

Westminster Magistrates Court

Former UK ambassador Craig Murray denounces arrest and conviction of Julian Assange

By our reporter
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Outside Westminster Magistrates court in central London supporters of WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange rallied to his defence. Assange appeared at the court Thursday afternoon after he was arrested and dragged from his place of political asylum at the Ecuadorian embassy in London.

Judge Michael Snow found Assange guilty of bail charges that date back to 2012, ordering him to appear at Southwark Crown Court at an unknown date. If found guilty, he will face a sentence of 12 months.

Outside the court, supporters of WikiLeaks demanded that the UK government reject US demands for Assange's extradition.

The UK government has confirmed Assange was arrested on behalf of US law enforcement authorities. The US has charged Assange with computer crime over documents published by WikiLeaks. If Assange is extradited to the US, he will undoubtedly face more serious charges under the Espionage Act, threatening life in prison or the death penalty.

During a brief hearing Judge Snow gave voice to the state vendetta against Assange, attacking the award-winning journalist as a "narcissist", telling him to "get over the US" and "get on with your life" and describing as "laughable" his claim he had not received a fair hearing.

Among the supporters of Assange outside the court was former British diplomat, whistle-blower and human rights activist Craig Murray. A long-time supporter and friend of Assange, Murray spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* after witnessing proceedings inside the court.

What we have seen today is extraordinary. It's amazing that you can be dragged out of somewhere by armed police and within three hours brought up before a judge and found guilty of a crime involving a serious jail sentence. There was no jury and no chance to mount a proper defence or have a proper hearing.

It is clear the judge was extremely prejudiced. It was very short hearing today and he cannot possibly have formed during that time his judgement that Julian Assange is a 'narcissistic personality'.

That plainly shows that he must have formed his judgement from what he had read in the media before he ever came into the court. That judgement could not possibly be formed in the few minutes in the court. There are serious reasons to question Judge Snow and about the quality of justice that has gone on here. It is a case of extreme prejudice. There is no way anyone could call what has happened a fair trial.

Julian Assange has provided an important service. There is no evidence of anybody's life being in danger. If there had been, we would have told about it by now.

Then there is the truly appalling behaviour of Ecuador's dreadful President Moreno. He has not only curried favour with the United States and UK but sold Julian out.

One good thing, if you wish, that has come out of this is that now we are talking about extradition. We can now see what all of this is really about. It is about freedom of the press, about Julian being charged with publishing the revelations made by Chelsea Manning. From day one this has been about the United States

wishing to lock Julian up for the Chelsea Manning leak exposing serious American war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The whole Sweden case has been a charade. It has always been about whether a journalist should be punished for publishing leaked documents showing a government offending against international law.

I am hoping, maybe a long-shot, that the media pundits of a liberal disposition will realise that this is a fundamental threat to press freedom. If anyone who publishes a US leaked document wherever they are in the world can be dragged to the US and imprisoned, then the American government is going to have impunity for its crimes for ever more. All journalists must decide where they stand on this fundamental test of media freedom.

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