



WikiLeaks Editor in Chief on the Prosecution of Julian Assange

This transcript may not be 100% accurate due to audio quality or other factors.

TAYLOR HUDAK (TH): Hi, everyone, I'm Taylor Hudak with acTVism Munich, and we are wrapping up the second week of Julian Assange's extradition hearings. Joining me now is WikiLeaks editor in chief Kristinn Hrafnsson. Kristinn, I want to thank you for joining me. Now, we have had a number of defence witnesses take the stand. What is a common theme that we are seeing in this extradition hearing so far? And do you think that the defence is putting up a very good case?

KRISTINN HRAFNSSON (KS): Exceptionally good witness statements that we heard both from those who have testified on their experience as the journalists who worked on the project, but also the expert witnesses in various fields, legal expert professors and professors in journalism and media. And it has been very, very strong testimony. And it's been the experience throughout here that has seen an attempt by the opposition, by the U.S. lawyers to sort of poke holes in their testimony. But they do it on a very shallow basis, in my opinion. They try to attack the integrity of the individuals, accuse them of bias, etc. etc. But I am very happy with what we've heard so far and we're going to be hearing many more testify in defence of Julian Assange.

TH: We have heard a lot about WikiLeaks publications, specifically the Iraq war logs. What was it like for that moment in court to hear about how these publications have helped initiate positive political and social change?

KS: I mean, the evidence is so strong that it's overwhelming. It cannot be denied. And in many respects 2010 was a watershed point in journalism history, and nobody can deny that. And when it comes to these two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the material that we published in 2010 were instrumental in the change, in the perception of what those wars were all about. It was the full story. And it is there's no doubt in my mind that we heard testimony to this, that it has fundamentally changed the perspective. For example, just the helicopter attack video - we've heard Nicky Hager, a respected renowned journalist from New Zealand who has worked on the WikiLeaks project. He said there were two sentences [spoken] in the video by the helicopter pilots of the Apache helicopter who basically assassinated a dozen people on the ground there, including innocent civilians. It happened when they - the commanders -

were observing the carnage on the ground that one of the crew of the helicopter said, "*look at all these dead bastards*". And the reply came back saying "*nice*". Just these two sentences was the equivalent of the black man who died in the United States where he was uttering, "*I can't breathe, I can't breathe*". It changed fundamentally how we looked at the Iraq war. Just this one video, an extremely important item in the whole exposure of the horrors of the war. But then, of course, there were the almost 400,000 field reports from Iraq that were published and almost 90,000 from Afghanistan. So it's a tremendously important publication for exposing the true nature and the horror of the war.

TH: Now, we also heard earlier today about how Jennifer Robinson was present in the Ecuadorian embassy in London while Julian Assange was staying there. And this was specifically during the meeting where a former U.S. congressperson, Dana Rohrabacher, visited Assange and he claimed that he was visiting him on behalf of President Trump to issue Assange a pardon for providing information on the source of the DNC emails. That is a very strong piece of evidence to suggest that this is a political case and therefore extradition should not be granted based on that fact alone.

KS: Yes, it's a very strong testimony - on that you are totally correct. When you take all the elements together to support the politicisation of this case and how it is being politically motivated, there should be no doubt in anybody's mind that this [case] should be thrown out. There is no possibility of extraditing Julian on the basis of a political crime. That is basically the text of the extradition treaty between the two countries [U.S.-UK]. So this meeting and the account of Jennifer Robinson of this meeting was very important to get into the records and add to the full story. We have in that same year, Mike Pompeo infamous first appearance in addressing a crowd where he goes after WikiLeaks, calling it as a "*lone state hostile intelligence service*". It was then as the director of the CIA. We have Jeff Sessions, then attorney general, talking about the utmost priority in bringing Julian to trial. And then we have this meeting where an offer is put on the table, an extraordinary one. And even though it's been denied by the White House, you have to just measure the testimony of the person who was there, Jennifer Robinson, towards the integrity of how you believe what the White House is saying, who had been claiming that they never sanctioned anything of this nature. But Rohrabacher did claim that he was there on behalf of Donald Trump with his knowledge and approval. Making this offer - which was extraordinary - that was denied- an offer to basically reveal a source which no journalist of course, can do - we saw a toughening of this stance and a chain of events that leads to our day here in court, basically.

TH: Now, the U.S. Espionage Act of 1917 is being used broadly to criminalise standard journalistic activity. Can you speak about the broader implications of this case and how journalism is going to be impacted if Assange is extradited, tried and convicted?

KS: It's actually extraordinary. It was very revealing to hear the testimony of the lawyer [Cary] Schenkman today and yesterday, who is an expert for the Espionage Act of 1917. To understand that we are going back to that era, which is probably the most repressive era in the

U.S. history, going back more than 100 years to World War 1 and hear how this act was used as a pretext to go after dissidents and those who opposed the participation of the United States in World War One. However, then this [Espionage Act of 1917] toxic weapon against free speech and dissidents laid dormant for decades and decades. It was only in the early 70s that the U.S. government tried to sort of go back to its archive of weapons against free speech and try to use it against Daniel Ellsberg and failed, of course, in that attempt. Since then no publisher has been basically threatened with this Espionage Act, although if you look back over the Obama years, we of course saw and noted that the Espionage Act was being used again and again against the whistleblowers in an act which will forever haunt the memory of the Obama [administration], in my opinion, because it was totally contrary to the platform that he fought on prior to 2008. And at that time, in the Obama years, we frequently warned that this was a step towards the next phase - using the Espionage Act against journalism and journalists and publishers. And Julian now has been the first victim of that attempt. And as I frequently say, that he will not be the last if this is [case] not thwarted here and he is saved from the extradition to the United States. If that [extradition of Assange] goes through, it will be the biggest shock to journalism in decades. Absolutely in my lifetime now.

TH: Lastly, why should people support Julian Assange?

KS: They should support Julian Assange because of the principles that are underlying this persecution of him. The principles that are at stake here. Of course, I would say that they should support him on a personal level, because it's absolutely untenable and it's disgraceful that we have a political prisoner in a Western European country sitting and rotting away in a jail here, waiting to be extradited to a country where he will end his life in a cell. But it's more than the personal - you have to think about the wider implications. And as I say, it is the matter for everybody to save our fundamental freedoms. And those fundamental freedoms are at stake in this case here.

TH: Kristinn Hrafnsson, thank you.

END