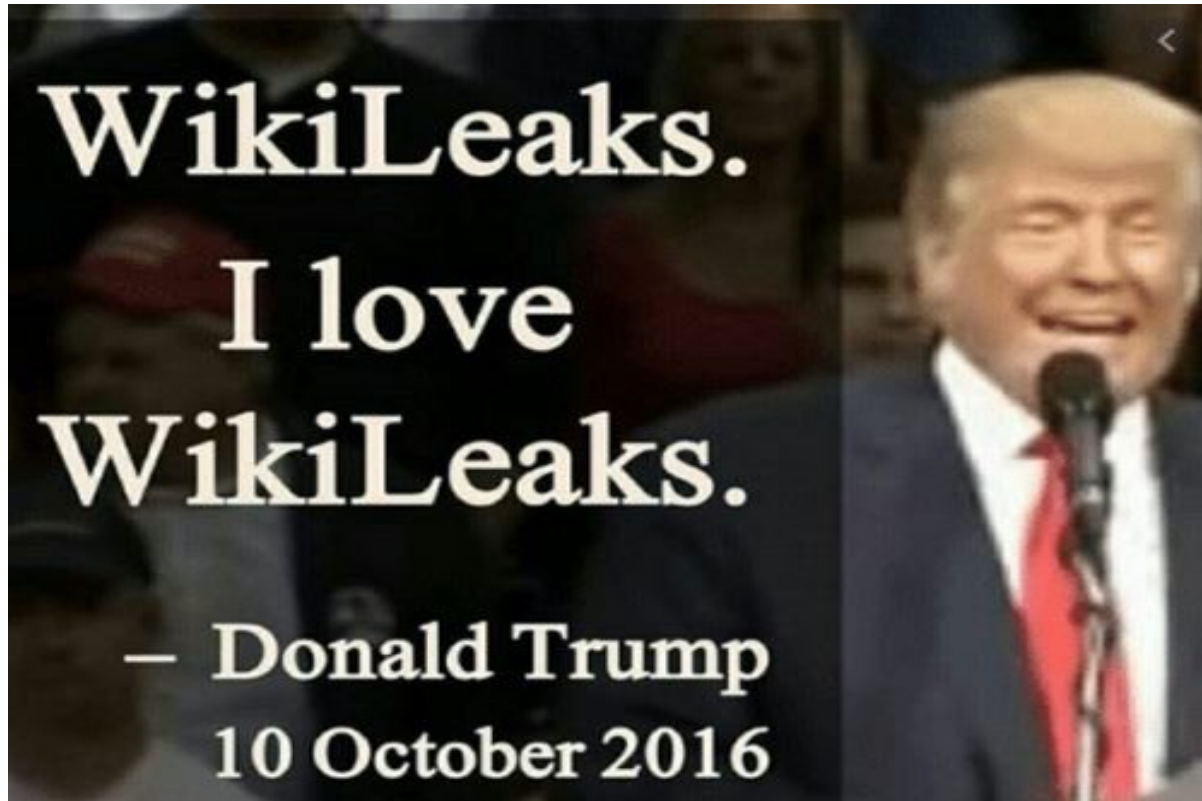


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No Pardons For Edward Snowden Or Julian Assange

By Kevin Gosztola



January 20, 2021 "Information Clearing House" – Although several long shot campaigns were mounted, President Donald Trump did not pardon any whistleblowers who were indicted or prosecuted under the United States Espionage Act. He also declined to pardon the only journalist ever to be indicted under the World War I-era law.

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden were not offered clemency because Trump "did not want to anger Senate Republicans who will soon determine whether he's convicted during his Senate trial."

"Multiple GOP lawmakers had sent messages through aides that they felt strongly about not granting clemency to Assange or Snowden," according to CNN.

NSA whistleblower Reality Winner, who was the first to be prosecuted under the Espionage Act under Trump, and former CIA officer John Kiriakou pursued pardons. They were effectively denied as well.

On January 17, the New York Times reported that an associate of Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani told Kiriakou a pardon would cost him \$2 million.

"I laughed. Two million bucks—are you out of your mind?" Kiriakou told the Times. "Even if I had two million bucks, I wouldn't spend it to recover a \$700,000 pension."

The report exposed a sliver of the corruption around pardons in the final days of the Trump presidency, as "several people with connections" to Trump apparently "accepted large sums of money" in return for clemency.

Kiriakou said Trump was not the only president in history to encourage this kind of behavior. "Certainly, Bill Clinton did at the end of his administration well. But this just highlights how the pardon process in the United States is broken."

Throughout the past three months, prominent supporters of Assange, like Pamela Anderson and Glenn Greenwald, were frequent guests on Fox News during primetime in order to communicate the case for a pardon directly to Trump.

A few Republicans in Congress, like Senator Rand Paul and Representative Matt Gaetz, crafted a partisan pitch for pardoning Snowden that went something like Democratic allies, such as former director of national intelligence James Clapper, persecuted him.

"He revealed that James Clapper, the highest-ranking, most powerful spy in the world, was spying on Americans and lied to us about it," Paul declared. "So I think what Snowden did was a service to the American people and he ought to be pardoned."

But Snowden did not have millions of dollars to pay off Trump nor was he ever going to do Trump any political favors.

Snowden responded, "Reports that Trump has let himself be bullied out of pardoning Assange, mistakenly believing Senate Republicans won't vote to impeach him if he caves. Once he's out of power, they're going to vote to impeach him anyway. Which, well—that's one way to be remembered."

"Trump will either be remembered as the first president since JFK, who from his first to last day in office was hated by the NSA, CIA, and FBI, or as the one who caved to pressure at the very last moment," Snowden further suggested.

He constantly bashed the "deep state" during his campaign and presidency, but whenever he needed to challenge national security institutions and stand up to their apparatchiks in the Republican Party, he showed there was nothing behind it.

"[The rhetoric] ended up not really serving anybody," Kiriakou contended.

Which is not to say the pardon campaigns by Assange, Snowden, Winner, Kiriakou, and others were a waste of time. Nobody would have predicted President Barack Obama would commute U.S. Army whistleblower Chelsea Manning's sentence in 2017 during the final days of his administration.

Assange, who was indicted under Trump, will remain in Belmarsh, a high-security prison in London where COVID-19 has recently spread through his unit. The Biden Justice Department is expected to pursue an appeal of a British court's decision to deny the U.S. government's extradition request against Assange.

With a newborn, Snowden and his wife, Lindsay Mills, will remain in Moscow. They will live in exile at least until Snowden can return and defend his whistleblowing acts in a courtroom in the Eastern District of Virginia. (Significant reform is necessary for that to happen.)

Winner will be able to leave Federal Medical Center Carswell and go to a halfway house as early as November 2021. However, she also must worry about COVID-19 outbreaks at Carswell.

Because Kiriakou completed his sentence several years ago, his circumstances are far less dire. He still would like to reclaim his pension.

In the end, a president who built up a brand of standing up to the so-called swamp did not want to take any heat for pardoning individuals loathed by the very establishment that despises him. He was spineless and weak.

Trump risked a scandal over pardons for his son-in-law or any one of his cronies. He was not willing to take the same risk for Assange, Snowden, or Kiriakou.

"No president wants to really be involved in a controversy. Donald Trump [was] no different," Kiriakou concluded.