

Scottish National Party supports the witch-hunting of Julian Assange

By Steve James
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The few comments made by Scottish National Party (SNP) representatives on the hounding and torture of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange make clear the party supports his arrest, jailing and extradition.

So hostile is the SNP to Assange that on the day he was illegally seized from the Ecuadoran Embassy—in defiance of the right of asylum and after years of incarceration—SNP chief whip in Westminster, Patrick Grady, was praised by the Conservative government Home Secretary Sajid Javid for his helpful comments.

During the April 11 Westminster debate Grady, the MP for Glasgow North, welcomed Assange's arrest.

"It is right that nobody is above the law, and in many ways today's actions mean that at least one kind of deadlock has been broken," he said, before cynically adding, "[W]hich is perhaps important, at least from a health and wellbeing point of view."

After endorsing the brutal seizure of Assange by the Metropolitan Police, Grady merely requested to Javid that Assange's subsequent treatment must accord with "due process".

Grady intoned, "Will the Home Secretary therefore confirm that nobody should be extradited from the United Kingdom if they face an unfair trial or a cruel and unusual punishment in the destination country?"

"Will he also assure us that any judicial process here in the United Kingdom will be carried out with as much transparency as possible, and with all appropriate opportunity for review and appeal, as necessary?"

Javid, worried that the images of a seriously ill and vulnerable Assange surrounded by grinning police would lead to an increase in support for Assange within the population, thankfully seized on Grady's comments.

SNP parliamentarians specialise in posturing and angrily denouncing the Tory government when it suits them. On this occasion, however, Javid was "very happy to agree with what the hon. Gentleman said", as "This country has a long and proud tradition of human rights."

Grady defended the same line against one of his Glasgow

North constituents, Carol Watt, who wrote to him after the April 11 arrest highlighting the desperate circumstances facing Assange.

Watt noted that in 2016, the UN's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention made clear that Assange had been subject to arbitrary detention and that the UK was acting "above the law" in this case and ignoring their obligation to comply with the UN findings.

She reminded Grady that Assange had initially sought asylum because of his concerns "of a secret sealed indictment being held by the US, which would see him charged under the Espionage Act and extradited."

"Patrick," continued Grady's constituent, "I cannot urge you in strong enough terms to speak on behalf of Julian Assange, a dying man in need of protection and support."

"Julian Assange is a multi-award-winning journalist who has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize a staggering seven times. He needs and deserves our help. Please do all that you can to ensure that this man receives all the medical attention he so needs at this desperate time."

In response, Grady replied, "The SNP profoundly believes in the rule of law and we have an obligation to uphold the rule of law in this high-profile case like in any other. No one individual is ever above the law and Mr Assange will have has [sic] to face charges of contempt of court and it is now for the courts to decide what happens next."

Grady re-iterated a meaningless opposition to US extradition if it were to involve charges that could include the death penalty. He then concluded, in words reeking of cynicism:

"I'm sure you will appreciate that the legal system is independent of parliament and that it is not appropriate for politicians to seek to interfere in individual decisions before the judiciary."

Needless to say, Grady was silent when Assange was jailed for 50 weeks in Belmarsh Category A prison, along with murderers and violent criminals, for a bail violation stemming back seven years. After having his basic democratic rights trampled on by the British judicial system,

Assange was forced to breach bail conditions as he sought political refuge at the Ecuadorean embassy—which he was granted under international law—because he feared that he would be extradited to the US on trumped-up espionage charges.

Grady was silent too, when Javid signed the extradition order for Assange and again when UN Rapporteur on Torture, Nils Melzer, described Assange’s treatment as “progressively severe forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the cumulative effects of which can only be described as psychological torture.” Grady kept his counsel when Assange was charged under the Espionage Act, despite the fact that the WikiLeaks journalist faces 175 years in a US prison under its provisions.

Nor has Grady’s profound concern for “due process” extended to criticism of Judge Emma Arbuthnot’s refusal to recuse herself from Assange’s extradition case. Arbuthnot’s husband’s close relations with the Ministry of Defence, arms and security firms and his public defence of mass surveillance were the subject of thousands of WikiLeaks releases.

The SNP’s only other public position on Assange was taken by MP for Glasgow Central, Alison Thewliss, who signed Labour right-wing MP Stella Creasy’s April 12 letter to the home secretary demanding Assange be extradited to Sweden “in the event that Sweden makes an extradition request.”

Since no other SNP leader has said a word in the Assange case, Grady’s sanctimonious upholding of official illegality and Thewliss’ endorsement of bogus sexual assault allegations in Sweden can be taken as representing party policy. Their positions underscore the SNP’s essential character as a right-wing, pro-imperialist party—a goal entirely compatible with their perspective of Scottish independence.

The SNP supports NATO, the European Union and, as the ruling party in Scotland since 2007, collaborates on a daily basis with the British government, including its police and security apparatus. Scotland hosts numerous vital British military installations, including the base for its nuclear arsenal. The SNP is working closely with the Labour Party and pro-EU Tories to attempt to delay or reverse Brexit, a position shared by dominant sections of big business and much of the British security establishment.

In line with this, the SNP has repeatedly offered to serve as a component of a Labour-led coalition government, which would, no less than the current Tory administration, viciously step up the assault on the social position of the working class. Hence the hostility to Assange and WikiLeaks, whose work cuts across the machinations of all the imperialist powers and has exposed to the world the raw

data of imperialist war crimes, diplomatic and financial skulduggery and mass surveillance.

The SNP’s support for Assange’s brutal seizure and jailing is amplified by the pliant Scottish media commentariat.

The *Glasgow Herald* hailed Assange’s arrest in an editorial entitled, “Julian Assange is not a journalist, and he’s not a hero, and his day in court is long overdue.” Assange, the editorial continued, was a “complicated figure,” a “bad house guest” and “irresponsible activist” and should be “be forced to take personal responsibility for his actions.” Also in the *Herald*, Kevin McKenna described Assange as having a “Messiah complex” and lied, saying that Assange fled a “legitimate investigation into accusations of serious sexual misconduct in Sweden.” In fact, Assange sought and was granted the approval of the Swedish authorities to leave the country.

Not to be outdone, the *Scotsman* hosted a particularly filthy piece by regular columnist Dani Garavelli headlined, “Apologists of false prophet make light of alleged rape.” Garavelli compared Assange to Saddam Hussein and described anyone willing to defend Assange, such as world-renowned investigative journalist John Pilger, as “a brocialist happy to throw women under a bus in pursuit of your own agenda.”

The only way to secure Assange’s freedom, and to defend fundamental democratic rights, is through the development of an independent movement of the working class against militarism and war, and their source—the capitalist profit system. We call upon workers and youth to support the global campaign to free Assange and whistle-blower Chelsea Manning.

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