

# Stefania Maurizi on How Julian Assange Changed Journalism

The Italian journalist and longtime media partner of *WikiLeaks* speaks with Dennis J. Bernstein and Randy Credico about the implications of Assange's struggle against U.S. extradition.

By [Dennis J Bernstein](#) and [Randy Credico](#)

[KPFA Flashpoints](#)



Julian Assange was back in court twice last week, and will return to a high British court next month for the major legal battle of his life. It will determine whether the U.S. is allowed to extradite the *WikiLeaks* publisher to the U.S. for prosecution.

In the first of a series of extradition hearings on May 2, [Assange appeared](#) in court via video screen. He seemed composed and focused and ready to fight. He told the British High Court: "I do not wish to surrender for extradition. I'm a journalist winning many, many awards and protecting many people." The next procedural hearing is scheduled for May 30 and another substantive hearing for early June.

Stefania Maurizi is an investigative journalist for the Italian daily *la Repubblica* and the author of two books; "Dossier WikiLeaks: Segreti Italiani" and "Una Bomba, Dieci Storie." She has for years worked closely with Assange on some of the most significant *WikiLeaks* releases including ["Collateral Murder."](#) Maurizi also worked closely with Glenn Greenwald on the files about

Italy of Edward Snowden, who blew the whistle on National Security Agency surveillance.

On May 2, right after Assange's high court appearance, [Maurizi told us](#) that she fears for the health and welfare of Assange. She said she also fears for what it might mean to other journalists and whistleblowers if Assange is convicted in a U.S. court for his crucial work with whistleblowers, which has been used widely by news organizations.

**Dennis Bernstein:** Stefania Maurizi, I'd like you to start by giving us your gut reaction to what we have seen so far in terms of the treatment of Julian in recent days.

**Stefania Maurizi:** For me it has been really shocking to witness how Julian Assange has declined in the last nine years. I have been able to see changes in Julian's health and psychology. It was so sad, and no one could do anything. I could report on it and expose it but the other media and public opinion did absolutely nothing to make the government understand how terrible his treatment was. And all this is happening not in Russia, not in North Korea, this is happening in London, in the heart of Europe. I now realize how little we can do in our democracy. If you look at what has happened to high-profile whistleblowers like Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden, and an important publisher like Assange, who had the courage to publish these important revelations, what did your democracy do to save them, to treat them in a human way? Chelsea Manning was put in prison for seven years, where she tried to commit suicide twice. Now she is back in prison. Edward Snowden was forced to leave the U.S. Julian Assange has spent nine years in detainment and no one did anything. We were reporting, we were denouncing, we were exposing how seriously his health was declining. Nothing happened.

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**Dennis Bernstein:** You've worked very closely with Julian Assange in Italy. You were in a sense a co-publisher in getting out crucial documentation. Could you talk about why you consider Assange not only a publisher, but one of the most important publishers of our time?

**Stefania Maurizi:** I started working with *WikiLeaks* in 2009 when very few people knew about them. They hadn't yet published important documents like "Collateral Murder" or the "War Logs." I immediately saw that they were going to start a revolution. And that is what has happened: They have changed journalism. Their model of journalism spread and we see now leaks everywhere. We see this model of collaborative media partnership used by many media, like the Panama Papers Consortium. In addition, you have to realize the importance of what they have revealed. They have revealed the true face of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. They have revealed the inner working of U.S. diplomacy, for example, how they put pressure on Italian prosecutors who were trying to convict 23 Americans, almost all CIA agents, responsible for the extraordinary renditions here in Italy. Or they published revelations of how the U.S. forced the Italian government to purchase a Lockheed jet fighter. This information is now available to everyone. You can see how *The Washington Post* used emails to investigate the [Jamal] Khashoggi murder and they were able to do so because they had the courage to publish these files. Even in the case of the Panama Papers, only the journalists inside the partnership can access the original files. *WikiLeaks* made these files fully accessible to everyone, so that every journalist, ever activist, every scholar, every citizen can be empowered by this information free of charge. That is the revolution.

**Dennis Bernstein:** Chelsea Manning is now in jail, refusing

to cooperate with the grand jury. This is someone who spent so much time in solitary confinement. One of the key collaborations had to do with the activities of the U.S. government in Central America, destabilizing, undermining governments. Now they say they never get involved. If you look at the documentation in the context of the current attempt by [U.S. Special Representative for Venezuela] Elliot Abrams to destabilize Venezuela, here comes *WikiLeaks* again.

**Stefania Maurizi:** Absolutely. Whenever we have a scandal, we can go to the *WikiLeaks* website and search for any pertinent information. The information they publish continues to inform the public. They are now paying a huge price. I myself feel guilty because I was able throughout the past 10 years to work on all these documents, to verify them and publish them without any risk. Julian and *WikiLeaks* are paying a huge price and all the editors are silent. People accuse me of acting as an activist. I am not acting as an activist, I am speaking out because I feel uncomfortable when I see how professional journalists have all sorts of protection and are not facing imprisonment or extradition.

**Randy Credico:** The last time I saw you was in December of 2017. I had seen Julian three months earlier and his health had declined noticeably in those few months. Now that he is in jail, is he able to see doctors? What is his physical health like at this point?

**Stefania Maurizi:** I am not sure whether he is able to see visitors. It is a very strict regime, there are very strict rules for suspected terrorists. He spends most of his time completely alone. This comes after spending the last seven years at the embassy almost entirely alone, apart from occasional visits. So you can imagine how his forced isolation is affecting his health.

**Randy Credico:** I look at the sentence that judge Deborah Taylor handed down: a year in jail for allegedly skipping bail. Can you go into the bogus charges that were never filed against Julian, and how they were perpetuated with the assistance of the Crown Prosecution Service?

**Stefania Maurizio:** Three years had passed since the Swedish case was closed. No journalistic organization had ever tried to access these documents. Thousands of journalists had covered the case but no one had the facts clear. At that point I realized that it was important from a journalistic point of view to try to access the documentation. These documents allow us to establish important facts, such as that it was the U.K. that advised the Swedish prosecutors against questioning Assange in London. The whole case began with this refusal by the Swedish prosecutor. Now we know that behind this decision there was the Crown Prosecution Service. Let's not forget that this agency is the very same agency which is in charge of deciding whether to extradite Julian Assange to the U.S. now. The Crown Prosecution Service entered the case at the very beginning and they advised the Swedish prosecutor against questioning Assange in London. Julian Assange never refused to be questioned, he refused to be extradited because he was convinced that the extradition to Sweden could pave the way for his extradition to the U.S.

Now we see that he was right.

And it was the Crown Prosecution Service which advised the Swedish prosecutor against dropping the case in 2013. At that time the Swedish prosecutor considered to drop the case but the Crown Prosecution Service was against this possibility.

Finally, it was the Crown Prosecution Service who destroyed crucial emails about the case, even though the case is still ongoing. I am still fighting in the U.K. tribunal because I want to access these documents and fill in the gaps. Now the Swedish prosecutor is

evaluating whether to open this case once again. The statute of limitations is in August 2020. There is a massive campaign about Julian being a rapist. After one or two years of this campaign, who will care about Julian Assange being extradited to the U.S.? That is a possible scenario.

**Dennis Bernstein:** Again, Julian had his first hearing today [May 2, 2019] regarding extradition to the United States. He looked okay but he is definitely in danger. Stefania, what responsibility do we have as journalists to stand up? According to Daniel Ellsberg, if they go after Julian and Chelsea the way they want to in the United States, it is the end of journalism.

**Stefania Maurizi:** Absolutely. This case is about whether the press is allowed to publish documents like the video "Collateral Murder," which records war crimes and whether the press is allowed to publish documents about the NSA spying on world leaders, whether the press is allowed to publish documents on Guantanamo Bay. We saw what happened after 9/11: habeas corpus came to an end with Guantanamo, the Fourth Amendment [of the U.S. Constitution] was trampled by the NSA. Now they want to destroy the First Amendment and they will do it using Julian Assange. They will not go after *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*.

**Dennis Bernstein:** Wouldn't you say that part of the genius of *WikiLeaks* was the ability to guarantee anonymity? The reason why Assange has been successful and all these major journalistic organizations were willing to work with him is because of this process he created to guarantee anonymity.



**Stefania Maurizi:** Julian Assange understands technology and he understands the nature of power. Most geeks know very

little about power, about empire. Thanks to his knowledge in the technology field, we have this platform. But let's not forget that *WikiLeaks* is in trouble now not because they have this platform, but because they have the courage to publish. It is not enough to get the documents. Most newsrooms hide such documents. One of the journalists at *The Washington Post* had the video "Collateral Murder" and he didn't publish it. *WikiLeaks* did. It is not enough to have the platform: you have to have the integrity and the courage to publish. *The New York Times* didn't publish the important story that the NSA was intercepting the communications of U.S. citizens for more than a year. For years *The New York Times* didn't want to use the word "torture," preferring instead "enhanced interrogation." The reason the U.S. authorities are hostile toward *WikiLeaks* and Julian Assange is because they publish what the U.S. media and many other media don't want to publish.

**Dennis Bernstein:** Would you like to do a shout-out from one courageous woman there in Italy to a woman who became a woman in solitary confinement and was arrested again on International Women's Day?

**Stefania Maurizi:** I feel a huge debt of gratitude because I have worked on Chelsea Manning's documents for years. I supported her defense fund, I wrote to her in prison. I have tried to explain to my readers why she is tremendously courageous. I really would like to see her go free because I cannot accept that one of the most important journalistic sources of all time is again in prison.

**Dennis Bernstein:** Both Randy and I are extremely grateful for your work, Stefania Maurizi, investigative journalist

for *la Repubblica* and author of [“Dossier WikiLeaks,”](#) which describes the power of a courageous publisher like Julian Assange, who has worked with extraordinary sources to get information out which we would otherwise never have heard.

[Listen](#) to the interview on KPFA.

Dennis J. Bernstein is a host of “Flashpoints” on the Pacifica radio network and the author of [“Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom.”](#) You can access the audio archives at [Flashpoint](#). You can get in touch with the author at [dbernstein@igc.org](mailto:dbernstein@igc.org).

Randy Credico is an American perennial political candidate, comedian, radio host, activist and the former director of the William Moses Kunstler Fund for Racial Justice.

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