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Julian Assange – Comments from Snowden, Chomsky, Varoufakis, Greenwald & Horvat (REWIND)

Edward Snowden:

Whether an individual in the US goes to Wikileaks or they publish these things directly, unredacted, on the internet themselves, or whether they work as I did, where you have a system of checks and balances where journalists have the material, they make the publication decisions, not myself.

And then they even give the government a chance in advance of the publication to review the stories

and go hey, maybe you guys don't understand the details here, maybe you don't see the big picture here. Maybe there's one little sentence here that you don't quite get, will put a human life at risk here, and because of this we'd like to share this evidence with you that that is in fact the case and for you to consider whether or not you want to modify your story as a result

And that has been followed in every case in the reporting that has arisen from me. But despite that, the US government makes no distinction whatsoever. And I think this is an important thing to establish because it means the government is not actually concerned with harm negation. They're not actually concerned with saving lives, with protecting programs or insuring that human sources or the efficacy of our security apparatus continues unimpeded.

What they're looking for are easy arguments. Things that sounds persuasive at first glance, like saying "Oh, this is going to endanger sources and methods, oh, these journalists have blood on their hands!" But when you look at cases, for example the case of Chelsea Manning, again, she went to trial, the US government was able to present their best evidence.

They had control, it was a military court, they could hold secret proceedings for sections if they wanted to present classified information. And despite all of this, the government was asked by the judge to present evidence of any harm that came as a result. And again,

remember in the case of Chelsea Manning, these were things that were presented on Wikileaks, they eventually made their way to the public in a completely unredacted form. And these were classified documents, I think roughly three quarters of a million, both military and diplomatic records, and in court, in front of the judge, the US government said we can't demonstrate that anyone has been hurt, that anyone has died, and we aren't even going to try because from our perspective it doesn't matter.

Now if this is the case, and I know we've run a little bit long here, but this is a central point that I think a lot of people don't quite get, because much of the media is afraid to confront this point, because they're afraid they'll lose access to government officials, to anonymous sources, to senior White House officials, senior administration officials in whatever country they're in, their equivalent, if they don't simply repeat it, if they don't just say "well these officials said this" and treat it as if it's reliable rather than challenging the claim.

But what's actually happening here, why is this happening? If they're not interested in saving lives, if they're not interested in protecting these things and if Chelsea Manning was going to trial in 2013, 4 years after the documents were revealed in 2009, and in four years the government couldn't show that anyone had been hurt, maybe it's just about changing the subject.

Maybe the government would rather talk about the theoretical risks of journalism when you're in an open society with a free press, where mistakes could possibly be made, someone could possibly be hurt, although it's never happened. Not in national security reporting, not in the way we've seen. We have no public evidence. Not in my case, not in Manning's case, not in any other case that we can think of. Not Ellsberg, not Binney, not Drake.

If this is the case, they want to talk about the theoretical risks of journalism instead of the concrete harms of their policies, of their programs, of the decisions. The way this is affecting everyone in the United States and around the world. They don't want to have a conversation about what's been done. They want to have a conversation about what might happen if you don't trust them. What might happen if journalists investigate them in the absolute worst case.

Yanis Varoufakis:

Well, first they are getting Julian. Then they will get you. Me. Everyone. This is a clear struggle for freedom of the press and for the right of citizens to know that which governments are doing behind their backs, supposedly on their behalf. Julian has never been charged for anything. His name has been dragged through the mud over the Swedish case. Even progressives were cajoled into believing that he was running away from Swedish justice on the rape charges. And whenever the supporters of Julian were pointing out that Julian would like nothing more than to face his accusers in Sweden but the only reason why he is not getting out of the Ecuadorian embassy is because he knew that there was a secret national

security apparatus ready to pounce upon him from the United States. Simply because he embarrassed the security apparatus by revealing all the information that we now know and cherish. Regarding massacres in Iraq, in Afghanistan, the CIA papers in 2017.

Even progressives were cajoled into thinking or saying “Oh come on, this is paranoia. He’s simply trying to avoid facing up to the charges in Sweden”. Now we know, because by an accident, by a cock-up in United States, the authorities have actually published the charges that are being laid against him, which are effectively spying charges. Which means that if Julian steps out of the Ecuadorian embassy, he will be arrested by British police. Then he would be extradited to the US and then we will never hear from him again. He will be like Chelsea Manning, he will disappear into the Guantanamo-like system. Even his lawyers will not be told what he has been charged with and that is only for the purpose that people like you and me and our audience and everybody else out there do not have access to the dirty secrets of our security apparatus, supposedly in our name.

Glenn Greenwald:

There's been a long effort to try and prosecute Julian Assange and Wikileaks going back to the Obama administration that actually convened a grand jury that made clear they wanted to be able to prosecute and indict him for what they regarded as the crimes of reporting information about what the US government was doing in the dark, but ultimately concluded, the Obama administration did, that there was no way to do that without also prosecuting the *New York Times* or the *Guardian* or all the other news organisations that either worked with Wikileaks or that published the same secrets as it did or that published similar or even more sensitive secrets. How do you justify criminalising the act of publishing documents in the case of Wikileaks but then not prosecute the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the other ones.

So with that reason the Obama administration, although it wanted to and made clear it wished it could, but decided that it wouldn't prosecute Wikileaks. At the time, the US media seemed to be more on the side of Wikileaks because they realised the threat that that kind of a prosecution could and would pose to themselves. Everything changed in terms of how the US government views Wikileaks and in terms of how the media views Wikileaks after the 2016 election, because before, it was perceived that Wikileaks was exposing the war crimes of the Bush administration and had a lot of support on the left and among liberals as a result.

But once 2016 happened and most of their reporting during that year was harmful to the candidate favored by most of the media, which was Hillary Clinton, and therefore helped Donald Trump, he [Assange] lost almost all of his support on the left and even among the traditional media. And even though he gained some support on the right, it is still true that in a lot of ways Wikileaks is viewed as public enemy number one among the CIA, the justice

department, the FBI, the NSA. Even with Trump at the helm, they still view Wikileaks as one of their main enemies because he's been stealing their secrets for years.

And then the media support for him has more or less evaporated now that they see him not so much as a neutral whistleblower or an anti-Republican whistleblower, but as a pro-Trump whistleblower or even as an arm of Russian intelligence, which is something they say with great regularity notwithstanding the fact that there is no evidence for it. So all that has changed how Wikileaks is perceived. The Trump administration has made clear that it is a top priority of theirs to prosecute and extradite Julian Assange and Wikileaks for the crime of - what they regard as the crime - publishing documents and it's going to be much harder to stop them [Trump adm.] this time because he [Assange] has very few allies across the political spectrum as opposed to 2011 when the Obama administration decided they couldn't do it.

Srecko Horvat:

Well let me first state that for years now I've been a close friend to Julian Assange I haven't brought him any ration [of] files and he hasn't given me any kind of files but precisely out of this perspective I think it's a very dangerous situation what is happening to Julian Assange who is already for more than six years in something what the the United Nations calls "arbitrary detention" at the Ecuadorian embassy in London. So me as a friend I was hundreds of times surveilled by just entering the embassy. Even "The Guardian" published a list with our names. Me, Yanis Varoufakis & Slavoj Zizek - everyone who visited the embassy. And so it's not just that I don't want to compare my situation to his because I am free luckily but I want to say that anyone who is connected to him is also suspicious. So what was found out very recently is that the Department of Justice in the United States prepared an indictment and charges for Julian Assange which for me hardly comes as a surprise. And this is something what his lawyers have been warning for almost eight years now that there is a secret grand jury in Virginia that they want to charge him under the [Espionage Act](#) and so on.

Why did it come out now. I don't think it's so much connected to the so-called Robert Mueller investigation. I think it's much more closer to the biggest leak in the CIA-History by WikiLeaks called "[Vault-7](#)". And so obviously Assange has many enemies. But why is this important for for for the independence of journalism. It's important because what it's happening now is setting a very dangerous precedent for media freedom. So let's say that I have some information, I leaked the information to you. You publish the information. This information is an interest of of the public because they can see about the corruption scandal for instance, find out about the corruption scandal, and you end up in jail because you publish the information. I'm simplifying things. But what they tried to do is actually to set a precedent in the sense that any publisher any media any journalist who acquires certain information, which is their [journalists] job by definition, from the times of [Walter Lippmann](#), whom you mentioned, could end up persecuted or in jail or in a sort of Guantanamo. And I think this is really dangerous because it also on the other side it sets a dangerous precedent in the sense

that OK if the US is now asking the UK to extradite Julian Assange why wouldn't Saudi Arabia ask to extradite critical journalists who are based in France in Germany or the U.K. - in all the countries with whom Saudi Arabia is doing very lucrative arms deals for instance or what if a journalist for The New York Times writes a very critical article about the Chinese social credit system which is a very dystopian surveillance system and China starts to request extradition of all those journalists. I mean this is a hypothetical scenario but I'm just saying that the indictment and charges of Julian Assange could lead us in a very dangerous situation where the whole perspective of freedom of press might change.

Noam Chomsky: (Video produced by "[ThePressProject](#)")

Julian Assange has performed an enormous service to all the people in the world who treasure the values of freedom and democracy and who therefore demand the right to know what their elected representatives are doing. And for that very reason he is one of the most dangerous criminals on the face of the earth pursued with savagery by the rulers of the free and democratic societies. And there is a reason - there is a basic principle of government that's well understood by serious analysts. actually it was explained quite clearly by the Professor of the Science of Government at Harvard University, the distinguished liberal political scientist and a government adviser Samuel Huntington.

He observed, I'll quote him that "the architects of power in the United States must create a force that can be felt but not seen. Power remains strong when it remains in the dark exposed to the sunlight it begins to evaporate."

And he gave some telling examples concerning the real nature of the Cold War. He was discussing a US military intervention abroad and he observed, I'll quote him again that "you may have to sell intervention or other military action in such a way as to create the misimpression that it is the Soviet Union that you're fighting. That's what the United States has been doing ever since the Truman Doctrine." And there are many illustrations of that the leading principle.

Well Julian Assange has committed the grave crime of exposing power to sunlight which may cause power to evaporate if the population grasps the opportunity to become independent citizens of a free society rather than subjects of a master who operates in secret. And that's a choice. And it's long been understood that the public can cause power to evaporate.

The one leading thinker who understood and explained this critical fact was David Hume writing on the first principles of government. In one of the first modern works of political theory almost 250 years ago his formulation was so clear and pertinent that I'll simply quote it, Hume found "nothing more surprising than to see the easiness with which the many are governed by the few and to observe the implicit submission with which men resign their own

sentiments and passions to those of their rulers. When we inquire by what means this wonder is brought about, we shall find that as force is always on the side of the governed, the governors have nothing to support them but opinion is therefore on opinion only that government is founded and this maxim extends to the most despotic and most military governments as well as to the most free and the most popular. “

Actually Hume underestimates the efficacy of violence but his words are particularly appropriate to societies where popular struggle over many years has won a considerable degree of freedom. In such societies such as ours, force really is on the side of the governed [uns/menschen/citizens]. The governors have nothing to support them but opinion. That is one reason why the huge public relations industry is the most immense propaganda agency in human history. It reached its developed and reached its most sophisticated forms in the most free societies - the United States and Britain. Those institutions [Public Relations Propaganda Agencies] arose around a century ago when elites came to understand that too much freedom had been won for the public to be controlled by force. So it would be necessary to control attitudes and opinions. Liberal intellectual elites understood that as well, which is why they urge to give a few quotes that “we must discard democratic dogmatism about people being the best judges of their own interests. They are not. They are ignorant and meddling outsiders and therefore must be put in their place for their own interests.” I’m quoting highly respected liberal intellectuals.

One device to control the population is to operate in secret so that the ignorant and meddling outsiders will stay in their place remote from the levers of power which are none of their business. That's the main purpose for classification of internal documents. Anyone who has pored through the archives of release documents [via Wikileaks] has surely come to realize pretty quickly that what is kept secret very rarely has anything at all to do with security except for the security of the leadership from their domestic enemy - their own population. The practice is so routine that illustration is really quite superfluous.

I'll mention only one current case consider the global trade agreements - the Pacific and Atlantic [TTIP & TPP]. In actuality [they are] investor rights agreements masquerading under the rubric of free trade. They're negotiated in secret with the intention of a Stalinist style ratification by parliaments - yes or no. Which of course means “yes” with no discussion or debate but what's called in the United States a fast track. To be accurate they're not negotiated entirely in secret. The facts are known to the corporate lawyers and lobbyists who are writing the details in such a way as to protect the interests of the constituency that they represent which is of course not the public. The public, on the contrary, is an enemy that must be kept in ignorance. Julian Assange's crime is to violate the fundamental principles of government; To lift the veil of secrecy that protects power from scrutiny keeps it from evaporating.

And again it is well understood by the powerful that lifting the veil may cause power to evaporate. It may even lead to authentic freedom and democracy. If an aroused public comes

to understand that force is on the side of the governed [on the people] and it can be their force if they chose. If they choose to control their own fate.

We should all thank Julian for his courage and integrity in providing us with this precious gift at great cost to himself. Much to our shame.

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