

If Assange is extradited, no journalist in the world is safe from life imprisonment in the U.S.

Interview with legendary Pentagon Papers whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg

U.S. Espionage Act used against a publisher and journalist for the first time

The press in the United States has remained in a state of denial for 40 years — since my case — that the Espionage Act has wording in it that could be aimed directly at them, at journalists and publishers. Although, until this case, it hasn't been done.

Secrecy system protects government wrongdoing

Now the press is staring right down the barrel at the use of the U.S. Espionage Act against journalists and publishers for doing journalism. For doing what they do best, at their best, every day. Getting information that the government doesn't want the public to know because of their wrongdoing, their lies, their crimes — there's a lot of those. And that's what the secrecy system is mainly intended to protect.

Press freedom and democracy under attack

It's not only U.S. journalists affected here, although the First Amendment — the core of the U.S. form of government — is at stake in this right now and is being attacked. If Julian Assange is extradited, it will lead to prosecution and probably conviction. He will be the first journalist and publisher to be prosecuted and convicted in the U.S., but not the last. The *New York Times* probably won't be the second, either; it might be the third or the fourth.

So, everybody has a stake in this. Meanwhile, if Julian is extradited to the U.S. to face the charges against him for doing the journalism that he has, no journalist in the world is safe from life imprisonment in the United States of America. The stakes are enormous for freedom of the press anywhere — ours is far from perfect, other places have less, a few have more. The possibility of freedom of the press, and thus of democracy, is at stake all over the world in this case. That sounds like hyperbole, and it isn't.

Journalists ask for documents all the time

The U.S. prosecution has shown that they're basing a lot of the case, first of all, on the fact that whistleblower Chelsea Manning was encouraged by Julian to give this information, and he actually asked for documents. I can't count the number of times I've been asked for documents, as is quite proper for journalists. So that "conspiracy" is something that every source goes through with every journalist who uses sources.

Assange made enormous efforts to redact names

On the question of what damage he has done, the government is seeking to focus on the fact that names, unredacted, were subject to danger in the countries where they were by being published. As I pointed out to the prosecutor, the way to stop that danger from occurring was to stop the publication of those names. And those were not names that either the media or WikiLeaks or Julian Assange wanted to put out. On the contrary, the media and the government was well aware — the media was participating — that WikiLeaks and Assange were making enormous efforts to redact from

this mass of documents the names of anyone who might be put in a feeling of anxiety or danger or might be in real danger. Second, they called on the government to supply those names so they could take them out. It was in the government's capability to prevent those people from being revealed, and they chose not to do it.

The U.S. government has total responsibility for the anxiety, the fleeing of some of them from their

countries — total responsibility, since they could have prevented it and they chose not to. I can only infer that they preferred to reserve these charges for Julian Assange, rather than to protect those people from the possible danger that they were put in.

37 million refugees caused by U.S. initiated wars

Finally, those accusations from the U.S. government are of the utmost cynicism. We're talking of people who are refugees from a state of war that the United States initiated, first with the attack on Afghanistan, but in particular with its aggression against Iraq. And I did mention this the other day to the prosecutor, that it's cynical — I could use other words — to say that our government is worried about 100 or 200 people being made anxious, and some of them asking to leave the country with U.S. help — to be concerned about those people, when the United States government has caused the flight of 37 million refugees from U.S. initiated wars. It's a mockery.

If the extradition of Julian Assange is successful — even before any trial — it will have an intimidating effect on journalists all around the world and will be a direct attack on the First Amendment of the United States.

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