

UK Home Secretary approves Richard O'Dwyer's extradition to US

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Britain's Home Secretary Theresa May has approved the extradition to the United States of 23-year-old Richard O'Dwyer on charges of copyright infringement.

The charges relate to TVShack.net, the website set up by the Sheffield Hallam University computer science student, which posted links to sites containing copyrighted material.

TVShack acted solely as a conduit to the other sites and did not break any British laws. An effort by British authorities to prosecute TV-Links, a similar website, in 2010 failed.

However, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) have demanded O'Dwyer's extradition, claiming that he earned some £147,000 (US \$230,600) in advertising revenue before they were able to close down the domain name in June 2010.

O'Dwyer was charged in May last year and issued with an extradition warrant, which was upheld in January by Judge Quentin Purdy sitting at Westminster Magistrates Court. If extradited and found guilty, he faces up to ten years in prison.

May's decision came just weeks after 65-year-old retired businessman, Christopher Tappin, was extradited to the US, accused of breaching sanctions on Iran by exporting batteries that could be used in missiles. Tappin argues that he is the victim of entrapment by ICE agents, operating out of a bogus front company in Texas.

Asperger's Syndrome sufferer Gary McKinnon is also currently fighting extradition to the US, accused of accessing military computers.

The 2003 extradition treaty between the UK and the US was part of a raft of legislation seriously curtailing civil liberties, enacted by the Labour government under the so-called "war on terror".

At the same time, Britain signed up to the European Arrest Warrant (EAW). The EAW and the Washington-London extradition treaty abolished the requirement that the petitioning state provide prima facie evidence of a crime.

The EAW has most notoriously been used against Julian Assange, founder of WikiLeaks. For more than a year, Assange has been held under virtual house arrest in England, while he fights an EAW for his extradition to Sweden to face trumped-up sexual assault allegations—even though he has not been charged with any offence.

Assange is currently awaiting the outcome of his appeal to Britain's Supreme Court. The British courts have consistently ruled in favour of Assange's extradition and the Supreme Court is expected to follow suit.

His removal to Sweden could be only the first stage in moves to extradite him on to the US. The US authorities have already sought to silence and financially cripple Assange and WikiLeaks, after it released classified documents exposing US war crimes in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. A secret grand jury convened in Virginia is said to have met to draw up espionage charges against him.

The move against O'Dwyer has its roots in ongoing efforts by the ruling elite and multibillion corporations to regulate and censor the Internet.

The US authorities have drawn up two bills—the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and the Protect IP Act (PIPA)—which would enable the US attorney general the power to effectively shut down domains anywhere in the world, supposedly on the grounds of protecting intellectual property rights.

Simultaneously, European Union member states have signed up to the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement

(ACTA) which provides for a massive extension of policing powers on the Internet by governments and big business.

A review of the UK's extradition arrangements set up by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government found in favour of the existing treaties. In particular, it rejected demands that a person should be able to stand trial in the UK if their crime was alleged to have been committed here.

The home secretary's decision to approve O'Dwyer's extradition was made just as Prime Minister David Cameron began his three-day trip to Washington for talks with President Barack Obama.

High on the list of discussion topics are ongoing US/British provocations in the Middle East and Africa, aimed at achieving regime change in countries and regions considered vital to the predatory interests of western imperialism.

Cameron was given the special privilege of a trip on the president's private jet, Air Force One. Just days after a US soldier committed the latest of many atrocities against the people of Afghanistan—executing 16 people, including 11 children—the two leaders have blood on their hands and are preparing to shed more.

Unsurprisingly, a spokesman for the prime minister said the issue of extradition would not be on the agenda.

As a statement by the International Students for Social Equality (ISSE) opposing O'Dwyer's extradition explained:

“The anti-democratic measures being used against Richard and the ongoing efforts to clamp down on the internet are 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.

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

Richard's mother, Julia O'Dwyer said, “By rights, it should make for an interesting conversation between the Obamas and Camerons aboard Air Force One—but

I'm not holding my breath.”

Her son had been “sold down the river” by the government, she added.

O'Dwyer has until March 26 to launch an appeal against the home secretary's decision.

Julia told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “We expected the letter as it is part of the process. But because the letter was dated on Friday 9 March and they didn't bother sending it out until Monday [March 12] it has given us less than two weeks to lodge an appeal. We knew it was due but it's quite a bureaucratic procedure.”



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