

ASSANGE & SWEDEN

A YEAR OF LIVING PRODUCTIVELY

Seeking to avoid extradition to the United States, Julian Assange has been confined in the London embassy of Ecuador since June 19th, 2012. That has provoked much “shrill abuse”, but media reports of his friendless isolation are greatly exaggerated.

July 4, 2013. Over a year has passed since Julian Assange walked into Ecuador’s London embassy and applied for asylum in order to avoid extradition to Sweden and, more crucially, subsequent delivery to the untender mercies of the United States.¹

It was on 19 June 2012 that Assange made his surprise move, and the reaction confirmed the validity of his stated concerns. For, although the offended party was ostensibly Sweden, it was from the United States that the angriest threats and denunciations were unleashed. When Ecuador decided to grant asylum in mid-August, the response was immediate and characteristically aggressive.

Claiming that it merely wished to fulfil its legal obligation to Sweden, but acting under pressure from Washington, the British government threatened to invade the embassy and remove Assange by force. As former U.K. ambassador Craig Murray related, “I returned to the UK today to be astonished by private confirmation from within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that the UK government has indeed decided — after immense pressure from the Obama administration — to enter the Ecuadorean Embassy and seize Julian Assange.

“This will be, beyond any argument, a blatant breach of the Vienna Convention of 1961, to which the UK is one of the original parties and which encodes the centuries — arguably millennia — of practice which have enabled diplomatic relations to function. The Vienna Convention is the most subscribed single international treaty in the world.”²

The threat was soon withdrawn, partly in response to outraged world opinion, perhaps mainly out of self-interested concern that a likely consequence of such a violation would be to endanger British embassies and diplomats around the world.

But there is no doubt that the threat was genuine, nor that it revealed the United States’ powerful interest in the extradition of Assange to Sweden — where he was wanted only for *questioning* regarding suspicions of relatively minor offences, the most serious of which is classified as “minor rape” (i.e. lacking any element of violence or compulsion). U.S. economist and commentator Mark Weisbrot pointedly inquired: “Is there anyone in their right mind who believes that the UK government would make such an unprecedented threat if this were just about an ordinary foreign citizen wanted for questioning— not criminal charges or a trial— by a foreign government?”

“We can infer that the Swedes have no legitimate reason for the extradition, since they were repeatedly offered the opportunity to question him in the UK, but rejected it, and have also refused to even put forth a reason for this refusal.”³ (Weisbrot’s inference was later given support by a member of Sweden’s Supreme Court; see reference to justice Stefan Lindskog on page 11.)

As so often, the category of “anyone in their right mind” appears to exclude most editorial employees of the mainstream press, as Kevin Gosztola observed:

“The coverage from media in the US, UK and Australia has been nothing but dismissive or outright sneering. Rather than admitting Assange is within his legal right to seek and apply for asylum from any country like Ecuador, media have focused on tangential issues.... The media have made it seem like Assange is hysterical to think he could end up in the grips of the United States if he goes to Sweden.... Joan Smith of *The Independent* called Assange’s asylum a part of an ongoing ‘one-man psychodrama’.

“The breadth of caricature, misinformation, misrepresentation and pretentiousness in coverage of Assange’s asylum request would be surprising if it weren’t for the fact that media have allowed many labels and smears to be attached to Assange without question. As of now, it would be hard to fault someone from the public who called Assange a sleazy, self-important, anti-American, anti-Semitic and high-tech info-terrorist.”⁴

Frothing with journalistic rage

As Julian Assange evades arrest by taking refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy... British commentators have targeted him with shrill abuse. They almost froth with rage as they cite petty examples of his supposed gaucheness, egotism and appearance, as if these were criminal faults....

An extraordinary aspect of the campaign against Assange is that op-ed writers feel free to pump out thousands of words about his alleged faults, with never a mention of far more serious state crimes revealed by WikiLeaks....

As for the suggestion that he exaggerates the chances of being extradited to the US from Sweden, this is surely very flip. Who would willingly take even a 5 per cent chance that their flight to Stockholm might result in 40 years’ detention in a US prison cell?

— Patrick Cockburn⁵

The paranoid narcissist

The general image of Assange conveyed by the mainstream press is one of a narcissistic, paranoid, emotional wreck whose unpleasant behaviour has driven away former friends and supporters, leaving him isolated and “holed up” in his Ecuadorian refuge. One variation on that theme was published by *The Guardian*, a principal beneficiary of Assange and WikiLeaks, in December of 2012: “...he seems more like an in-patient than an interviewee, his opening words slow and hesitant, the voice so cracked as to be barely audible. If you have ever visited someone convalescing after a breakdown, his demeanour would be instantly recognisable. Admirers cast him as the new Jason Bourne, but in these first few minutes I worry he may be heading more towards Miss Havisham” [the pathetic recluse of Dickens’ *Great Expectations*].⁶

Two months later, *The Guardian* was at it again: “... who in all seriousness can continue to suppress the odd smirk at the thought of Assange, holed up with his sunbed and his computer and his radioactive self-regard.... How can it be that the man who shot to fame



Photo: Al Burke

June 22, 2013: Supporters of Julian Assange keeping vigil outside Ecuador's London embassy, as they have done since he sought asylum there a year earlier. The mainstream media have generally ignored them, or dismissed them as misguided souls who have failed to grasp that their hero is "an ultimately insufferable narcissist" with "radioactive self-regard", etc., etc.

engaged in a swashbuckling, sublimely modern form of secret-busting has caused his former allies to wince at his name, as one might over a particularly misguided and naff teenage crush? ... If one subscribes to the view that only an ultimately insufferable narcissist could have had the balls to do what he did, then it was always going to come to this."⁷

An "insufferable narcissist", alone and friendless, etc., etc. As noted, *The Guardian* is far from alone and friendless in promulgating that view. Like so much else in the media, however, it does not conform with observable reality.

Among those who have yet to understand that they do not exist are the loyal supporters who have kept vigil outside Ecuador's London embassy ever since Assange first sought refuge there. Other supporters gathered inside the embassy on the evening of 22 June 2013 to join Assange in celebrating his first year of refuge from his alternative fate — i.e. indefinite incarceration in Sweden without being convicted or even charged with any crime, quite likely followed by transfer to the USA to be thoroughly abused for performing the proper function of journalists, although better than most. Due to the small quarters of the embassy, the gathering was limited to some 25 guests. Most of them have been actively engaged in the activities of WikiLeaks and/or the defence of Julian Assange, and their varied backgrounds reflect the range of support that he still enjoys.

They included: John Pilger, the widely respected journalist and documentary film-maker who has been one of Assange's strongest supporters from the start; Bianca Jagger, human rights activist and writer; Gavin McFadyen, Director of the Centre for Investigative Journalism at London's City University; Rigmor Robèrt, Swedish physician and author; Ethan Ingraham, a TV producer from Ireland; Barbara Kvocekova, a human rights lawyer from the Czech Republic, currently working at a London-based NGO; barrister John Jones, Q.C.; photographer Susan Benn; and the author of this article.

As for the host, Julian Assange, it was difficult to detect any trace of the mental distress or personality disorders routinely ascribed to him by the mainstream press. The discrepancy between that negative image and the man, himself, had also been noted some months earlier by a visitor from Australia who had evidently been smitten by the distorted media image: "I expected to find him self-absorbed, humourless and rather vain. Instead he was warm, engaging, unpretentious, intelligent and frank."⁸

That assessment was published just one day prior to the above-noted hit piece in *The Guardian* which characterized Assange as "an ultimately insufferable narcissist" with "radioactive self-regard", etc. — raising the question of how two descriptions of the same individual could be so diametrically opposed. One plausible explanation is that most of those who have denigrated and ridiculed Assange in the media have little or no personal knowledge of him, while those who have more positive opinions have actually spent some time with him (and have not been on a media mission to malign his character).

"Not everyone has the opportunity that I have to engage with him," notes Jennifer Robinson, who has provided counsel to Assange since the start of the U.K. extradition proceedings in late 2010.

"The way he is portrayed in the media is different to the way he is in person. He is engaging, warm, far more self-deprecating than anyone realises and very concerned about his staff." She adds that, he is also "incredibly brave. I can't imagine anyone else standing in his shoes."⁹



Photo: Susan Benn

Rigmor Robèrt, John Pilger and Julian Assange in a friendly encounter at Ecuador's London Embassy on 22 June 2013.

There are exceptions, of course — former associates and supporters who for various stated reasons have become disaffected with and critical of Assange. Inevitably, those exceptions have been presented by the mainstream media as the norm. The general rule is that anyone who criticizes Assange is a reliable source whose claims require no verification, while those who support him are either ignored or dismissed on dubious grounds that require no justification.

One example of the latter is provided by Hanne Kjoller, a persistently malicious and illogical editorialist with Sweden's leading daily newspaper who has likened Assange to Oscar Pistorius, the South African Olympic athlete suspected of murdering his fiancée.

"The first thing that strikes me when I look at the South African news clippings, and read newspaper articles and commentaries, is the similarity with Julian Assange and the sex crimes of which he is suspected," explains Ms. Kjoller. "Of course it hurts when a hero falls — so much so that some people deny that it has happened. Just as in the case of Julian Assange, who is also a hero to some, there are many who 'know' that Oscar Pistorius is innocent."¹⁰

Such rhetorical linkage, of Assange to other men who have been suspected or found guilty of serious crimes, is a recurrent phenomenon. The evident dilemma for journalists who are determined to attack Assange is that they lack any substantive basis for doing so. The solution has been to arbitrarily render him guilty or highly suspect by association with the likes of Oscar Pistorius, Roman Polanski and Dominique Strauss-Kahn (the last two being guilty / suspected of various sex crimes).

Reliably useful sources

The most useful and frequently cited “reliable source” in such matters has been Daniel Domscheit-Berg who, according to WikiLeaks insiders, has grossly exaggerated the importance of his former role in the organization — i.e. before he sabotaged its computer system and stole a large volume of information which anonymous leakers had submitted in good faith to WikiLeaks, not to Daniel Domscheit-Berg.

Since being dismissed in 2010, Domscheit-Berg has, among other things, announced plans to start a similar organization (which have yet to materialize) and published a book containing some criticism of Assange and a great deal of trivial gossip.

Much, if not most of what Domscheit-Berg has said and written about Assange has been called into well-documented question by the latter’s supporters and more neutral observers. According to a statement by WikiLeaks in 2011:

“In [his] book Domscheit-Berg confesses to various acts of sabotage against the organization. The former WikiLeaks staffer admits to having damaged the site’s primary submission system and [to having] stolen material....

“It should be noted that Domscheit-Berg’s roles within WikiLeaks were limited and started to diminish almost a year ago as his integrity and stability were questioned. He has falsely misrepresented himself in the press as a programmer, computer-scientist, security expert, architect, editor, founder, director and spokesman. He is not a founder or co-founder, nor was there any contact with him during the founding years....

“The negotiations [for return of the stolen material] have now been terminated by the mediator, Andy Müller-Maguhn, who has stated that he doubts Mr. Domscheit-Berg’s integrity and [his stated] willingness to return the material, and that under those circumstances Müller-Maguhn cannot meaningfully continue to mediate. In response, Mr. Domscheit-Berg has stated that he has, or is about to, destroy thousands of unpublished whistleblowers’ disclosures sent to WikiLeaks. The material is irreplaceable and includes substantial information on many issues of public importance, human rights abuses, mass telecommunications interception, banking and the planning of dozens of neo-nazi groups. Our sources have in some cases risked their lives or freedom attempting to convey these disclosures to WikiLeaks and to the public.” Etc., etc.¹¹

However, none of that matters to the mainstream media, which have repeatedly and uncritically cited the dismissed WikiLeaks employee in accordance with the above-noted rule that all criticism of Assange is assumed to be valid. (For a detailed and more sceptical assessment of Domscheit-Berg’s credibility, see “Revenge Of The Second Banana” by Ramon Glazov.¹²)

Another prominent critic is Jemima Khan, who went public with her complaints in February of 2013 with an article in the *New Statesman* headlined, “How the Wikileaks founder alienated his allies”.¹³ A London socialite who contributed a sizable sum of money to Assange’s bail security during the extradition proceedings and lost most of it

when he sought asylum, Ms. Khan is an “associate editor” at the venerable British weekly. Her article is poorly reasoned and contains numerous inaccuracies, but no matter: It and she have served the mainstream media quite nicely as further proof that the narcissistic Assange is now alone and friendless, having alienated most or all of his former supporters.

As noted above, however, reports of Assange’s self-inflicted isolation are greatly exaggerated; in fact, he enjoys the continued support of numerous friends and associates. One of them is Joseph Farrell, who works closely with Assange and issued a response to Ms. Khan’s complaints. It is quoted extensively below, because it serves not only as a well-informed response to her, but to Assange’s detractors in general.

“Dear Jemima,

“As you can imagine, when I read your article in the *New Statesman* I was very surprised. I was also shocked, but most of all, I was disappointed....

“Julian has had significant relationships with hundreds of people. Your list of so-called alienated and disaffected allies is not long: your article mentions nine people, one of whom Julian has never actually even met.

“You list Mark Stephens, an internationally little-known media lawyer who had a contractual dispute with Julian and who charged Julian more than half a million pounds for a magistrate’s court case defence. Yet you overlook Gareth Peirce, “the doyenne of British defence lawyers”; Michael Ratner, President Emeritus of the Center for Constitutional Rights and other lawyers at the CCR; Baltasar Garzon, the Spanish judge; Jennifer Robinson, who left Mark Stephens’ firm over the issue; Baroness Helena Kennedy QC; Geoffrey Robertson QC, the acclaimed human rights lawyer whose table you sit at regularly; John Jones; Julian Burnside SC and Julian’s other lawyers in Australia; his lawyers in Ecuador; the Icelandic lawyers; the Danish lawyers; the Washington lawyers; or any of the rest of an international team of dozens of lawyers who represent or advise Julian and WikiLeaks.

“You list Jamie Byng, who published an unprepared, unapproved, unfinished manuscript that had not been fact-checked, without Julian’s knowledge, but you do not mention Colin Robinson or John Oakes of OR Books, with whom Julian has published a successful and acclaimed book without any problems or disagreements. Neither do you mention the more than fifteen other publishers who are releasing his *Cypherpunks* book in various languages, or indeed the publishers of *Underground* with whom he has maintained a good relationship for more than fifteen years.

“You list Daniel Domscheit-Berg, who sabotaged WikiLeaks’ anonymous online submission system, first stole and then deleted more than 3,000 submissions evidencing, *inter alia*, war crimes, corruption and bank fraud.... His entire livelihood is earned by constantly backstabbing the man who fired him.

“You list a person, who you incorrectly describe as ‘the technical whizz behind much of the WikiLeaks platform’, who was in actual fact a technician contracted to upgrade our submission platform according to Julian’s architectural design specifications. He was first referred to in Domscheit-Berg’s book as ‘the architect’, a propaganda term invented by Domscheit-Berg for his book well after he was suspended from WikiLeaks. The term is clearly designed as an attempt to steal Julian’s creative authority. But you are correct that this is the way that he is portrayed in Daniel Domscheit-Berg’s book, which contains numerous falsehoods....

“You list the *Guardian* and the *New York Times*, the two organisations who broke their agreements with us.

“One of the contractual clauses that the *Guardian* broke was to disclose a password that unlocked a list to all the diplomatic cables, which it published in its book in an act of gross negligence. Both the *Guardian* and the *New York Times* have written factually incorrect books about us to whitewash their deceitful actions, which they continue to profit from and promote.

“You don't, however, mention the 110 media partners with whom we have ongoing working relationships, some of whom have also written books about WikiLeaks but who donate all the profits to us, as a gesture and in solidarity to help us circumvent a banking blockade that has eroded the majority of our resources.

“Why don't you list the hundreds of activists, researchers and publishers who play a day-to-day role in WikiLeaks' operations — the technicians who maintain servers; the developers, mathematicians and cryptographers who build new search interfaces and oversee the internal security protocol; those who curate data for us; the investigators who corroborate submitted material; or the managers and administrators who plan and bring projects to fruition?

“Why don't you list the allies and friends across the world who enjoy a close personal relationship with Julian and who are part of the same support community that you once were.... Is it because they do not seek acclaim in the press and because they do not say negative things about Julian, and hence have zero currency in the news?

“... Over a lunch you questioned [his] fear of extradition to the US, and when I asked you what you would do in his position you refused to answer the question. I asked you more than six times what you would do in his shoes. Having offered to cooperate with the Swedish investigation non-stop for the past two years and [having] been refused with no proper explanation, and believing that you would end up in an American prison for decades, in solitary confinement and under SAMs, what would you do? You never gave me a concrete answer....

“[Regarding your complaint of being neglected:] You could have spoken to Julian in person. He did call you — more than once. You could have called back. You could have come to visit him to check on his well-being, as many others have done. [You had several



“Jemima Khan in the sitting room of her Fulham house, which she decorated herself”, reads the caption to this photo with a gushing profile in the New York Times, one of the media that has uncritically propagated her criticism of Julian Assange.

opportunities to speak with him] which you declined. These are all times when you could have asked Julian in person about your issues....

"It is one thing to publicly disagree with someone, or even to distance oneself in public from a former ally, but it is quite another to use one's own publication to the further harm of a political refugee suffering the persecution of a superpower. I imagine you must have vetted the magazine cover, which claims that Julian is 'alone'. Julian is not alone. That *New Statesman* front page was used to harm the entire WikiLeaks project out of disaffection. It was also an attempt to cast a shadow on all his allies. And yet you were the one who said: 'he needs friends not enemies'. Julian has both friends and enemies. He does not need or seek friends who only agree with him (in fact, I have not met one non-argumentative friend of his) but he certainly does not need friends who are in fact enemies...."¹⁴

The work continues

Among those invited to the festivities at the embassy on June 22nd but unable to attend was Jennifer Robinson (see page 4). Also missing was Sarah Harrison, a close associate of Assange whose absence was due to the fact that she was just then accompanying whistleblower Edward Snowden on his attempt to escape the vengeance of the U.S. government whose illicit activities he had recently exposed.

Snowden's disclosures of massive, secret and illegal surveillance did not come as a surprise to Assange. He had warned of such a development in the recent co-authored book, *Cypherpunks*, and in a book review published just days before Snowden's first revelations exploded in the world press. The latter included the following observations:

"*The New Digital Age* is a startlingly clear and provocative blueprint for technocratic imperialism, from two of its leading witch doctors, Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen, who construct a new idiom for United States global power in the 21st century....

"The book proselytizes the role of technology in reshaping the world's people and nations into likenesses of the world's dominant superpower, whether they want to be reshaped or not....

"The erosion of individual privacy in the West and the attendant centralization of power make abuses inevitable.... The section on 'repressive autocracies' describes, disapprovingly, various repressive surveillance measures: legislation to insert back doors into software to enable spying on citizens, monitoring of social networks and the collection of intelligence on entire populations. All of these are already in widespread use in the United States...."¹⁵

That analysis was abundantly confirmed by the disclosures of Edward Snowden, who requested advice and assistance from WikiLeaks in his efforts to evade the clutches of the U.S. government. In addition to the assistance of Sarah Harrison, WikiLeaks has provided Snowden with financial and other support.

According to WikiLeaks spokesman Kristinn Hrafnsson, "We have been helping him on two fronts: on one side, our legal team has been in contact and consultation and advising his legal team — for obvious reasons our legal team has vast knowledge in matters of extradition so it's quite natural that they could assist in many ways. Secondly we have been a go-between, carrying messages from Mr Snowden and his team to officials and governments."

All of this has presumably been co-ordinated by Assange, who explains that, “I have personal sympathy with Mr Snowden, having lived through a very similar experience, but the Wikileaks organisation more broadly exists to defend the practical rights of whistleblowers to bring their information to the public.”¹⁶

Aiding whistleblowers in distress is only one of the tasks that Assange has been able to perform from the limited confines of his embassy refuge. Others include: writing articles and books; overseeing major WikiLeaks releases such as the Global Intelligence Files and the Kissinger Cables¹⁷; maintaining an extensive global network of contacts and collaborators; establishing a new political party in Australia and conducting a campaign for election to that country’s Senate in co-operation with numerous supporters, etc. — none of which would have been possible if he were caged in a Swedish jail or a U.S. prison.

Notes Kristin Hrafnsson: “He has been maintaining a positive attitude. He is doing fine; and he has been busy and he has been working, leading our work under these rather difficult conditions.... I think that he has an incredible ability to adapt to difficult situations. He is getting a bit used to that now. It is not just the year in the Ecuadorian Embassy; before that we had imprisonment and house arrest, so this is a situation that is becoming easier. He has a strong character and he is capable of adapting to the situation.”¹⁸

Of course, this might be easily dismissed as the biased view of a loyal friend and associate, if it were not for the fact that Hrafnsson is far from alone in this regard, as noted.

In any event, Assange no longer has any loyal friends or associates according to the mainstream media. That was still a popular theme just five days after Assange joined a number of friends in celebrating his first year of safe and productive refuge in the embassy.

Musing in *The Independent* under the sardonic headline, “A year on and it’s still unclear: Does God have a Julian Assange complex?”,

Simon Kelner regaled his readers with a tale of Julian Assange and his “alien-like stare” who was “once the most infamous public figure in the world, but who now goes about his daily business of extradition-dodging in the embassy, which apparently involves a rather large period of time on a sun bed, unnoticed and unremarked upon.”¹⁹

This sort of thing, of which there is a great abundance, suggests that there is indeed some sort of craziness associated with the figure of Julian Assange, but that it does not reside in him — unless he is afflicted with some mysterious malady that induces journalists and others to assail him with “shrill abuse”, to cite Alexander Cockburn (page 2).



Photo: Al Burke

The British government has encircled the Ecuadorian Embassy with police since Julian entered it on 19 June 2012 — a show of force that has already cost some 4 million pounds (ca. USD 6 million), with no end in sight.

Meanwhile, in Sweden...

Speaking of shrill abuse, there has been no shortage of it in Sweden. Assange's decision to seek asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy was angrily denounced as a cowardly attempt to avoid Swedish justice which, despite voluminous evidence to the contrary, was declared to be unimpeachable.

"Assange showed himself to be a cowardly swine" declared columnist Oisín Cantwell in the often swinish tabloid *Aftonbladet*, Sweden's largest daily. "The truth is that Julian Assange's stated reasons for avoiding Swedish justice are bullshit. He has shown himself to be a completely different person than the heroic fighter for freedom of expression that he has made himself out to be."²⁰

In the even more swinish tabloid, *Expressen*, TV hostess Jenny Strömstedt offered the modest proposal that Assange could be put on display in a glassed-in room at the London embassy where "we could get used to the idea of paying an entrance fee in order to watch his aging struggles".²¹

The Guardian recruited *Expressen*'s culture editor, Karin Olsson, to proclaim that: "After this, Julian Assange has very few friends left in Sweden. Julian Assange's circus has pulled off another breathtaking stunt: he has won political asylum in Ecuador. Assange's flight from Sweden, a decent democracy with a largely excellent justice system, takes ever more absurd forms." It was only possible because it served the devious purpose of Ecuador's dictator-president Correa, explained Ms. Olsson: "Assange is a plaything for the president's megalomania." Etc., etc.²²

As with much else that is stated by *Expressen* journalists, there is no discernable basis for Ms. Olsson's confident assertions, especially those presuming reliable knowledge of general opinion in her homeland: Surveys of Swedish news consumers have found that only some ten per cent regard *Expressen* as a trustworthy source.

That was not the first time that *The Guardian* had enlisted Ms. Olsson to malign Assange, illustrating the incestuous relationship that has developed in the ongoing campaign against the leader of WikiLeaks, between ethically and/or intellectually challenged Swedish journalists and kindred colleagues abroad.

Not to be left out, and certainly not by media such as *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen*, was the politician-lawyer representing the two women on whose behalf Swedish authorities have launched an investigation — but have not yet filed charges — against Assange. Claes Borgström, who has since been dismissed by them, declared that Assange's successful application for asylum demonstrated that he was "an egotistical coward who has not a thought for the women. When he says that he fears being turned over to the USA, it is merely an attempt to shift the focus. There is, in fact, no such risk."²³



Jenny Strömstedt, whose modest proposal for the entertaining glass-encagement of Julian Assange was included in a column entitled "Less talk and more action: The new woman is here."

Swedish political leaders have also contributed to the media campaign against Assange. One such is Göran Hägglund, leader of the Christian Democratic Party which is part of the current coalition government. His response to the news that Assange's application for asylum had been approved by Ecuador was: "Sick. A coward who does not dare to have his case tried in court.... Assange is a very cowardly person who does not dare to confront the accusations against him."

Hägglund was also critical of the decision by Ecuador to grant asylum: "It might very well be that country's [hatred of the United States] that lies behind such a decision, or it might also quite simply be a desire for publicity," speculated the good Christian.²⁴

Plenty to fear

Two main themes in the public discussion of Assange's struggle to avoid extradition to Sweden are that (a) it is not possible or reasonable for the prosecution to interview him in London, as Assange and many others have urged it to do, and (b) the government cannot offer a guarantee that he will not be further extradited to the United States as a condition of his voluntary return to Sweden, since extradition is a purely legal matter that is determined by an independent court, not by the government.

Both arguments, which have been frequently adduced in Sweden and elsewhere, have been refuted by judicial experts; and they were dealt what ought to have been a final blow in early 2013 by none other than a member of Sweden's Supreme Court.

It was in April that Justice Stefan Lindskog visited Assange's native land of Australia to deliver a public lecture entitled, "The Assange Affair: freedom of speech and freedom of information, a global perspective". It was unusual, to say the least, for a justice to publicly address an issue that might very well be adjudicated by the court in the future. Assange and others suspected that it was part of a government plot to prejudice the case to his disadvantage.

However, what Lindskog had to say gave scant comfort to Assange's antagonists. "If a person whose extradition is requested opposes extradition," he explained, "it falls to the Supreme Court to examine whether extradition can be legally granted under the conditions laid down by law. The Supreme Court then delivers its opinion to the government for use in its examination of the case.

"Swedish men just don't want to use condoms"

The principal basis for the accusations against Assange, and one of the main reasons cited for his designation as a "swine", etc., is his alleged reluctance to wear a condom. If so, it appears that he is not alone.

On 19 June 2012, the same day that Assange entered Ecuador's London embassy to seek asylum, "a single American woman in her late twenties who has now lived in Stockholm for over a year" informed readers of a Swedish newspaper that she was "constantly amazed that the majority of Swedish men I've encountered do not use — or, dare I say — never use, condoms...."

"Out of the six Swedish men that I've casually dated so far here in Stockholm, every single one of them seems to have some sort of issue or hang-up with using this little piece of plastic...."

"I can honestly say that since moving to Sweden, this is the first time that I have encountered such a strong dislike for something that really is only meant to protect you."²⁵

"If the Supreme Court holds that there is any legal impediment to extradition, the government is not allowed to approve the request. The government can, however, refuse extradition even if the Supreme Court has not declared against it."

As lawyer-journalist Glenn Greenwald observed, "The evidence that this is true has long been clear. Like most governments, the Swedish government retains the power to refuse extradition even when its courts find that it would be legally valid; that's because extradition entails more than just legalistic questions but also encompasses political considerations and questions of fairness and equity."²⁶

Justice Lindskog also characterized the prosecution's handling of the case as "a mess" and said that, "During my years as a practising lawyer I learned to mistrust any organisation, including the state.... I think that one shall not presume that the state, or any part of it, is always good. If anything should be presumed at all, it is to the contrary. It is sometimes necessary to view the different authorities of the state as heads of a vicious Hydra. You have to be attentive and to be prepared to fight the evil that a misled intent to do well can result in...."

"At the end of the day, many years from now, I think Assange will not, even in Sweden, be associated with his efforts to escape the laws of Sweden. He will be thought of as the person who made public some pieces of classified information to the benefit of mankind."

"Crimes against humanity such as the [WikiLeaks images of Iraqi civilians being killed in a] helicopter shooting need to be made known. The good made by leakage of such information cannot be underestimated. It should never be a crime to make crimes of state known."²⁷

In the following discussion, Lindskog also said: "I would like to comment upon the possibility of the prosecutor to go to London. It is possible that the prosecutor could travel to London and interrogate him there. I have no answer to the question why that has not happened."²⁸

None of this offered much comfort to Assange's enemies and assailants, but at least one Swedish lawyer with experience in such matters strongly approved. "The management and preliminary investigation of the so-called Assange case is a judicial scandal in which genius thinking has clouded judgement," wrote Raoul Smitt in a legal journal. "Under the circumstances, it would be unreasonable to deny that Assange has genuine grounds to fear being extradited to the United States where he risks being sentenced to lifelong imprisonment."

"All honour to Justice Stefan Lindskog [for his remarks in Australia]. Those who criticize Lindskog may be regarded as part of the general intellectual mess that has characterized the management of the Assange case...."

"Given the way that the prosecution has handled the Assange investigation, it would probably be difficult — most likely even impossible — to ensure a fair trial."²⁹

Tabloidism as usual

True to form, however, *Expressen* misreported Justice Lindskog's remarks by interpreting them to mean the opposite of what he actually said, and the same falsehoods were repeated in some international media.

Things are not much better at the other national tabloid, *Aftonbladet*. Less than a week after the first anniversary of Assange's enforced confinement in Ecuador's London

embassy, Sweden's largest daily published an article that conveyed the impression that his guilt had already been established: "Anna, 34, talks about Assange's assault". The reference is to alleged victim Anna Ardin, but the article misrepresents her testimony to the police and ignores the many contradictions of her words and actions.

Predictably, *Aftonbladet* repeats the standard mantra that Assange is "an isolated, homeless, paranoid man who subjects his co-workers to the same sort of censorship that he wanted to eradicate", etc., etc.³⁰

Thus, it appears that not much has changed in the collective conscience and conventional wisdom of the Swedish media. That and much else indicate that Julian Assange was wise to seek asylum and to avoid extradition to Sweden by all means possible.

— Al Burke
4 July 2013

NOTES*

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Note: Blind hero-worship is not a requirement for belief in Assange's innocence, as the evidence for it is substantial. See: www.nnn.se/nordic/assange/summary.htm
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14. Joseph Farrell, "Response to Jemima Khan". Justice for Assange, 2013-03-08 <http://justice4assange.com/Response-to-Jemima-Khan.html>
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