putting hands on Julian and forcing him to sit down, preventing the handshake.

On the first day of trial, Julian had twice been stripped naked and searched, eleven times been handcuffed, and five times been locked up in different holding cells. The lawyer for the defence, Fitzgerald, asked the judge to interfere and save Julian from this rough mistreatment.

The Baraitser stared down Fitzgerald and stated, in a voice laced with disdain, that he had raised such matters before and she had always replied that she had no jurisdiction over the prison estate. **You might make a recommendation, suggested Fitzgerald, they usually listen to judge's remarks.** Even the prosecution counsel James Lewis stood up to say the prosecution would also like Assange to have a fair hearing, and that he could confirm that what the defence were suggesting was normal practice. But bloodthirsty Baraitser flatly refused.

Edward Fitzgerald made a formal application for Julian to be allowed to sit beside his lawyers in the court. Julian was "a gentle, intellectual man" and not a terrorist. Baraitser replied that releasing Assange from the dock into the body of the court would mean he was released from custody. That is obviously nonsense. Again, the prosecution counsel James Lewis intervened on the side of the defence, for Baraitser's notion of law would not work anywhere outside Israeli courts in the occupied West Bank. Lewis said that prisoners, even the most dangerous of terrorists, gave evidence from the witness box in the body of the court next to the lawyers and magistrate. In the High Court prisoners frequently sat with their lawyers in extradition hearings, in extreme cases of violent criminals handcuffed to a security officer.

Baraitser replied that Assange might pose a danger to the public. It was a question of health and safety. Health and safety, forsooth! Such cynicism may be unprejudiced in British justice, and it should reserve a special place in hell for Ms Baraitser.

Why should she keep Assange in that box, unable to hear proceedings or instruct his lawyers, when even counsel for the US Government does not object to Assange openly sitting in the court? He is brought handcuffed and under heavy escort to and from his solitary cell to the armoured dock via an underground tunnel. In these circumstances, what possible need is there for him to be repeatedly strip- and cavity-searched? Why is he not permitted to shake hands or touch his lawyers through the slit in the armoured glass box?

It is a torture session, not a hearing. And the hearing, or rather the torture will continue in May — if Julian is still alive.

Israel Shamir can be reached at adam@israelshamir.net

<https://www.unz.com/ishamir/julian-in-the-dock/>

Australia: Melbourne teachers vote to defend Assange and Manning

Committee to Defend Public Education (CFPE)
World Socialist Web Site
14 March 2020

On March 11, teachers representing their colleagues at the Maribyrnong **regional meeting of the Australian Education Union (AEU)** in Melbourne passed resolutions demanding that the Australian government immediately act to secure the freedom of WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange and voicing their solidarity with whistle-blower Chelsea Manning. The important stand taken by the teachers should be followed by workers in every workplace and industry around the world.

A mass movement of the working class must be built to defend Assange. In a historic attack on freedom of speech, the Trump administration has charged him with multiple counts of espionage because WikiLeaks published the information that was courageously leaked by Manning exposing war crimes committed by American imperialism in the Iraq and Afghanistan and the extent of US diplomatic intrigues around the world.

The US is attempting to extradite Assange from the United Kingdom. Extradition hearings began last month and will resume in May, in what is likely to be a protracted legal case. Assange has been denied bail and is being incarcerated in the maximum security Belmarsh Prison under harsh conditions. The Australian citizen has been subjected to constant psychological and physical torment for close to a decade and his life is in danger.

The first resolution passed at the meeting insisted that the Australian government of Prime Minister Scott Morrison end its complicit collaboration with the persecution of Assange and intervene, using the full scope of its diplomatic and legal powers, to secure his safe passage to Australia. A second motion aimed at widening the campaign in defence of Assange was also adopted. It requires the Australian Education Union (AEU) to publish the resolution in “the next issue of the AEU News and AEU e-bulletin.”

The Maribyrnong regional meeting was **attended by some 20 teachers** representing at least 10 schools in Melbourne’s inner-western suburbs. It began with a discussion over the shocking conditions under which teachers must now work, such as unmanageable class sizes, excessive workloads and poverty-level wages for Education Support Staff. These conditions are a direct result of the agreements which the AEU has signed up for with state Liberal and Labor governments.

Teachers then voted to extend the duration of the meeting to allow for discussion on Assange.

The convenor of the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), Sue Phillips, moved the first resolution. She told her colleagues: “Assange has stated that he wants people at their workplaces to voice their support. The lead that teachers are taking in his defence must be advanced here by supporting this resolution.”

Phillips, a primary teacher at Moonee Ponds West Primary School, drew attention to the reason for Assange's incarceration: "Why does Assange face this situation? Because in 2010–2011 he revealed US war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq, along with diplomatic conspiracies. He did what every good investigative journalist should do.

"For exposing the criminal and secret operations of governments, information in the public interest, he is being punished in the most brutal and anti-democratic manner. The purpose of his extradition and the political show trial that is underway, is to intimidate and terrorise all journalists who uncover and expose the truth. Anyone who dares speak out against war crimes is under threat."

She explained that the aims of the US, Britain and Australia are demonstrated in the barbaric treatment of Assange. "The manner in which Assange is being dealt with in the courts is an indication of the anti-democratic and cruel procedures that have been meted out against him over nearly a decade and what he would face in the US. Anyone who suggests he is or will face a fair trial in the US is telling lies.

"On the first day Assange was handcuffed 11 times and stripped naked twice. He sits behind a glass cage, treated as if he is the worse type of criminal and terrorist. He can't hear properly and cannot pass notes or speak to his lawyers. On one of the days the judge began the trial without Assange present in the court and another day he had prepared notes from the previous day and they were taken from him."

The resolution stated: "This meeting of teachers and education support staff opposes the ongoing persecution of journalist, publisher and founder of WikiLeaks, Julian Assange, and courageous whistle-blower, Chelsea Manning. The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Nils Melzer, warns that Assange's continued exposure to arbitrariness and abuse may soon end up costing his life. We insist that the federal Morrison government uses its diplomatic powers to organise the safe return of Assange to Australia. We resolve to send this resolution to other schools and workplaces."

In supporting the motion, Will Marshall, a member of the Committee for Public Education, stated: "Assange needs the support of workers, teachers and students. The courts are clearly not going to dispense justice. That is why we should be involved. Secondly, the major governments are preparing for war. The US has just announced the largest ever funding for the military. They are determined to stop Assange because they are preparing for new crimes and new wars."

One teacher at the meeting pointed out, "Assange has done nothing illegal" and said that he should not be standing facing charges.

To this point, the Australian trade unions, including the AEU, have maintained a deafening silence on the question of Assange. This is above all due to their links with the Australian Labor Party, which held government in 2010 and, flowing from its support for the US-Australia military alliance, condemned WikiLeaks for exposing American war crimes. The unions' collaboration with the persecution of Assange is one of the main reasons that the Labor and, since 2013, the Coalition government has been able to deny any assistance to the Australian journalist and publisher.

At the conclusion of the Maribyrnong meeting, Daniel Mulholland, an Education Support Staff worker, stated: "Educators should defend Assange as if they were defending their own students. What sort of democracy do we have when such arbitrary measures are taken to arrest and intimidate journalists?"

The CFPE has initiated resolutions at both school and regional union meetings calling for the defence of Assange and Manning. The regional meeting at Maribyrnong is the latest in a campaign that is building momentum to defend democratic rights and Julian Assange.

Teachers at Footscray High School, in Melbourne's western suburbs, voted in December to oppose the extradition of Assange and to form a committee to take forward his defence. In February, a meeting of the Hills Association of the New South Wales Teachers Federation in north-west Sydney unanimously passed a similar resolution moved by Erika Laslett, a secondary teacher and member of the CFPE. The same resolution was moved by a CFPE supporter and passed unanimously by more than 30 teachers at a meeting of the Illawarra Teachers Association in Wollongong.

All workers who defend Assange, Manning and freedom of speech should likewise organise meetings at unionised and non-union sites and move resolutions calling for the freedom of Assange and Manning.

Hold meetings in your workplace, college, university or school to discuss the imminent threat to Assange's life and the dangers this poses to the democratic rights of the entire working class. Pass resolutions demanding the blocking of his extradition to the US and his immediate and unconditional freedom.

Teachers and education workers who want to make contact with the CFPE can email cfpe.aus@gmail.com or via its Facebook page:

www.facebook.com/commforpubliceducation

The CFPE Twitter account is @CFPE_Australia.

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/03/14/cfpe-m14.html>

Blow to Assange extradition after Chelsea Manning is freed and grand jury disbanded

*Tom Coburg
The Canary
14 March 2020*

War crimes whistleblower Chelsea Manning has been released from prison for refusing to testify before the WikiLeaks grand jury, which has been disbanded. This is not good news for the US government, which is hoping to extradite WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, in part, on charges linked to Manning.

On 11 March 2020, news emerged that Manning had attempted suicide and was hospitalised. The next day it was announced that judge Anthony Trenga, who was overseeing the WikiLeaks grand jury, had ordered the release of Manning from prison.

Manning was imprisoned in March 2019 for refusing to co-operate with the WikiLeaks grand jury. After two months she was released, but then re-arrested and imprisoned in May.

In February 2020, Manning's lawyers filed a motion arguing that their client was incoercible and so should be released.

This motion was crucial and stated that Chelsea Manning's declaration (Exhibit A): "... articulates her perceptions and the moral basis for her recalcitrance. Her solemn patience during eleven months in jail without having been accused, let alone convicted of a crime, speaks for itself."

The motion referred to a psychological assessment by Dr Sara Boyd (Exhibit B [under seal]) that: "...identifies and explains the characterological attributes from which Ms. Manning's persistence and morals spring, and those attributes that function to entrench and fortify those morals."

There was also support from Nils Melzer, UN rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, whose letter (Exhibit C): "...not only casts serious doubt on the permissibility of coercive sanctions, but provides profound moral support for Ms. Manning's self-perception."

Other material included a petition supporting Manning signed by 60,000 people (Exhibit D) that provided: "...compelling evidence of Ms. Manning's wide social support, and the kind of impact the withdrawal of that support would have on Ms. Manning, were she to change her position."

The motion concluded: "No realistic possibility remains that continued confinement or other sanctions will bring about Ms. Manning's testimony. Further confinement cannot attain its stated coercive purpose, and therefore will be not simply futile, but impermissibly punitive."

The motion clearly worked.

War crimes

In 2013, Manning, a former US army intelligence analyst, was convicted of violating America's Espionage Act — along with other offences — and sentenced to 35 years imprisonment. She was responsible for leaking hundreds of thousands of documents relating to the invasion of Iraq and the Afghanistan conflict. These were subsequently published by WikiLeaks.

Manning's most infamous war crime exposé was the video of a US Army helicopter in Baghdad firing on civilians, including a Reuters photographer and his driver. The crew also fired on a van that stopped to rescue one of the wounded men.

Manning is the recipient of many awards, including the Guardian's Person of the Year and the Sean MacBride Peace Prize.

In January 2017, former US president Barack Obama commuted Manning's sentence to end in May 2017.

Implications

With the release of Manning the WikiLeaks grand jury has been disbanded....

Manning's release could directly affect the outcome of the extradition hearing against Assange, due to resume in May. Indeed, the US authorities would no doubt have regarded Manning's testimony in regard to the initial charge of "Conspiracy to Commit Computer Intrusion" against Assange as pivotal.

Manning's continued silence may weaken the case generally against Assange, given she is referred to numerous times in the additional charges relating to the Espionage Act.

The extradition farce should end now and Assange be released.

Meanwhile, Manning desperately needs help to pay off her punitive court fines, which amount to \$256,000.

<https://www.thecanary.co/uk/analysis/2020/03/14/blow-to-assange-extradition-after-chelsea-manning-is-freed-and-grand-jury-disbanded/>

Doctors condemn Australian government's refusal to defend Assange

Oscar Grenfell
World Socialist Web Site
19 March 2020

In a letter publicly released today, almost 200 eminent doctors from around the world have condemned the Australian government's refusal to defend imprisoned journalist and WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange, warning that he faces heightened medical risks due to the rapidly expanding coronavirus pandemic.

The Doctors4Assange group wrote to the Australian government on December 15 and February 1 to insist that it immediately fulfil its obligations to Assange as an Australian citizen. It outlined the assessment of United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer, that Assange is showing medically-verifiable symptoms of psychological torture and warned that his life was in danger if he was not urgently released from Belmarsh Prison to a university teaching hospital.

The correspondence, which was also sent to the Labor Party opposition, went unanswered for months.

On February 18, Mat Kimberley, the assistant secretary for consular operations at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), finally replied on behalf of the government. His letter is a tissue of lies and evasions.

Kimberley blithely stated that the "Australian government rejects any suggestion by the UN Rapporteur on Torture that it is complicit in psychological torture or has shown a lack of consular support for Mr. Assange." He made an offhand dismissal of the professional opinion of the doctors that Assange has not received adequate medical care.

Kimberley described the imprisonment of Assange in a maximum-security facility designed to hold terrorists and murderers as "appropriate." He declared the government's confidence that "Mr. Assange will receive due process in the legal

proceedings he faces in the UK and we are likewise confident that he would receive due process should he face legal proceedings in the US.”

The DFAT bureaucrat’s declarations amount to a greenlight for the torture of an Australian citizen and journalist whose only “crime” has been to expose illegal wars, global diplomatic conspiracies and human rights violations. Given that Labor has ignored the doctors’ letters and has played a central role in the US-led pursuit of Assange, Kimberley’s statements can only be read as a bipartisan endorsement of the illegal persecution of an Australian citizen.

The Australian government’s response was issued after months of complaints by Assange’s lawyers that he was being denied the right to prepare his own defence. It was sent on the eve of the first week of British court hearing for Assange’s extradition to the US, which can only be described as a show trial. The WikiLeaks founder was repeatedly stripped naked and handcuffed, his legal documents were stolen by prison guards and he was isolated in a bullet-proof glass box at the back of the courtroom, preventing him from participating in the hearing.

In their latest letter, the doctors’ cite the assessment of the International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute that Assange’s treatment was “shocking and disproportionate,” and may have constituted a breach of his right to a fair trial and a violation of international law.

Kimberley falsely claimed that the Australian government was powerless to intervene in the legal processes of another country. In reality, the government has a clear legal responsibility and considerable powers to intervene when an Australian citizen is facing political persecution abroad. It has done so on many occasions, especially when the countries involved are in the crosshairs of US imperialism, such as Iran and China.

The government’s “confidence” that Assange will receive “due process” in the US is absurd and reveals the political character of its refusal to defend the WikiLeaks founder.

Assange has been the subject of a secret US Grand Jury for the past decade. If he is extradited, he will be tried in Eastern District of Virginia. The location has been selected because it is home to the largest concentration of government agents in the US. Assange would be tried in a sealed court, with a jury stacked full of CIA operatives, that has a 100 percent conviction rate in national-security cases. He faces a sentence of up to 175 years imprisonment in conditions of total isolation.

The DFAT official asserted that the government could no longer provide Assange with “consular assistance” because he had withdrawn his consent. Such unspecified “consular assistance” is worthless, under conditions in which the government has already declared that it will take no action to protect Assange’s rights. Its only purpose would be to allow Australian officials to monitor him and pass over information to Assange’s persecutors in the US.

The doctors correctly noted that the issue of “consular assistance” was a “red herring.” They wrote: “In the case that an Australian citizen’s human rights are being abused, including his human right to health, his right to be free from torture and arbitrary detention, his right to a fair trial, his right to lawyer-client confidentiality and his right to prepare a defence, we are reliably advised that, consular assistance

aside, government ministers can advocate for due legal process, and raise concerns about gross violations of rights with their overseas counterparts.”

The doctors continued: “In Julian Assange’s case, all of the above human rights have been violated, in a manner that endangers his health and contributes to his prolonged psychological torture as assessed by the UN Rapporteur on Torture and two medical experts specialised in the assessment and documentation of torture. **These surely are matters in which Government ministers have not only the ability but the obligation to raise concerns about gross violations of rights with their UK counterparts.**”

They noted, moreover, that according to the “Australian government’s own Human Rights Commission, the federal government has the overall legal responsibility for ensuring that Australian citizens’ human rights are protected.” It is the assessment not only of the UN rapporteur and the doctors, but of rights and civil liberties organisations internationally, that Assange’s legal and human rights are being trampled on.

The exchange is a damning indictment of the entire Australian political establishment. In their commitment to the US-Australia military alliance and Washington’s predatory wars and military preparations, the Australian parliamentary parties have signalled their support for political persecution and lawlessness.

The lies contained in Kimberley’s letter are the latest in a string of fabrications and evasions used by successive Australian governments to justify their refusal to defend Assange. This began with the Greens-backed Labor government of Julia Gillard, which in 2010 branded WikiLeaks as an organisation conducting “illegal activity,” falsely asserted that Assange had broken Australian laws and pledged to assist the US campaign against him.

The doctors’ letter makes clear that the Australian government, and all of the states participating in the persecution of Assange, have placed his life at risk.

The doctors stated that “with the president of the Prison Governors’ Association warning that prisons provide ‘fertile breeding grounds’ for coronavirus, Julian Assange’s life and health are at heightened risk due to his arbitrary detention during this global pandemic.”

They concluded by insisting that the Australian government “heed not only the doctors’ warnings, but those of respected legal and human rights bodies and authorities, many of which are calling for the US extradition request to be denied and Julian Assange’s incarceration and extradition trial to be ceased, in the name not only of medical ethics, but human rights and rule of law.”

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/03/19/assa-m19.html>

Growing demands for Assange’s release as first coronavirus case confirmed in British prisons

*Oscar Grenfell
World Socialist Web Site
21 March 2020*

There are mounting calls from Julian Assange's family, along with journalists and defenders of democratic rights, for his immediate release from London's Belmarsh Prison after the first coronavirus case was confirmed in the British penitentiary system on Wednesday.

The British government responded to the demands for Assange's freedom, and for measures to protect the safety of all prisoners, with unconcealed indifference. A Prison Services spokesman told the Daily Mail on Tuesday: **"We are not planning to release any prisoners as a result of COVID-19."**

The statement came after a call from the Appeal charity for the release of hundreds of inmates, including remand prisoners charged with non-violent offences, those with underlying health issues and those aged over 70.

Appeal's director Emily Bolton stated: "In this country, a prison sentence is supposed to be a deprivation of liberty; not a death sentence. Prisoners are part of families and our community, and those families and communities are desperately worried about their loved ones behind bars."

The stark warning was followed by confirmation that an inmate at the Strangeways Prison in Manchester tested positive on Wednesday. Last week, Andrea Albutt, president of the Prison Governors Association, stated that prisoners "will die" as a result of the pandemic. Health experts have warned of a mass coronavirus outbreak under conditions of overcrowding, limited medical care and poor sanitation.

The refusal to release Assange is particularly criminal. He has not been convicted of any offence, but is being detained in a maximum-security facility at the behest of the American government. He is a political prisoner, incarcerated solely to facilitate hearings for his extradition to the US, where he faces Espionage Act charges and life imprisonment for publishing evidence of war crimes.

Assange's poor health, moreover, is well documented. Since last November, eminent doctors from around the world have warned that he is being denied adequate medical care. Their statements, warning that Assange could die if he is not moved from Belmarsh Prison to a university teaching hospital, have been ignored by the British government and the Labour Party opposition.

The findings of United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer that Assange is exhibiting medically-verifiable symptoms of torture after ten years of persecution, also have been dismissed by the British and Australian authorities.

As early as 2015, doctors treating Assange in London's Ecuador embassy stated that his health was in such a compromised state that anything more than a mild illness could threaten his life. Since then, he has experienced an additional five years of government abuse and his medical condition has deteriorated further.

Last week, Christine Assange, the WikiLeaks publisher's mother, again called for his immediate release. She noted that some low-security prisons in the US had begun releasing non-violent detainees in response to the pandemic.

"My journalist son Julian Assange is detained in the UK's Belmarsh Prison without charge," she wrote, adding that he was "weak from chronic ill health. He must be released too to save his life."

More than 7,300 people have signed an online petition demanding Assange's immediate release. It notes that there is a high probability that prison authorities will shortly suspend all visits. This, it warns, would further affect Assange's psychological health, which has been damaged by prolonged periods of isolation during his arbitrary detention.

The petition states: "As a vulnerable prisoner whose health is already in jeopardy further isolation would be damaging in itself, let alone the threat that the virus breaks out inside the prison. The increased health risk means he should be released immediately."

It continues: "Releasing him and other vulnerable prisoners would reduce the risk of outbreak of the virus inside the prison. Julian Assange should be with his family during this time where he can prepare his defense against his extradition hearing."

The petition was initiated after a statement by WikiLeaks' ambassador Joseph Farrell, declaring: "With the authorities about to end social visits it's essential that Julian Assange be included in any release policy. His health is already in jeopardy and further isolation would be damaging in itself, let alone the threat that he might contract the virus itself."

The sharpest comments were made on Twitter by Stefania Maurizi, a prominent journalist who has collaborated with WikiLeaks over the past decade. An Italian citizen who has commented frequently on the devastating impact of the pandemic in that country, Maurizi wrote: "I am absolutely convinced we should get Julian Assange leaving Belmarsh Prison immediately and before it is too late for him. I am terrified he can die in prison due to the coronavirus epidemic. We know how terrible prisons are when it comes to health."

Maurizi noted that Iran, which is frequently vilified by the British government, has released some political prisoners amid the spread of coronavirus. Even the authoritarian dictatorship in Azerbaijan had begun taking similar measures.

Comments from health experts demonstrate that the warnings are no exaggeration. An article by three prominent British medical professionals on the Conversation today states: "Prison environments can create a perfect storm for spreading disease. Inmates often live in unsanitary, overcrowded conditions with limited access to healthcare." It notes the high incidence of underlying diseases and health issues within the prison population, and the inability of prisoners to self-isolate.

A 2018 parliamentary report, for instance, found that 15 percent of British prisoners suffered respiratory issues. Some 10 of 35 men's prisons failed to comply with minimum standards of cleanliness and hygiene. A prisoner's mother, cited in the Guardian today, stated that despite the pandemic, inmates are being forced to use communal hot water for drinks, along with other shared amenities.

The willful endangerment of Assange's life is a continuation of the attempts by the British, US and Australian governments to destroy the WikiLeaks publisher. This intent was exemplified in the first week of the US extradition hearings, which began on February 18. Assange was repeatedly strip-searched and handcuffed. His legal documents were stolen by prison guards and he was isolated in a bullet-proof glass box at the back of the court-room, preventing him from participating in the proceedings.

As Craig Murray, a prominent WikiLeaks collaborator stated, the transparent purpose was to intensify the prolonged psychological torture to which Assange has been subjected.

Murray noted that Assange's degrading treatment followed court-tendered documents warning that he was at risk of committing suicide. He wrote: "I believe that the Hannibal Lecter style confinement of Assange, this intellectual computer geek, which has no rational basis at all, is a deliberate attempt to drive Julian to suicide."

<https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2020/03/21/assa-m21.html>

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Internet address of this document:

<http://www.nnn.se/nordic/assange/Assange-2020a.pdf>