



Julian Assange's father and brother travel to Washington to oppose US extradition

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

Anya Parampil: I'm at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., where the brother and father of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, Gabriel and John Shipton, have wrapped up a multi week, 13 city tour of the United States, where they've aimed to raise awareness about Julian's case and demand he not be extradited to the United States.

John Shipton: Julian has now spent, well, moving to the 12th and 13th year of arbitrary detention, arbitrary detention declared by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. Experts on Psychological Torture published the report that Julian had undergone years of psychological torture, mobbing, calumnies, lies, smears.

AP: John Shipton, father of Julian Assange. You were just sharing a story about something he went through while in prison over the last few months. During this event at the National Press Club, you discussed the pain that he's gone through as a father in detention. I'm wondering if you could repeat that story for our viewers, because I think it really highlights his plight.

JS: In the first visit in a number of months because the jail is in covid locked down, Julians two children came in, Max is a little boy, with their mom. The guards insisted that they searched the mouth of the little boy and began to apply force. And the child went into a meltdown and started to cry out. If Julian had got up and defended his child, there would have been a pile on what they call the parlor. Six guards would have come over and pressed him to the ground and handcuffed him and dragged him away in an intimidatory fashion. So Julian has to sit there and see his child insulted. This sort of intimidation and oppression is a constant in maximum security circumstances- Belmarsh as being a maximum security jail.

AP: And they threatened him with further isolation as well, correct?

JS: In another visit some months preceding that, Julian had to dress in full PPE. And it's a bitter irony because he's 23 hours a day in his cell as it is, so in full PPE. The children come in and the children's mum and his partner Stella. The guards warn children that if the children run to embrace him or Stella embraces him, Julian will have to spend 23 hours a day in isolation for two weeks. Well, he's been in isolation now, for coming on three years.

AP: And I just wanted to highlight that because at The Grayzone, at least, we talk a lot about the implications for press freedom. But I think for the average person, the average citizen sitting at home in the United States to hear the story of how a father suffers the way Julian and the rights of his children are being violated on such a personal level, I think it's important for people to understand. So thank you for sharing that with us, John.

JS: Thank you. It's been a pleasure.

Gabriel Shipton: It is about 20, the Chelsea Manning leaks and the publication of those leaks. And it's about explaining to people that that's what it's about. It's not about- that's what Julian is being prosecuted for. You know, that's what this precedent, dangerous precedent has been set, is about those leaks. It's not not about anything else. You know, and I think this is a real problem that people feel that they can, you know, excuse this prosecution, that is the first of its kind against the publisher, because they might disagree with or, you know, have a disagreement with that person. So I think it's really important to just to talk to these people and say this is the first time that this has ever been done to a publisher and how it affects people not just here but around the world.

AP: Gabriel Shipton, brother of Julian Assange, tell me, how is your tour? You were in 13 cities during this trip right across the United States. How are you greeted by local organizers? How is this trip made possible?

GS: It's been incredible. Like John and I have literally spoken in front of thousands of people across the country over the past month. A lot of people coming into this different way, a lot of anti-war people, technologists who are interested in free Internet, you know, people from libertarian bent who are more interested in First Amendment and things like that, so everyone sort of approaches this case in a different way, but they are all united that this prosecution is a, you know, it's a danger to a free press and the First Amendment.

AP: And what about the media interest?

GS: Well, yeah. I mean, really, it's the independent media that has paid us a lot of attention. We have got some mainstream media here and there, but it's really the independent media that has, you know, jumped on board and wanted to hear our story, basically.

AP: What is the experience like for you and your father as Australians being in the United States, a country that is prosecuting your brother, also an Australian citizen, for violating US laws?

GS: Well, it's pretty surreal. You know, I guess John and I have a bit of a laugh at the end of most days about, you know, just the irony that we are two Australians in the US trying to convince people to stand up for their rights. So, yeah, it's a bit surreal in that way. As to the extraterritorial stuff, we don't really talk about that here because the U.S. is you know, it's so exceptional. You know, it has this...

AP: It's the empire...

GS: Yeah, its tentacles reach everywhere. So it's not just Julian who is in trouble. There are literally hundreds of people who have been trying to be plucked out of their country. Especially it's gotten so much worse after 9/11, obviously, where all these extradition treaties are negotiated around the world and now they're being turned against people like Julian or business people or, you know, foreign people from other governments like Venezuela and so on.

AP: You're referencing the case of Alex Saab, which is something else that we've covered at The Grayzone, a diplomat literally kidnaped by the United States. Absolutely surreal. Gabriel Shipton, thanks so much.

GS: Thank you.

Cornel West: When it comes to courage, when it comes to the willingness to expose lies and crimes, I am in deep solidarity with my dear brother, Julian.

AP: Dr. West, it's a pleasure. I don't know if you remember, but actually the first time we met, I was here covering an event you did to deliver a letter to the White House in support of Jeffrey Sterling, a whistleblower locked up. It was a while back and he's free now.

CW: He is free now....

AP: But in covering the Assange trial, I thought about how the fact that the judge in the United Kingdom refused the extradition request based on the possibility that Assange could face torture in the United States. And I think about what Jeffrey Sterling went to when he was denied medical care. What do you think about the significance of that specifically being the reason Judge Baratz would not send Julian to the United States?

Cornel West: Yeah, I think the judge didn't want to confront the fundamental truth that it's an

issue of press freedom, it's an issue of Julian and other journalists being able to lay bare a truth. And so, on the one hand, it could be positive because it means, in fact, that at least we have some possibility of him being treated more humanely. But in terms of principle, it's still far removed from what we want. And the very fact that we're able to put it in the context of how do we keep alive issues of integrity, honesty, decency, let alone substantive democracy in the face of the lies and crimes of the American empire, become very, very important, very important.

AP: You drove all the way from New York just to be here today and you're driving back tonight.

Cornel West: Driving back, indeed, indeed. But this was worth every second of the way.

AP: Julian's case is that important. Thank you, Dr. West.

END