

The Crucifixion of Julian Assange, A Journalist Committed to Truth and Peace

Mr. Dedaj is Co-administrator of the French alternative media website, Le Grand Soir, <https://www.legrandsoir.info/>. This is the edited text of the English translation of his remarks delivered on Panel 2 of the December 12-13 Schiller Institute conference.

I am a “citizen journalist” who has adopted this mission for 30 years now after discovering and following politics in Latin America. I have been following the past and present evolution of the Latin American situation, especially Nicaragua and later Cuba. It was therefore natural that I was very interested in all notions of knowledge, freedom of the press, and how to circulate propaganda.

WikiLeaks: A New Hope in Media

When WikiLeaks appeared on the international scene in 2010, it appeared only natural that we should meet somewhere. And this experience of WikiLeaks, for us alternative media, alternative journalists, was literally a kind of hope. A hope to get rid of having to depend on the information conveyed by the mainstream media, which we were certainly scrutinizing and analyzing.

Now a new media offered us raw and unfiltered information. The WikiLeaks model was crucial for us. This model was the following. It offered to whistleblowers the ability to anonymously post authentic documents issued by insiders within the entities of corrupt systems without risk of retaliation or punishment. In addition, WikiLeaks and its team of journalists and



Viktor Dedaj

Schiller Institute

technicians guaranteed the authenticity of these documents. The third thing WikiLeaks was morally committed to, was that someone, somewhere, had taken risks to expose crimes or embezzlement.

This model was something quite extraordinary, quite innovative. Similar sites existed, but they lacked the dimension and the validity of the data, the certification of the authenticity of the documents.

You are aware of the 2010 publication of the famous video “Collateral murder,” which I considered a sort of trailer WikiLeaks prepared to introduce a whole series of other documents, terrible documents about the reality of the wars that were hidden from us. We were there with the WikiLeaks phenomenon at the heart of a major problem that appeared in the post-9/11 world.

This world, the turning point after the attacks, is distinguished by several factors.

The first is the state of astonishment in which the world found itself under the threat of an American empire that was unleashed with words like “you’re either with us, or against us.”

A second element, post-9/11, is the explosion of the security and intelligence services in terms of volume and margins for maneuvering. The tentacles of these entities were spreading. They were becoming more and more invasive and less and less controlled. Governments, under the pretext of fighting terrorism, a phenomenon, arrogated to themselves the right to practice more and more in the dark and less and less in transparency.

And as for the media—and this is the essential point—they abandoned any claim of objectivity ... and we saw the emergence of what has been called “embedded journalism.” The big international media did not even pretend to do their job. So it was logical that a media like WikiLeaks, which we could call Media 2.0, emerged soon after these phenomena. It was essential for democracy that our right to know as citizens be restored. And this right to know, which was sacred to WikiLeaks, was probably the greatest service it could render to humanity, at that moment, in the midst of those events.

If you think about it, you become aware of it, and I think the public didn’t realize it immediately, but some people got the point very quickly.

The model that WikiLeaks proposed, the model of being able to propose to insiders within organizations to denounce abuses anonymously, and thus with a certain guarantee of impunity, is important.

Well, this Modus Operandi was an existential threat to all corrupt structures. And I insist on corrupt structures because, starting from the idea that WikiLeaks spied and revealed things, it is easy to understand that WikiLeaks did not denounce and has never denounced good deeds. It is not the good deeds that the whistleblowers transmit in the hope of making them public. It is indeed a question of embezzlement, and in this case, speaking of the publications of 2010, truly, war crimes.

Repression of Assange and WikiLeaks

And here the media have done their job of stifling WikiLeaks, because when WikiLeaks releases a video, ok, it gets media attention, but in reality, very little is reported about the content.

The repression that came down on Julian Assange and WikiLeaks was equal to the real or perceived existential threat. It was clear that the U.S. administration, in short, was determined 1) not to let this model work normally, and 2) above all not to repeat itself.

To go after Assange therefore required not simply neutralizing the organization, but an intimidation to make clear that it was dangerous to fight for its right to inform. You know that Assange was accused of being a sexual abuser, and this kind of stuff.

In the meantime, we have proof that it was a frame-up. It was the journalist Stefania Maurizi of *La Repubblica*, an Italian investigative journalist who got us the emails exchanged between the two prosecutors that show collusion. We know that the arrest warrant issued by the Swedish prosecutor was irregular. We know that

the British were forced to change the law after arresting Julian Assange because of the irregularity of their arrest warrant but in the end accepted.

We know that the trap had closed around Julian Assange’s ankle, like a wolf caught in a trap, and he knew that he was expected in Sweden to be sent to the United States for the serious crime of having allowed us to know the truth. So he took refuge in the embassy where the British took extraordinary measures, never before seen for a person who was formally accused of nothing, since the prosecutor, Marianne Ny, had only launched a preliminary investigation and nothing else.

Seven years in an embassy of 70 square meters without having seen the light of day, WikiLeaks was able to continue to act and did even more by saving—this is what I believe—saving the life of Edward Snowden by organizing his escape—if I may say so—from Hong Kong. Few people know this, but Edward Snowden owes his present freedom to Julian Assange.

Unfortunately all the attempts to regularize his situation—all the attempts to set up humanitarian channels to cure him of his lung disease, his shoulder problem, his broken tooth—everything failed, largely due to the bad will of Great Britain, which treated Assange worse than the way it had treated the [Chilean] dictator [Augusto] Pinochet, who in his time had benefited from a 4-star hotel and humanitarian measures.

The determination to capture Assange was stated loud and clear with an embassy surrounded night and day by British police officers at the cost to the American taxpayer of tens of millions of pounds sterling.

Later, as you know, the Ecuadorian government was to change, and the betrayal by the new president, Lenín Moreno, was blatant. He reneges on all the commitments made, he violates the constitution, and almost at the same time, it becomes clear that Julian Assange had been the subject of a full-fledged spy operation by the very company that was in charge of security at the embassy, UC Global, which is currently on trial in Madrid.

The fact that Lenín Moreno went on to betray almost all of his promises, including to his voters, violated the Ecuadorian constitution itself, made life impossible for Julian Assange and attempted by all means available to push him out of the embassy, for example, by turning off the heating in his room, by installing new staff who became very aggressive with him, by setting up impractical visiting conditions, by cutting off his internet communications, by accusing

him of organizing a world spy center from the embassy, etc., in short, by even accusing him of covering the walls of the embassy with his excrement! This is what the president of Ecuador said at a press conference. Of course, it was not known at the time that everything was recorded and filmed and that all the madness surrounding Julian Assange could be demonstrated as a fraud precisely because of their own espionage.

This simple fact of having been spied on, including his lawyers and the journalists who visited him, even his doctors, should, because of the violation of the client/lawyer privilege, have made any trial impossible in England, but as we will see throughout this case, legality has nothing to do with this story.

Defamation and Sham Legal Maneuverings

So it was a question of getting their hands on the greatest journalist of the 21st century, and how would they do it? They were to proceed with a propaganda campaign to infiltrate people's minds very slowly over a period of ten years, where urban legends would appear about what WikiLeaks is doing, the crimes allegedly committed by WikiLeaks, and also about the person of Julian Assange, presented as a mythomaniac, as a misogynist, and sometimes as an anti-Semite—in short all the weapons known to destroy someone's personality.

This campaign was not a surprise, in fact it had been prepared by one of those private intelligence companies that gravitate around the CIA, the NSA, and the rest of that crowd. We're talking about the Stratfor company, which is one of the main companies in charge of the fight against WikiLeaks, and we know this because a leak from the company was passed on to WikiLeaks.

When Julian Assange was finally removed from the Embassy in violation of international law and even the Ecuadorian constitution, it only took a quarter of an hour for the British judge first to insult him, and then to sentence him to 50 weeks in prison, for violating what? His "conditions of probation," which is a sentence that has never been more severe for someone who has committed such a crime, especially since he committed it to seek refuge and asylum in an embassy. But he will not just be sentenced to 50 weeks, but to 50 weeks in a high security prison. We will see that this is the only case to my knowledge in Great Britain, that a journalist, accused of nothing, in preventive detention, is locked up in a high security prison.

The second shock that will really surprise you, but which is not really a surprise, is that at that moment, as if by chance, Sweden, and the Swedish prosecutor Marianne Ny, decides that finally, it is a good time to abandon the case, as she had decided in 2007 to reopen it. In fact the Swedes opened and closed the case three times! Because it was necessary to give space to the real actor of this farce—I mean the United States Department of Justice, which during all this time was hidden backstage behind the curtains, but with their shoes protruding under the curtain. And here they came, presenting themselves to ask for the extradition of Julian Assange.

A Rendition, Not an Extradition

So already if we stop and think about the words—because here we are in the middle of propaganda—extradition, already there, we are in the middle of it, extradition is sending someone back to a country where he has committed a crime or sending him back to a country where he has to serve a sentence.

Julian Assange is an Australian, strangely qualified as a traitor in the United States. He is a journalist who has worked in Europe, whose publishing house is based in Reykjavik, Iceland. It is therefore not actually an extradition. Julian Assange has never been under American jurisdiction. It is simply a well-established American habit of exercising extra-territoriality, a new extra-territoriality, and after their embargo law, the Americans have decided to apply an extra-territoriality to an Australian journalist on the basis of an old law from 1917, the "Espionage Act."

It is not therefore an extradition in the strict sense of the term. The word "extradition" is used by the press and by the Ministry of Justice to confuse the public in order to hide the following fact: Julian Assange is the subject of a sophisticated form of "rendition," of forced kidnapping on British soil disguised as an extradition. As far as Europe is concerned, especially London, it is about the equivalent of pulling a hood over his head and throwing him in the trunk of a car and taking him off to a wasteland.

Not a single person found an anomaly and raised their finger to wonder what exactly was going on. So the urban legends and propaganda campaigns tried to turn Julian Assange and WikiLeaks into some kind of terrorist organization. That's how he was labeled, agent of Russian forces of course, and a whole panoply of epithets that served to slowly erase the passing years, to erase from the public's consciousness the memory of WikiLeaks and Julian Assange who in 2010 had made

the front page of *Le Monde* and *Time* magazine. He was the man of the year, representing the organization of the year. Today there are a lot of people asking us who Julian Assange is. Ah yes, WikiLeaks reminds me of something. The greatest press adventure of the 21st century, the most promising experiment has literally been erased from the collective consciousness.

The Show Trial

The trial that finally took place on September 7 will have seen the same strategy applied. The Americans will change several charges; the public knows the first ones that were launched in February, but in August, at the last minute, the Americans presented a whole new series of charges that had nothing to do with the first ones, and during the trial they changed again their arguments and their guns by questioning witnesses who were prepared for charges that were 7 months old.

So much so that they even tried to destabilize an important witness, Daniel Ellsberg, by sending him 300 pages at 3 o'clock in the morning when he was supposed to testify at 6 o'clock in the morning.

During this trial we saw the Americans finally say out loud what everyone knew: that they gave themselves the right to come and get any journalist anywhere in the world under the Espionage Act of 1917.

We saw a trial that almost took place behind closed doors, refusing by name the presence of about 50 NGOs, where 90 journalists had been accredited and not a single one came. In the room there were only four people and a few rare witnesses who could tell us how the trial unfolded. We saw American lawyers who were extremely aggressive towards the witnesses but who

lost their footing in the face of witnesses of exceptional strength. Losing ground to such an extent that we saw the American lawyer, Lewis, attacking his own witness after having forgotten that it was his witness, and so annoyed at not receiving the right answers. This operation to kidnap Julian Assange that is taking place before our eyes will probably succeed despite all efforts, because of a parallel event to this trial: the silence of the media.

Here in France we have solidarity—several hundred people who are trying by all means to warn of the danger of what has just been done.

Extraterritoriality

The extraterritoriality of American laws and their affirmation means that no journalist is safe anywhere. The justification employed for prosecuting a journalist abroad is important, it's interesting. Their justification is that since he published on the internet, it is as though he published everywhere in the world, and thus in the United States. Therefore, for all of us who would like to defend our right to know, who believe they would be safe, elsewhere, far away, well, no, they would not.

Apparently, the paradigm is changing, a new era is opening up and from the most absolute silence we have probably fallen into an information war as we have never seen it before. It is clear that the people targeted are not mainstream journalists but real investigative journalists and so-called alternative media.

In conclusion, I have only one thing to say to you: Imagine a world with WikiLeaks, a world without WikiLeaks, decide which world you prefer, and act accordingly.

Thank you.