

Journalist Craig Murray sentenced to eight months imprisonment

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Journalist and blogger Craig Murray has been sentenced to eight months in prison for contempt of court in a vindictive ruling with chilling implications for press freedom and democratic rights.

Murray was found guilty in March this year for his reporting on the 2020 trial of former Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond. Murray, a former British diplomat, was found to have published articles which supposedly “seriously impeded or prejudiced” Salmond's trial by breaching contempt of court legislation “preventing the publication of the names and identity and any information likely to disclose the identity of the complainers” against Salmond.

Sentencing was delayed until May 7, the day after the Scottish election, with the final decision announced by Scotland's Lord Justice Clerk, Lady Leeona Dorrian, Tuesday morning. Dorrian was the judge in Salmond's trial.

Dorrian said of Murray, “It appears from the posts and articles that he was in fact relishing the task he set himself, which was essentially to allow the identities of complainers to be discerned—which he thought was in the public interest—in a way which did not attract sanction.”

Dorrian described Murray's actions as a “contempt of considerable gravity,” which “strike at the heart of the fair administration of justice.”

Murray was initially told to hand himself in to a police station within 48 hours. Only an intervention by his lawyer extended this to three weeks to allow Murray time to prepare an appeal.

Dorrian ignored QC Roddy Dunlop's mitigation that Murray was of “impeccable character” and “untarnished reputation,” that the 62-year-old had already suffered considerably and that the only purpose was “pour decourager les autres” (to discourage

others). Submissions on Murray's health also appear to have been rejected.

Significantly Murray was told to surrender his passport. He was due to give evidence in a criminal prosecution over CIA spying activities against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange in Spain this month. Murray has been a dedicated defender of Assange, commenting frequently and observantly on the monstrous, decade long, frame-up and persecution orchestrated by the US and UK.

Retaining Murray's passport was specifically intended to prevent him giving evidence in support of Assange. The judges initially proposed holding his next hearing on May 19 to prevent him travelling.

He commented that what he found “most shocking” was “the peculiar determination of the judges to make sure that, during the three weeks we have to lodge the appeal, I am not allowed to go to Spain to testify in the criminal prosecution for the CIA spying on Assange's legal team.”

The commentary of Murray, though he is a dedicated Scottish nationalist, on the background to the case against Salmond, who was acquitted of 13 sex charges, including attempted rape, was one of the few sources of analysis that allowed anyone to understand the political significance of what was taking place. In the face of a Scottish press that was almost universally hostile to Salmond, Murray exposed the factional infighting between Salmond and his successor, Nicola Sturgeon, that lay at the heart of the exaggerated and concocted charges against the former First Minister—all of which were rejected by a jury.

Murray brought out, and none of this has been refuted by two Scottish parliamentary inquiries on the matter, the efforts of a narrow clique of close advisers of Sturgeon to set in motion a #MeToo inspired witch-

hunt, backed by the full weight of the Scottish legal apparatus, to prevent Salmond's intended return to politics.

Murray was found guilty, by a panel of three judges led by Dorrian, of so-called “jigsaw identification”—whereby certain facts released into the public domain, combined with other already known facts, may allow the identity of complainants to become known.

This is particularly sensitive in rape cases, where, in Scotland, anonymity rests on evidence being given in a “closed court” from whom all but “bona fide journalists” are excluded.

In contrast no contempt charges have been brought against the “bona fide” mainstream journalists whose own reporting on the trial potentially allowed some of the complainants to be identified. Murray commissioned a survey which concluded that eight percent of the Scottish population believed that they had been able to identify some of the complainants. The great bulk of these reported the mainstream media as their source. Murray insists he identified no-one.

As Murray commented on his own blog, “what has been harmful is the gross censorship of my journalism, with my entire daily account of the defense case removed...” As a result, he continued “it is once again virtually impossible for anybody to discover WHY Alex Salmond was acquitted...”

In her statement, Dorrian sought to place the case, and the harsh sentence against Murray, in the context of the general need for anonymity in cases where sexual assault is alleged. Dorrian noted that “the historical reluctance of complainants to come forward with their complaints, as a result of concern about how they will be treated is at the heart of the basis upon which anonymity is given.”

Murray himself has repeatedly said he upholds the anonymity of complainants in such cases. But the issue here, which Murray has repeatedly brought out—exposure of which is the reason for his being imprisoned—is the cynical use of legitimate anonymity safeguards as cover for a vicious politically motivated faction fight.

Murray's jailing has been condemned internationally. Journalist and Assange supporter John Pilger noted, “In these dark times, Craig Murray’s truth-telling is a beacon. He is owed our debt of gratitude, not the

travesty of a prison sentence which, like the prosecution of Julian Assange, is a universal warning.”

Professor Noam Chomsky tweeted, “Craig Murray has compiled a remarkable record of courage and integrity in exposing crimes of state and working to bring them to an end. He fully merits our deep respect and support for his achievements.”

Murray intends to take his case to the UK Supreme Court on the basis that he did not identify anyone and his right to report being denied through an “extraordinary, impossibly strict application of 'jigsaw identification' and on fair process not have been observed.”



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