Craig Murray joins Julian Assange behind bars

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Former British diplomat and whistleblower Craig Murray has begun serving an eight-month prison sentence in Scotland over his supposed "jigsaw identification" of witnesses in a failed sexual assault case against former Scottish National Party (SNP) leader Alex Salmond.

Murray's jailing for contempt of court is a settling of scores over his long record of exposing the crimes of British and US imperialism.

He surrendered himself to St Leonard's police station in Edinburgh Sunday. Surrounded by supporters, the 62-year-old, whose pleas for mitigation on health grounds were rejected by courts in Scotland and England, embraced his wife Nadira and their two young children.

Since 2002, Murray has earned the enmity of the British state, its intelligence services, judiciary and media over his exposure of human rights abuses by the imperialist powers extending from Central Asia to London's Belmarsh Prison.

As British Ambassador to Uzbekistan in 2002, Murray exposed British and US complicity in torture as part of the "war on terror." One year after the US invasion of Afghanistan, he blew the whistle on the widespread use of torture by the US-backed regime of Islam Karimov, including "rape with objects such as broken bottles; asphyxiation; pulling out of fingernails; smashing of limbs with blunt objects; and use of boiling liquids including complete immersion of the body."

Murray's exposé cut across long-term strategic plans set in motion after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Within weeks of 9/11, Karimov allowed the US to establish a military base in southern Uzbekistan, with the US funnelling $79 million to Uzbekistan's security forces. Torture was used to extract false confessions, with information fed to British and US intelligence, and used to justify the invasion and military occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq.

In 2018, Murray used his knowledge of the intelligence services to expose British imperialism's efforts to utilise the poisoning of former Russian double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia to ramp up hostilities against Russia, skewering their lurid claims that Moscow had manufactured and deployed "Novichoks" on British soil.

But it was in 2019 that Murray came to worldwide prominence for his eloquent defence of persecuted WikiLeaks founder and journalist Julian Assange. After Assange was seized from the Ecuadorian Embassy in London by a police snatch-squad in April and indicted under the Espionage Act for his exposure of US war crimes, Murray's defence of his friend was unrelenting. His daily reports during extradition hearings in February and September 2020 won an audience of millions, cutting through the lies, filth and hypocrisy of British judicial proceedings overseen by the CIA.

In 2020, Murray's exposure of #MeToo-style court proceedings against Salmond provided the ruling class with its opportunity to silence him. The former SNP leader was charged with rape and sexual assault in 2019 based on allegations passed to police by the Scottish government. Murray later reported "with a high degree of certainty" that First Minister Nicola Sturgeon's Chief of Staff, Liz Lloyd, was behind reports in the Scottish press in 2018 alleging sexual assault by Salmond.

Despite a massive police operation to encourage women to testify against Salmond, including some 400 police interviews, the jury exonerated him. Witnesses made claims that were impossible to verify, were frequently implausible and were sometimes disproven in court. But while Salmond was proven innocent, Murray was charged with contempt over his supposed "jigsaw identification" of witnesses—a claim that he has comprehensively refuted.

Murray's jailing is a further milestone in the collapse of democracy. Lady Leeona Dorrian, who presided over the Salmond trial and later sentenced Murray, is leading

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efforts to abolish jury trials in sexual assault cases. As Murray wrote Sunday, “We will then have a situation where, as established by my imprisonment, no information at all on the defence case may be published in case it contributes to ‘jigsaw identification’, and where conviction will rest purely on the view of the judge…

“The right to have the facts judged in serious crime allegations by a jury of our peers is a glory of our civilisation. It is the product of millennia, not lightly to be thrown away and replaced by a huge increase in arbitrary state power. That movement is of course fuelled by current fashionable political dogma which is that the victim must always be believed. That claim has morphed from an initial meaning that police and first responders must take accusations seriously, to a dogma that accusation is proof and it is wrong to even question the evidence, which is of course to deny the very possibility of false accusation.”

Like Assange, who was targeted via state manufactured sexual assault allegations in Sweden, Murray is a victim of the state’s utilisation of gender politics to suppress fundamental democratic rights, aimed above all at silencing those who expose the crimes of imperialism.

The sentencing of Murray has set a dangerous precedent above all in its singling out of independent media. The judges’ June 8 High Court ruling insisted, “it is relevant to distinguish his [Murray’s] position from that of the mainstream press, which is regulated, and subject to codes of practice and ethics in a way in which those writing as the applicant does are not.”

This is sickening hypocrisy. What “codes of practice” and “ethics” were the mainstream press exhibiting when they recycled state propaganda about Iraq’s “Weapons of Mass Destruction”—lies used to illegally invade, occupy and destroy an oppressed country leading to 1 million dead?

Murray’s imprisonment extends the precedent set by Assange’s indictment under the Espionage Act. Amid a pandemic that has triggered an historic breakdown of the world capitalist order, the ruling class fears the eruption of mass working class opposition to malignant social inequality, austerity, police violence and authoritarianism, and the escalating drive to war.

In 2010, WikiLeaks’ exposures of war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, torture, rendition and state corruption sparked mass movements of the working class and oppressed in Tunisia that led to the Arab Spring. The ruling class responded by designating Assange a “high-tech terrorist,” in the words of Joe Biden, with former CIA Director Leon Panetta telling German public broadcaster ARD that Assange was being targeted to “send a message to others not to do the same thing.”

Last Thursday, Murray issued a press statement that was ignored by the mainstream media, “I believe this is actually the state’s long sought revenge for my whistleblowing on security service collusion with torture and my long-term collaboration with Wikileaks and other whistleblowers. Unfortunately important free speech issues are collateral damage.”

In January 2018, the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site* issued a call for an international movement to fight internet censorship. Describing efforts by Google, Facebook and Twitter to suppress access to socialist and anti-war news sites throughout the world, the WSWS warned, “the technological scaffolding of a 21st century capitalist police state is being erected.”

The WSWS has itself been a central target of corporate censorship, through Google’s deliberate suppression of search results via algorithms and an army of censors. Of the 150 top Google search terms generating traffic to the WSWS prior to April 2017, by the summer of that year 145 no longer produced even a single search result for our website. These restrictions, coordinated by state intelligence agencies in the US and Europe, have tightened further, with the ICFI’s German section, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (SGP), designated an extremist organisation by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV) in 2018.

The WSWS has insisted that the defence of democratic rights must be waged by the working class against the capitalist state and independently of all of its political defenders. We urge workers and youth throughout the world to raise the demand for the immediate release of Murray and Assange as the spearhead of the struggle against imperialist war and authoritarianism.

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