

There is still time for us to do right – and save Julian Assange from dying in U.S. dungeon



By PETER HITCHENS FOR THE MAIL ON SUNDAY / June 18, 2023

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There is still just time for our [British] Government to do a good, brave deed, which will be recognised as such decades hence. There is still just time for prominent figures in politics and the media to place themselves on the side of justice and liberty, where they ought always to be.

Julian Assange must not be extradited to the U.S., for such an action will shame our country.

If in doubt they should consider the very similar case of Daniel Ellsberg, who has just died. Mr Ellsberg was excoriated, hounded and put on trial when, half a century ago, he publicised documents revealing the nasty truth about the Vietnam War. President Richard Nixon mobilised the law to silence and punish him. Ellsberg died a much-honoured hero of liberty. Nixon died in shame and disgrace.

Yet the shadows are closing fast around Julian Assange, the WikiLeaks founder who infuriated the US government by revealing a trove of embarrassing material about its misdeeds.

A few weeks from now, he could be bundled into a van at Belmarsh prison, the high-security fortress where he has been cruelly held for years. And then he could be led on to an aircraft and flown to the U.S., where there is a strong chance that he will spend the rest of his life buried alive in some federal dungeon.

I wrote here in September 2020: 'Do we really want the hand of a foreign power to be able to reach into our national territory at will and pluck out anyone it wants to punish? Are we still even an independent country if we allow this? The Americans would certainly not let us treat them in this way. It is unimaginable that the US would hand over to us any of its citizens who had been accused of leaking British secret documents. Yet if Mr Assange is sent to face trial in the US, any British journalist who comes into possession of classified material from the U.S., though he has committed no crime according to our own law, faces the same danger.

'This is a basic violation of our national sovereignty, and a major threat to our own press freedom. I think that no English court should accept this demand. And if the courts fail in their duty, then I think that any self-respecting Home Secretary should overrule them.'

Please raise your voices while you can. This is a political prosecution and we should not permit such a thing against anyone on our soil.

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