

Oppose extradition of Richard O'Dwyer to the US!

International Students for Social Equality (UK)
23 January 2012

The International Students for Social Equality is holding a public meeting on Tuesday, February 7 to discuss the Richard O'Dwyer case and other attacks on democratic rights. Meeting details follow this statement.

The International Students for Social Equality calls on all students, young people, academics and workers to oppose the extradition of Richard O'Dwyer to the United States on copyright infringement charges.

If found guilty, the 23-year-old Sheffield Hallam University computer science student faces from five to ten years imprisonment in an US federal jail.

Judge Quentin Purdy at Westminster Magistrates Court ruled that, despite breaking no British laws, O'Dwyer can be extradited to the US to face trial for merely running a web site posting links to other sites where people could download copyrighted content, including movies and TV programmes.

Purdy stated, "There are said to be direct consequences of criminal activity by Richard O'Dwyer in the USA, albeit by him never leaving the north of England. Such a state of affairs does not demand a trial here if the competent UK authorities decline to act, and does, in my judgement, permit one in the USA. I reject all challenges advanced to this request. No bars or other challenge being raised or found, I send the case to the Secretary of State."

The US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency alleges that O'Dwyer made thousands of pounds through advertising run on his TVShack.net web site. US authorities have since closed down the web site domain name.

O'Dwyer established the TVShack.net web site nearly four years ago. The web site did not utilise any US-based web servers, nor did it host any files

whatsoever. His web site acted only as a conduit and did not breach existing UK copyright laws. The only previous charge of a similar nature, the suit against TVlinks, was thrown out of court last year.

His threatened extradition must be set in the context of Internet censorship legislation currently before the US Congress. With the backing of film and music producers, the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and the Protect IP Act (PIPA) are immediately targeted against violations of intellectual property laws. However, their more fundamental driving force is the efforts of the US ruling elite to create a pseudo-legal and technical mechanism for significantly expanding the power of the US government to regulate the Internet.

If passed, SOPA and PIPA represent a significant assault on freedom of speech. They would grant the US attorney general the power to effectively shut down access to entire domains via a court order, force search engines and other web sites to cut links to the offending site, and firms such as PayPal to cut off its finances.

This is why Ben Cooper, O'Dwyer's lawyer, has said his client will effectively be made a "guinea pig" as the first British citizen to be extradited over copyright issues to the US. O'Dwyer plans to appeal the decision.

Sabina Frediani, on behalf of the civil liberty group Liberty, said, "Imagine your child is safe and sound using their computer at home? A university student builds a web site in his Sheffield bedroom and now faces being hauled across the Atlantic to stand trial in the US".

"Everyone is vulnerable under the current rotten extradition regime," she continued. "It takes key decisions out of the hands of British judges, leaving our children exposed to the injustice of instant extradition".

The moves must be seen as a continuation and

expansion of the offensive launched last year against WikiLeaks, after it released classified documents exposing war crimes and other conspiracies by the US administration.

A vicious campaign by the Obama administration against WikiLeaks saw Amazon and Paypal shut off services to the whistleblower organization. This was part of the government's efforts to silence WikiLeaks, including the persecution of its founder Julian Assange and the military prosecution of the US soldier, Private Bradley Manning.

Julian Assange is currently fighting extradition to Sweden on trumped-up sexual assault charges. He is a victim of the European Arrest Warrant (EAW) system, which means that although he has not been charged with any crime in Sweden or any other country, he can be forcibly removed on the basis of unsubstantiated and contested accusations. In this case, the EAW could be used as the first stage in moves to extradite Assange to the US.

Manning, who is being charged with handing over classified documents to WikiLeaks, faces a possible death sentence for the charge of "aiding the enemy," or life imprisonment for all the 22 charges under the Espionage Act lodged against him.

The EAW was just one of a number of anti-democratic measures enacted by the Labour government under Tony Blair as part of its "war on terror". The extradition measures were part of a European-wide initiative aimed at facilitating a suspect's rapid expulsion to a third state by abolishing the requirement to provide prima facie evidence of a crime.

When the legislation was passed in the UK in 2003, it was extended to include the US, Australia and Canada, among others. Asperger's syndrome sufferer Gary McKinnon, also a British citizen, is still fighting his extradition to the US, on charges of hacking into American government files.

Like all of the anti-terror legislation enacted over the last decade, what was supposedly aimed at combating terrorism is now being used against ordinary citizens to preserve the sanctity of corporate profits, and to intimidate and silence anyone deemed a threat to government interests.

This wide-ranging assault on civil liberties is directly bound up with the unprecedented transfer of wealth

away from working people to the super-rich, and the related agenda of militarism and new colonial-style wars of conquest. After the war against Iraq and the ongoing bloody debacle in Afghanistan, Iran now finds itself in the crosshairs of Washington.

Both domestic and international policy is dictated by a super-rich layer and its demands that national governments impose wage cuts, speed-ups, slash corporate taxes and gut public services and welfare provisions. This financial oligarchy, which is politically represented by all the main parties, is fully aware that such a deeply unpopular agenda can only be implemented through dictatorial measures.

Britain's campuses have become a prime target for state spying, political proscriptions and other forms of state-sponsored intimidation. This is because the young generation, forced to pay massive sums for their education and often denied a job at the end of their studies, find themselves in the forefront of movements against the government's cuts, predatory wars and other criminal acts.

An extensive campaign in O'Dwyer's support is integral to the necessary defence of democratic rights. We call on all students to attend our meeting to discuss these vital issues.

Tuesday, February 7, 5:30 p.m.

Sheffield Hallam University Students' Union
The Fishbowl @ The Hubs
Paternoster Row, S1 2QQ



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact