

Day 2: Julian Assange Appeal Hearing

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Taylor Hudak (TH): Hi everyone, I'm journalist Taylor Hudak with AcTVism Munich, and I'm outside the Royal Courts of Justice in London. We just wrapped up day two of the extradition proceedings of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange. Similar to yesterday, when I arrived at the courthouse, despite the rain, hundreds of protesters gathered outside the courthouse to demonstrate their support. Now, inside the courtroom today, the Crown Prosecution Service, representing the US government, presented their rebuttal to the defence arguments that were presented yesterday. Clair Dobbin, for the prosecution, spent quite a bit of time addressing the association between Julian Assange and whistleblower Chelsea Manning. It was Manning who leaked documents on the Iraq and Afghanistan wars to Julian Assange, which he then published on Wikileaks. On this point, Dobbin, for the prosecution, made several attempts to separate Assange's activities from that of a journalist by stating that Assange encouraged and solicited Manning to provide more information and publicly asked others to provide material to Wikileaks. Of course, this is a newsgathering technique that journalists engage in all the time. You encourage your sources to provide more information and to seek to criminalise this behaviour will set a dangerous precedent. One must also ask, is it right for judges, politicians and state officials to determine who is and who is not a journalist?

Rebecca Vincent (RV): This case is about journalism. It is about press freedom. If they make an exception of Julian Assange, the rule will be broken. And no one, no journalist, no publisher, no journalistic source, no media organisation can ever be confident that their rights will be respected again. We will see an immediate and distinct chilling effect, in particular on national security reporting. This is absolutely about journalism.

TH: Now moving on to a related point, the prosecution repeatedly stated that Wikileaks published the names of informants in their releases, and thus potentially put lives at risk. This was strongly countered by the defence, in which they argued that Wikileaks actually took time to redact the names. It was one of the media partners who published in his book the

Password to a media file, which included those unredacted documents. Right after Assange learned of this, he went to great lengths to reduce harm. In fact, he had a phone call – which has been published on Project Veritas, and it was also verified by Wikileaks Editor-in-chief Kristinn Hrafnsson as being authentic – in which Assange in this phone call, warns the State Department about this incident of the circulating password. Also, other organisations were the first to publish the files unredacted. Even the judge today made a point to the prosecution, stating that by the time Wikileaks published this information, it was already published on several websites. So this raises the question: why is Wikileaks being prosecuted? This points to the argument that this is a selective prosecution.

RV: Again, we're seeing attempts to make exceptions for Julian Assange – why his human rights don't matter, why no more protections for journalists don't matter. We've heard this before. We heard how – even though they knew his state of mental health, they knew his risk of suicide – how, on a note, it would be okay. Send him here anyways.

TH: The defence made another very strong point in court, stating that the prosecution is relying on the US-UK extradition treaty to prosecute Assange, but they ignore the safeguards and protections within the treaty, namely article four, which prevents extradition for political offences. But the prosecution instead cites the UK Extradition Act, which is domestic law and does not include a provision which prevents extradition for political offences. Now that this hearing has concluded, it will be up to two judges to determine the evidence presented and issue a decision. At the conclusion of the hearing today, the judges stated that they will stay their decision and ordered for both parties to submit relevant documentation in the coming weeks.

Craig Murray (CM): We are a community, a community that shows the sort of democracy that Julian dreams of. Where giving information empowers people, puts power back from the hands of the politicians into the hands of the people. And I see him!

TH: That's all I have for you today in this report, I'm journalist Taylor Hudak with ActVism Munich, and I'll see you all next time.

END

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