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Editorial: Lessons from the long ordeal of Julian Assange

By: THE MORNING STAR

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JULIAN ASSANGE is free, or soon will be. For 12 years he has been a prisoner: for seven of them holed up in the Ecuadorian embassy as a political asylum-seeker, for five in HMP Belmarsh, his treatment compared to torture by international experts.

The plea deal by which he secures his freedom is a face-saving exercise by US President Joe Biden. The ailing Democrat leader knows complicity in Israel's war on Palestine is already sapping his vote.

His "lesser of two evils" pitch to US citizens rests on pointing to Donald Trump as a threat to the rule of law and the US constitution. It would not be enhanced if the campaign is accompanied by a show trial of the world's most famous journalist on grounds leading liberal institutions, including the New York Times, have said make a mockery of the first amendment to the US constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech and the press.

The US leader's cynical motives do not detract from the joy that will be felt by Assange, his family and supporters. This is a victory of the people over the system. There is no way Assange would have been offered this deal without a sustained effort by campaigners, from the hardy souls who turned up for years to tiny protests to ensure he was not forgotten, to those who brought the case to international attention and secured the visits by medical specialists and even the UN special rapporteur on torture, whose judgements damned Britain's courts and penal system in the eyes of the world.

The National Union of Journalists and the International Federation of Journalists have been steadfast supporters of Assange, the latter's deputy general secretary Tim Dawson in particular working closely with the Morning Star to ensure no twist and turn in the long saga went unreported in the British press. No other national daily covered every day of Assange's extradition hearings.

So it is a moment to celebrate. An innocent man has been rescued from a terrible fate. The most powerful country on Earth has been forced to back down before grassroots pressure.

But it is not an unqualified victory. Assange is innocent: he should not have to plead guilty to anything to win his freedom. His doing so rests on a justified lack of confidence in US justice.

We have seen, too, how hollow are the claims of British courts to uphold justice. Assange was blatantly a political prisoner.

The [campaigner John Rees points out](#) that “in the course of the court hearings it has become public knowledge that a lead witness for the prosecution lied, that Assange and his lawyers were spied on by the CIA, and that the CIA discussed at the highest levels plans to abduct or assassinate Assange. In any normal trial any one of these, let alone all of them, would have had the case dismissed.”

Yet this was no normal trial. Washington needed to punish the man who exposed its war crimes: the civilian victims of its wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the lawless behaviour of soldiers who laughed as they gunned down unarmed people from the air.

What a blow to the reputation of the leader of the so-called “free world.” How awkward for its ongoing attempts — and those of the craven British politicians of both leading parties who have slavishly collaborated in the US persecution of Assange — to try to claim the moral high ground over rivals like Russia or China.

As we celebrate Assange’s freedom, bear that in mind. The drive to a new world war continues: it will do so whoever is prime minister on July 5.

When they bang the war drums, demand higher military budgets, assert the need to defend democracy from malign foreign powers, remember what we learned about the Nato war machine from the exposés of Julian Assange — and don’t be taken in.

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