

Julian Assange suffered stroke during High Court appeal for extradition

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Doctors have confirmed that Julian Assange suffered a “mini stroke” inside Belmarsh Prison during a High Court appeal in October, his fiancée Stella Moris revealed over the weekend. She made clear that a pseudo-legal conspiracy by the US and UK governments to secure Assange’s extradition is pushing the WikiLeaks publisher to breaking point.

Moris spoke to the *Daily Mail* on Saturday, just one day after Britain’s High Court ruled in favour of a US government appeal overturning an earlier bar to extradition on health grounds. Assange faces extradition to the US under the Espionage Act (1917) and a possible 175-year prison sentence for WikiLeaks’ publications exposing war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Assange suffered what doctors diagnosed as a “transient ischaemic attack” on the opening day of a High Court appeal on October 27, which he watched from prison via video-link. The *Mail* reported that Assange “believes the mini-stroke was triggered by the stress of the ongoing US court action against him, and an overall decline in his health as he faces his third Christmas behind bars.”

TIAs or mini-strokes temporarily block blood supply to the brain. A doctor has reportedly examined Assange, finding evidence of nerve damage. He underwent an MRI scan and has been prescribed blood thinning medication.

Moris spoke of her concern for Assange’s survival, telling the *Mail*, “Julian is struggling and I fear this mini-stroke could be the precursor to a more major attack. It compounds our fears about his ability to survive the longer this long legal battle goes on.”

She continued, “Look at animals trapped in cages in a zoo. It cuts their life short. That’s what’s happening to Julian. The never-ending court cases are extremely

stressful mentally.”

World Socialist Web Site reporter Thomas Scripps covered the High Court appeal hearing on October 27-28. His report noted that Assange looked “visibly unwell—thin, downcast and struggling to stay awake or to sit up in his chair.” Yesterday, Scripps recalled, “it took a moment to recognise Assange when he first appeared,” adding, “many journalists expressed concern in the videolink chat.”

According to the *Mail*’s report on Saturday, Assange was “left with a drooping right eyelid, memory problems and signs of neurological damage.”

Moris told the *Mail*, “It must have been horrendous hearing a High Court appeal in which you can’t participate, which is discussing your mental health and your risk of suicide and in which the US is arguing you are making it all up.”

She recalled, “He had to sit through all this when he should have been excused. He was in a truly terrible state. His eyes were out of synch, his right eyelid would not close, his memory was blurry.”

Throughout the two-day hearing the US sought to discredit medical experts who had testified that Assange would likely commit suicide if he were extradited to the United States. Lawyers for the US government argued that US federal prison conditions were not oppressive and that District Judge Vanessa Baraitser had failed to provide an opportunity to hear what are worthless US assurances that he would not be mistreated.

News of Assange’s stroke has evoked protest and urgent warnings from doctors and medical experts. It will add to the growing revulsion felt by tens of millions of workers and youth worldwide over Assange’s slow-motion assassination in plain sight, sanctioned by the British state.

Nils Melzer, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, who examined Assange with a medical team inside Belmarsh Prison in May 2019, responded on Saturday night, “Assange’s stroke is no surprise. As we warned after examining him, unless relieved of the constant pressure of isolation, arbitrariness and persecution, his health would enter a downward spiral endangering his life. [The] UK is literally torturing him to death.”

Melzer added, “As Assange clearly was not medically fit to attend his own trial through videolink, how can they even discuss whether he is fit to be exposed to a show trial in the US, a country that refuses to prosecute its torturers and war criminals but persecutes whistleblowers and journalists?”

Doctors4Assange (D4A), representing more than 250 doctors in 35 countries, issued a statement yesterday warning of a “dangerous deterioration of Mr. Assange’s health.” They explained, “This latest medical emergency adds to the already dire state of Mr. Assange’s health owing to his prolonged psychological torture. This includes eleven years of arbitrary detention, medical neglect, solitary confinement, obstruction of access to his lawyers, and an Orwellian legal prosecution that has violated the rule of law and due process.”

Noting CIA plans to kidnap and assassinate Assange, and the CIA’s illegal surveilling of his lawyers, Doctors for Assange demanded the WikiLeaks publisher be granted his “long overdue freedom.”

Bill Hogan, a medical doctor from the United States and a member of D4A told the WSWWS yesterday, “The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Doctors for Assange warned repeatedly that unless the United States and United Kingdom ended their psychological torture of Mr Assange, his physical health would deteriorate and he is at high risk of death over time.”

Dr. Hogan said of Assange’s stroke, “Fifty-year-old men rarely experience such events, and there is a direct physiological chain of events ... This outcome was wholly predictable and preventable. That the US and UK ignored our warnings directly implicates them as responsible and clarifies even further that their intent is to murder Mr Assange.”

Dr. Derek Summerfield, honorary clinical senior lecturer at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience, King’s College, and D4A member, told the WSWWS, “The Western order demands its sacrificial

victim, here the journalist daring to expose its secrets and lies, and in last few years we have witnessed Assange going through a process somehow akin to the hanging, drawing and quartering of medieval executions.”

Friday’s High Court ruling—made in the certain knowledge of Assange’s acute medical deterioration—confirms there is no line the British state, its judiciary, media and parliament will not cross in securing the courageous journalist’s destruction. He must not be left in their clutches. The fight for Assange’s freedom must be taken to the working class and especially its young generation whose future rests on defeating the growing threat of imperialist war and authoritarianism in the fight for socialism.



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