

UK court approves extradition of Julian Assange to US, decision with home secretary Patel

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Julian Assange has been issued with a formal extradition order for the first time. The case has now been sent to British Home Secretary Priti Patel to give the final sign-off on whether the WikiLeaks founder should be sent to the United States.

Assange is being pursued for charges under the Espionage Act with a potential life sentence for his work as a journalist exposing the war crimes, human rights abuses and diplomatic intrigues of the U.S. and its allies.

A short hearing took place Wednesday morning at Westminster Magistrates' Court, where Chief Magistrate Paul Goldspring explained, "I am duty bound to send your case to the Secretary of State for a decision on whether or not you should be extradited."

Goldspring was directed to make this decision by the High Court, which last December upheld a U.S. appeal against an original ruling not to extradite. The original ruling was made on the strictly limited grounds that doing so would be oppressive given Assange's mental health and risk of suicide. The High Court held that assurances offered by the US about his treatment, exposed as worthless by his lawyers, removed that risk, and directed the lower Magistrates' Court to reverse its decision.

Assange's legal team sought to challenge this ruling at the Supreme Court but were rebuffed, despite the High Court certifying that they had raised a "point of law of public importance."

According to the Extradition Act (2003) which governs the process, Assange now has four weeks (to May 18) to make representations to Patel before her decision is announced, during which time he will continue to be remanded in London's Belmarsh

maximum security prison, where he has now been held for more than three years.

That decision is a foregone conclusion. Patel, who carries out the government's authoritarian agenda with the demeanour of a gangster and the satisfaction of a true sadist, will enjoy nothing better than handing Assange to the U.S. She is a leading figure in a Brexiteer cabinet whose foreign policy is based on a slavish commitment to an alliance with Washington in order to lever the interests of British imperialism. Her boss, Prime Minister Boris Johnson, congratulated the police in his capacity as then-foreign secretary on their illegal seizure of Assange from his place of asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy in London in April 2019.

Assange's legal team have been preparing an extensive appeal against the extradition, which Goldspring confirmed yesterday "won't be heard until the Secretary of State has made her decision under the Act." The *World Socialist Web Site* summarised its key points in an earlier article:

"They argue that Assange's extradition is being illegally sought for a political offence, barred by the US-UK Extradition Treaty; an abuse of due process; in breach of Article 3 (inhuman and degrading treatment), Article 5 (unfair detention), Article 6 (denial of fair trial), Article 7 (retroactive justice) and Article 10 (freedom of expression) of the European Convention on Human Rights; based on a misrepresentation of facts; and being pursued for ulterior political motives."

There is no guarantee that the High Court will agree to hear this appeal—a danger made more concerning by the actions of the Supreme Court. Assange could therefore be on a plane to the U.S. in just over a month's time.

Speaking outside the court, Assange's wife Stella Moris—they were married in Belmarsh prison last month—commented, “Today was a formality but I still felt sick to my stomach about what happened. A magistrate signing an order to send Julian to the United States. The UK has no obligation to extradite Julian Assange to the United States. In fact, it is required by its international obligations to stop this extradition.”

WikiLeaks editor-in-chief Kristinn Hrafnsson said, “16 months ago, this court decided that extraditing Assange would be a risk to his life, would be a death sentence. Now this court has been ordered to issue that death sentence.”

The clear and present threat to Assange's life makes more urgent a serious consideration of the type of campaign which must be waged in his defence.

Also present outside the court was former leader of the Labour Party Jeremy Corbyn. He told the crowd he hoped Patel would “reflect on the importance of her office, on the importance of the decision that she is required to make... reflect on, what is a democracy other than the ability of journalists to do their job, to ask the strong questions of politicians and those that make decisions? What is a democracy but protecting that right to speak, that right to know, that right to assemble, that right to be an activist?”

Such an appeal will fall on deaf ears. Patel's views on democratic rights are not a secret; they are there for all to see in the viciously reactionary Nationality and Borders Bill and Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill now passing through the Houses of Parliament under her authority. She is now overseeing plans to ship asylum seekers to Rwanda.

Assange's supporters must reject Corbyn's soporifics and at this eleventh hour turn to the building of a mass movement in the international working class which alone can force his release by his captors.

Whether the WikiLeaks founder is granted his appeal, or the case reaches the United States, the substance of the American government's baseless and reactionary allegations will be exposed in court—the High Court in the UK, or before the grand jury empanelled in the U.S.

The fight for Assange's freedom means politically challenging not only the Tory government and the Biden administration, but all those who have worked to enforce his isolation. In the UK this encompasses the Labour Party, the trade unions and the broad milieu of

pseudo-left, identity politics, and liberal organisations, and publications such as the *Guardian*, that joined in the slander campaign against him. The case must be made anew among the millions of workers and youth internationally who look on Assange as a hero for the stand he has taken against the war crimes of the US and its allies.

Under conditions in which the NATO powers are escalating their de facto war with Russia in Ukraine, plunging billions into severe economic hardship and starvation and threatening a third world war fought with nuclear weapons, Assange's opposition to war and commitment to the truth and journalism free from state co-option are more necessary than ever. The defence of the WikiLeaks founder is a major front in the struggle against the censorship and propaganda servicing the war drive.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Parties pledge to redouble their efforts to build this campaign as part of a wider fight for a socialist anti-war movement.



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