

Global condemnations of Assange extradition order as Australian government refuses to defend persecuted journalist

Oscar Grenfell
18 June 2022

Yesterday's approval by British Home Secretary Priti Patel of an order for Julian Assange's extradition to the US has been condemned by rights groups and principled defenders of civil liberties as a major step toward the outlawing of freedom of speech and the press.

Subject to further legal appeals, Patel's order amounts to a death sentence that would place Assange directly in the hands of the US military and intelligence agencies that have sought to destroy him for more than a decade. Assange is to be buried in an American supermax prison, never to be seen again, for the "crime" of exposing US imperialism's illegal wars, mass spying operations and global diplomatic conspiracies.

The brief Home Office statement summed up the blithe criminality of the protracted US-British-Australian witch-hunt of Assange. "In this case, the UK courts have not found that it would be oppressive, unjust or an abuse of process to extradite Mr Assange," and therefore Patel was obliged to approve the order, it stated.

Speaking at a press conference after the announcement, Assange's lawyer Jennifer Robinson skewered these official lies. Robinson noted that the US pursuit of Assange had involved the "seizure of legally privileged material, unlawful spying on him, his legal team and his family, unlawful plots to assassinate or kidnap him." It was "hard to imagine a case with more abuse of process than this one."

Through more than two years of extradition proceedings, the attitude of the British judiciary has recalled the wise monkeys who saw and heard no evil.

Despite being corroborated by video and photographic evidence, the allegations that the US Central Intelligence Agency orchestrated a massive illegal spying campaign against Assange while he was a political refugee in Ecuador's embassy, have left little mark on court hearings.

The fact that the surveillance material includes privileged communications between Assange and his lawyers should have seen the extradition request thrown out years ago, and

its authors themselves subjected to legal proceedings.

Likewise, the British judiciary has been unfazed by last September's revelations, attested to *Yahoo! News* by 30 former US officials, that then US President Donald Trump and CIA director Mike Pompeo were involved in discussions about kidnapping or assassinating Assange in 2017.

As the *Yahoo* report indicates, the indictment that forms the basis of the extradition request was drawn up in late 2017, so that if CIA agents snatched Assange from London, and returned him to Langley, Virginia, their extraordinary rendition would have had a pseudo-legal backing.

Having swept all this aside, the British High Court last December accepted self-contradictory and worthless US diplomatic "assurances" that Assange would not be treated badly if were he placed in the hands of the criminals who concocted those plots, including of murder.

In practice, this means that the rendition is proceeding through the courts. Together with the entire British political establishment, the country's judiciary has played the linchpin role in the deprivation of Assange's liberty for more than a decade, through legal chicanery, the jettisoning of precedent and established norms, and outright refusals to abide by fundamental tenets of international law.

While it proceeds with its judicial lynching of Assange, the British state quietly admitted in separate proceedings to have unlawfully surveilled his lawyer Robinson. Meanwhile, *El Pais* reported last week that Britain is obstructing the Spanish National High Court from examining other allegations of illegal spying on Assange's legal team.

Taken together, the various abuses to which Assange has been subjected, and the protracted character of his persecution, brand it as one of the political crimes of the century.

Speaking at yesterday's press conference, Assange's wife Stella Moris said the British legal process was being "used to prolong Julian's suffering." Britain, she said, "should not be engaging in persecution on behalf of a foreign power that

is out for revenge... that foreign power committed crimes which Julian put into the sunlight.”

Moris vowed, “we’re going to fight this,” including through a final appeal within the British set-up. Robinson explained that this would focus on the political nature of the prosecution, its contravention of the British-US extradition treaty and the various abuses, including the CIA plots against Assange.

Together with Moris and WikiLeaks, press groups, journalists’ associations and international rights groups warned that Patel’s decision represents a frontal onslaught on core rights that will be deployed against others.

American whistleblower, Edward Snowden, who exposed mass NSA spying, tweeted: “Hard to believe, but it looks real. Every serious press freedom group in the world has protested this. It is an appalling symbol of how far the British and American governments’ commitment to human rights has declined.”

Well-known Australian investigative journalist John Pilger posted: “Home Secretary Priti Patel has approved the extradition of Julian #Assange to an American hellhole. A new appeal will now challenge the political rotteness of British ‘justice.’ Either we raise our voices as never before, or our silence colludes in the death of an heroic man.”

Assange’s ongoing persecution is part of a war on the social and democratic rights of the working class that goes hand in hand with the eruption of militarism globally.

The governments spearheading the campaign against Assange are preparing even greater war crimes, with their proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and the US-led preparations for conflict with China. All of them have unleashed mass illness and death throughout the pandemic, rejecting the necessary health measures to contain COVID as an unacceptable impost on corporate profits. Now they are inflicting an unprecedented global inflation crisis on the backs of the working people.

All this is fuelling a major intensification of the class struggle. The frame-up of Assange is intended as a precedent to suppress widespread anti-war sentiment, and crack down on the emerging struggles of the working class against war, austerity and the “let it rip” COVID policies.

In this, the political establishment is as one. In the US, the Republicans and the Democrats are united in the pursuit of Assange. Biden is seeking to finish the assassination that Trump allegedly discussed. In Britain, there is not a shred of difference between the decrepit Tory administration and the Labour opposition led by Keir Starmer. As former head of the Crown Prosecution Service, Starmer was intimately involved in the first stages of the campaign against WikiLeaks.

The universal line-up of the capitalist governments behind

the persecution of Assange, as part of their broader turn to authoritarianism, has been epitomised in Australia.

Since coming to office last month, the Labor government has functioned as an attack dog of the US confrontation with China in the Indo-Pacific, while declaring the necessity for sweeping austerity and other pro-business measures.

In this context, it has rejected calls that it act to free Assange, who is an Australian citizen. In a statement last night, Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus “took note” of Patel’s extradition order.

In language identical to that of the previous Liberal-National government, Labor claimed it was “not a party to Mr Assange’s case, nor can the Australian government intervene in the legal affairs of another country.”

In other words, the British courts can string Assange up, and they will merely “take note.” This line, which amounts to a rubberstamp to the frame-up of an Australian journalist, is contradicted by dozens of precedents, in which Australian governments have fulfilled their obligation to persecuted citizens abroad.

It demonstrates, yet again, that Assange’s freedom will not be won through plaintive appeals to the powers-that-be, or hopeless illusion-mongering in Labor or any other section of the political establishment.

The fight to defend Assange, like the struggle against war, the attacks on social conditions and the ripping up of democratic rights, depends upon the independent mobilisation of the working class against a capitalist political establishment that is hurtling to the right. Patel’s announcement means that the struggle to fuse the fight for Assange’s freedom with the developing movement of the working class is an urgent issue of the day.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact