

Roger Waters on RT: “The US and UK are trying to kill Julian Assange”

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Famed rock music artist Roger Waters gave an extensive and significant interview to the television network Russia Today (RT) on October 25 in which he denounced the continued illegal imprisonment of Julian Assange and reiterated his call for the freedom of the WikiLeaks publisher and founder.

Julian Assange, who founded WikiLeaks in 2006 and published extensive proof of US war crimes in the Middle East and other corruption around the world, is currently being held at Belmarsh prison in London. Although he has broken no laws and not been convicted of any crime, Assange is being held in advance of being handed over—in blatant contravention of international law—to the United States to face 18 charges, including violation of the Espionage Act of 1917.

Former British diplomat and human rights activist Craig Murray recently published a blog post called “Assange in Court” where he described the condition of the journalist during the show trial hearing in Westminster Magistrates Court on October 21. Murray wrote: “When asked to give his name and date of birth, he struggled visibly over several seconds to recall both. ... it was a real struggle for him to articulate the words and focus his train of thought.”

Speaking from New York City on the RT program “Going Underground” with Afshin Rattansi broadcast from London, Roger Waters condemned Assange’s persecution by the UK and US governments. “They are clearly trying as hard as they can to kill him,” he said. “Julian Assange is becoming a warning to other journalists. ‘If you tell the truth, particularly to power, we will get you’ and that is the message that is being transmitted.”

When asked by Rattansi, “You think that they’re going to kill him?”, Waters responded: “They are killing him.”

Commenting on the dismissal of Assange’s request to extend his extradition hearing for three months, Waters said: “I’m flabbergasted and horrified in equal measure. The proceedings a couple of days ago in that Magistrates Court were nightmarish. For that to be happening in an English courtroom makes me thoroughly ashamed of being an Englishman.”

Waters went on to explain that the extradition treaty between the US and the UK does not apply to any political offenses or complaints: “I don’t know on what other grounds that they are trying to extradite Assange, but it is clearly a put-up job.”

When Afshin Rattansi pointed out that the hearing was not even reported by the UK evening news, Waters discussed his appearance at a rally with John Pilger to demand the freedom of Julian Assange on October 2, outside the Home Office in London. He noted: “I sang my song ‘Wish You Were Here’ and I made a speech and John made a very good speech to the assembled 1,000 or so people. And Julian’s brother spoke to them as well as and there wasn’t a single word in the Western media of a report of that protest. ... We’re getting a very, very one-sided narrative here.”

Waters then spoke about the reasons behind the persecution of Assange: “He’s being railroaded, as I said before, as an example to others, to scare the s**t out of any other potential journalist who might stand up and speak the truth about war crimes and other things that our governments do not want to be reported. They want to keep all that stuff secret.

“Assange is one of those essential publishers, and there are precious few of them—which is why he is so precious to us all—who are prepared to take the risk of actually reporting the reality of our lives, to us, to “we the people,” which is our right to know. They are applying the heaviest possible penalty they can for him

stepping out of line for doing his job as a journalist.”

Rattansi turned the interview to the question of Assange’s physical condition and explained that when John Pilger was on his program recently, “he was visibly shocked about the appearance of Julian Assange not hardly being able to speak.” Waters then replied: “I wasn’t in the courtroom two days ago, but I’ve read Craig Murray’s account of what happened in the courtroom and Craig Murray was devastated by what he saw...”

“He is exhibiting all of the symptoms, according to the accounts that I’ve read, of somebody who has been subjected to torture in a routine way over many months, and he looks like people who come out blinking from the dungeon after they’ve been tortured for many months. So, you can see that he is really frail and he is in real danger of them ending his life before they even get to an extradition hearing.”

Moving on to broader historical issues in the persecution of Assange, Waters said: “This makes an absolute mockery of the idea that we have the rule of law in the United Kingdom. You know, the Magna Carta might just as well not have happened. Because this just says, no, the law—the Magistrates Courts and the law—is actually just a tool for whoever it is that rules as all, in this case the United States of America.

“That’s why they were in the Magistrates Court pulling Vanessa Baraitser’s strings and she was responding like a puppet and doing everything they wanted her to do and everything they wanted her to say, with a bit of prodding from the QC James Lewis who was representing the United States government.”

There is no reason to doubt that the governments of the UK and the US would prefer the sudden death in jail of Julian Assange to the prospect of protracted court proceedings. The facts will be presented that he is innocent of the charges against him and that his activities were those of a journalist will be stressed to a world audience.

Everything that the authorities have done to Assange—from false allegations of sexual misconduct and a campaign of vilification in the media, to his forced near seven-year political asylum inside the Ecuadorian embassy in London, to his extended isolated imprisonment at Belmarsh—has been carried out in order to break and destroy him.

As Roger Waters has pointed out, the purpose of the

assault on Julian Assange is to intimidate all others who would dare to stand up to and expose—with massive documentary proof—the war crimes and corporate corruption of US and British imperialism.

The working class in every country must urgently take up the fight to stop the extradition of Julian Assange to the United States and win his freedom. This is a central and critical task, as part of the growing struggles of workers and youth throughout the globe against austerity, war and the assault on fundamental democratic rights.



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