

Announcement on Assange's extradition due any day as protest held in London

Thomas Scripps
17 May 2022

An announcement on Julian Assange's extradition to the United States is imminent.

The WikiLeaks founder faces a life sentence or worse on charges under the Espionage Act for exposing the war crimes, intrigues, and grave human rights abuses of the US and its Allies.

The decision to extradite is in the hands of Britain's Home Secretary Priti Patel. She can make the announcement any time from tomorrow, May 18 until May 31.

Assange was put in this perilous situation—at the mercy of the vicious authoritarian Patel, part of a government slavishly oriented to the US—by a series of rulings delivered by the British judiciary over the last year.

In July 2021, the US government was given leave to appeal a carefully calculated decision by District Judge Vanessa Baraitser that January blocking Assange's extradition on the sole grounds of its oppressive impact on his mental health, with all other defence arguments dismissed. That appeal was upheld in December 2021, with the High Court ordering the WikiLeaks founder handed to the US. An attempted appeal of this decision by Assange's legal team was denied by the Supreme Court this March and the case sent to Patel in April.

Throughout this time, the 50-year-old journalist and father has been imprisoned in London's Belmarsh maximum security prison, in conditions which have exacted a terrible toll on his health. He suffered a stroke during the High Court hearing in October.

Assange's legal team will respond to the Home Secretary's inevitable decision to extradite by launching their own appeal of Baraitser's initial decision, the majority of which found in favour of his being sent to the US. If this goes forward, his lawyers would finally be able to address the issues of factual misrepresentation, political motivation, legal malpractice and abuse of democratic rights central to Assange's persecution—largely excised from proceedings since the US made its appeal.

Such an outcome is possible. It would allow the British state to continue going through the motions of giving the WikiLeaks founder a fair hearing while keeping him buried in Belmarsh. But the recent history of his case shows nothing can be taken for granted. The High Court can refuse, as did the Supreme Court, to hear his case. If this happens, then Assange has run out of road with the legal process in the UK and nothing stands between him and extradition.

The Australian government—Assange is an Australian citizen—has said it will not intervene.

It remains unclear how an appeal to the European Court of Human Rights, previously raised by Assange's lawyers, would proceed. There is no guarantee, or even the likelihood that the UK post-Brexit will recognise its authority in this case, or that it would prevent Assange being transferred to the US in the meantime even if an appeal does get underway.

The danger cannot be overstated. In the last two years of legal wrangling over Assange's health, the point has been repeatedly stressed that the mere fact of his extradition, let alone the conditions he will face in the US prison system, will likely drive him to suicide.

Professor of neuropsychiatry Michael Kopelman told the original extradition hearing in September 2020 there was a “very high risk of suicide” and that in his opinion, “it is the imminence of extradition and/or an actual extradition that will trigger the attempt.”

Once in the clutches of the US government, Assange would face a trial and period of detention designed to isolate, mentally destroy and convict him.

He will be tried in front of a grand jury, which US criminal and civil rights lawyer Robert Boyle described in Assange's extradition hearing as operating “without adherence to the technical and evidential rules of criminal trials” and providing “fertile ground for prosecutorial abuse”. The jury is drawn from an area with a “high concentration of companies which are government contractors working in the military and intelligence sectors,” in the words of human rights researcher Bridget Prince.

During that time, he will be held in the Alexandria Detention Centre in conditions of “solitary confinement”, with inadequate medical care and no chance of remedying his situation, according to the direct experience of Virginia defence attorney Yancey Ellis, and sentencing expert Joel Sickler.

If convicted and sent to the ADX Florence, he will suffer a “fate worse than death”, in the words of a former warden at the facility, almost entirely cut off from the outside world.

At a protest outside the Home Office building in London this evening to mark the final day Assange's legal team is entitled to submit evidence to Patel, several hundred people gathered to demand she refuse his extradition. WikiLeaks Editor-in-Chief Kristinn Hrafnsson, Assange's wife Stella, Labour MP Richard Burgon, representative of the Committee to Defend Julian Assange Emmy Butlin, and Don't Extradite Assange (DEA) organiser John Rees gave speeches.

Stella Assange raised the example of the Ishaqi massacre in Iraq—in which 11 people, including four women and five children, were handcuffed and executed by US troops—to make the point that the releases for which Assange is being punished “aren’t just publications in the abstract. These are tens of thousands of human casualties... Piles upon piles of human corpses. That’s what we’re talking about.”

The enormity of these crimes, which the ruling class hopes to cover up and perpetuate, is what is driving the ruthless manhunt of Assange. His treatment so far has proved that nothing can be entrusted to the British government or the judiciary. They are on the verge of rubber stamping his transfer to the US. The perspective of mounting appeals to politicians and the state, delivered by a collection of “left” parliamentarians and luminaries, is in ruins.

At a meeting of the Don’t Extradite Assange official campaign in February 2020, Tariq Ali told the audience, “Hopefully as the case moves upwards to superior courts, we will find some judges who are prepared just to be decent.” Rees gave the same line in August 2021, saying of the US appeal in the High Court that Assange’s “case has finally reached a serious court”. At the same event, former leader of the Labour Party Jeremy Corbyn, fêted as a champion of Assange’s cause, expressed his own “hopes” in the judiciary.

Between them, Corbyn and the DEA have called on the whole gamut of politicians chiefly responsible for Assange’s persecution to intervene and secure his release, including US Presidents Trump and Biden, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson and now Patel.

The political impact of these pleas has been to turn Assange’s supporters away from the necessary struggle to build a popular movement in the broad mass of the population.

The conspiracy of the US, UK, Australia, Sweden—which orchestrated a fraudulent sexual assault investigation as a pretext for Assange’s arrest—all their major parties and the corporate media to silence and isolate Assange has been carried out relentlessly for a decade.

An equally determined campaign in defence of the WikiLeaks founder must overcome these obstacles. Popular support for Assange throughout the world must be activated. Younger generations who have not known a time when he was not imprisoned or gagged must be educated. Above all, a turn must be made to the working class as the only social force that can wage a successful fight for Assange’s freedom.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with protesters outside the Home Office.

Juan explained, “I am here to protest against the extradition of Julian Assange because I believe that people in the world have the right to freedom and I think Julian Assange has exposed crimes committed by the Western world.

“If he were extradited it would be very bad news. It is not just about Julian Assange. It is about the message you send to the whole world—that you cannot report on these things. As we see now with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it’s very easy to speak against Russia, but at the same time we see how the media do not talk so much about Israel against Palestine—so you can see the

dichotomy.

“There are certain wars we can oppose but not others. For example, the invasion of Iraq with the false idea that there were weapons of mass destruction there. People protested but they still went in. Millions of people protested across the world and yet they went ahead. This shows you how our governments abuse their power. So we need to keep protesting to prevent something like this happening again.”

Fahim told our reporter, “I am from Afghanistan and I have come here to support the freedom of Julian Assange because he told the truth. The truth about the crimes committed in Afghanistan. I am witness to so many crimes and atrocities—I know of what he speaks. He exposed the truth in documents. He has not made up anything. It was American soldiers and officials writing these documents.

“People like [whistleblowers] Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden and others were sick to their stomach at what they were seeing. They could not hide these crimes any longer. And what are the crimes? The killing of children. The killing of our people. The continuation of the illegal war. The government looted American taxpayers, spent it on arms and soldiers, \$8 trillion dollars according to Brown University, and they killed our children and destroyed our country and imposed a draconian regime.

“It is important for me to be here not only to support the freedom of Julian Assange, but also to tell the other part of the story about what happened in these criminal, illegal wars. I’m here to support him and to get the real criminals behind bars. Those who killed our children, committed genocide like Bush and Blair, Merkel and Johnson, Karzai, they should be brought to justice, and the Taliban, the Pakistan government. This criminal, illegal war was designed in the Pentagon.”

Oliver commented, “I’m here today to try and defend Julian Assange. He’s important because he has released thousands of true documents which are now being whitewashed by the media.

“There is a treaty between the US and the UK that should prohibit him being persecuted any further, because it’s political persecution. It’s wrong on all counts. The fact that it’s got this far is abhorrent.”



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact