

Stella Assange: “Julian is just one decision away from being extradited”

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At a press conference in London Wednesday, supporters of imprisoned WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange warned that a High Court ruling on Monday could see him extradited to the United States “within 24 hours”.

Stella Assange told a Foreign Press Association (FPA) briefing that if Britain’s High Court ruled against her husband next week, “there will be no further avenues for appeal in the UK.”

She was joined by WikiLeaks editor-in-chief Kristinn Hrafnsson, Reporters Without Borders campaign director Rebecca Vincent, and lawyer Jennifer Robinson who appeared via video-link from Australia.

Stella reminded journalists that Assange has been “in one form of detention or another” since December 2010, when he was placed under house arrest just seven days after WikiLeaks started publishing leaked US diplomatic cables. Since British police seized him from the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, he has spent five years without charge “in the UK’s most notorious prison”.

Assange is the victim of a political and judicial witch-hunt led by the US and Britain, in retribution for WikiLeaks’ courageous journalism exposing war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. Britain’s High Court will hear a final appeal from Assange on the narrowest grounds: whether to accept worthless US “assurances” that a man they tried to assassinate will receive First Amendment protections if he is extradited.

Arguments have been submitted to the High Court by US government lawyers and by Assange’s legal team. Both sides will argue their case on Monday morning, with a decision likely later that day. Stella explained, “The timing is uncertain, but we know that in other national security extradition cases, the person has been extradited within 24-hours of a decision.”

Hrafnsson told the assembled media, “It is abundantly clear that the process in the courts in the United Kingdom are corrupt. The case is rigged against Julian.”

He continued: “I know these are harsh words, and words that we usually have for courts in non-European countries, non-Western countries, but I’ve come to the opinion that that is absolutely the case. This is institutional corruption on a judicial level. Julian Assange is a political prisoner. It’s abundantly clear.”

He appealed to the assembled journalists: “I hope that you can look into the details of the case where the evidence is basically screaming at you.”

He pointed by way of example to paragraph 210 of the High Court’s most recent ruling, responding to arguments by Assange’s lawyers that “you cannot extradite an individual to a country whose secret service has drawn up plots to kidnap or assassinate them.”

Hrafnsson explained: “I’m referring to the CIA plot to kidnap or assassinate Julian in 2017, at the time when Mike Pompeo was director of the agency.” He described the High Court’s response as “something out of Alice in Wonderland”, paraphrasing its argument that even if it were credible that the CIA plotted to kidnap or kill Assange, “his extradition through a lawful process meant the need to kidnap or assassinate him falls away, thereby it is not an argument for an appeal. Can you believe this? This is something you read in papers in the Royal Court of Justice. It’s unbelievable. The judicial process is rigged.”

Rebecca Vincent told the media, “If Assange is prosecuted under the Espionage Act, the precedent is set for the same sort of case to be applied to any publisher, any journalist, any source. Any media organization that works with leaked classified

information could find themselves in the same situation at Julian Assange. Our hope for justice here in the UK is not completely diminished. At each stage that space for hope shrinks, but a small glimmer of hope is still there, and that is what we're hoping for on Monday."

Jennifer Robinson told journalists: "The Australian government has put their support behind Julian Assange. We are working closely with our Prime Minister and our Attorney General and the Australian government to try to seek a resolution of this case and we continue to demand that Julian be released, the case be brought to an end, and he be brought home to Australia."

Robinson added, "there is bipartisan political support for Julian Assange here in Australia and just recently we had a parliamentary resolution go through our parliament with two-thirds of the parliament's support calling on the UK and the US to drop this case and to allow Julian to return home to Australia."

There is overwhelming support among millions of Australians for Assange's release, but Robinson's portrayal of the Labor government as championing Assange's freedom is a political cover-up. Successive Labor and Liberal-National governments have backed the US vendetta against the WikiLeaks editor. Shamefully, Robinson made no mention of Labor's escalating war against whistleblowers and journalists, including the vicious five-year prison sentence handed down this week against former Australian Army lawyer and whistleblower David McBride who exposed war crimes in Afghanistan.

In the Q&A which followed, journalists asked whether the British or US election outcomes would have any bearing on Assange's case. Stella replied that her husband's case was "all politics" and said that the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) had "not acted in good faith" toward Assange since his arrest in 2010, "There is correspondence from the CPS evidencing that they were colluding... to keep him in a legal limbo and to keep him in in some form of detention and from being able to defend himself and be free."

The head of the CPS during that time was Labour Party leader Sir Keir Starmer.

Rebecca Vincent said: "We don't know how the US elections will play into this case either. I agree with Stella and Kristinn's assessment that this is a political case, we've talked about this quite a lot. We don't

know what will happen in the event of a return of Trump whose DoJ [Department of Justice] brought this case in the first place. President Biden has the chance still to be the president who put an end to this, who acted in the interest of press freedom and journalism, rather than enabling this very dangerous prosecution that will tarnish the reputation forever of the country of the First Amendment."

No faith can be placed in the war mongers in Washington or London. Democrats and Republicans, Labour and Tory, are at one in their backing of genocide in Gaza and military confrontation against Russia. Imperialist war abroad is being accompanied by a crackdown on democratic rights, with the mass arrest of student protesters across the US and a frontal assault in Britain on the right to protest and free speech.

The fight for Assange's freedom must be taken up by the working class internationally as part of the fight against war and dictatorship produced by capitalism.

Toward the end of the FPA's press briefing Vincent reported that journalists who are not based in the UK are being barred from remote audio access to Monday's High Court hearing. A journalist reported she had been told to pay for remote access. The *World Socialist Web Site* has received notice that our reporter must pay £303 and submit an "Application Notice (Pursuant to the Extradition Act 2003)". Such is the level of political censorship and secrecy surrounding the final stages of extra-judicial proceedings against Assange in the UK.



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