

Australian government joins persecution of WikiLeaks' Julian Assange

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The Australian Labor government has joined with the Obama administration in its attempt to manufacture criminal charges against Julian Assange, an Australian citizen and the editor of WikiLeaks.

On Monday, Attorney General Robert McClelland told a doorstep press conference that Australia “will support any law enforcement action that may be taken. The United States will be the lead government in that respect, but certainly Australian agencies will assist”. The Australian Federal Police, he stated, would “look at the issue as to whether any Australian laws have been breached as a specific issue as well”.

A taskforce, made up of personnel from various intelligence and police agencies, has been formed to scour through the leaked material to determine if Assange can be charged with releasing “national security-classified documents”.

McClelland indicated that the Australian government had not received a specific request from Washington to cancel Assange’s passport. This is likely because both the US and Australian governments hope he will emerge from hiding and attempt to travel, whereupon he can be detained on either the trumped-up rape charges brought by the Swedish government or whatever equally politically-motivated charges are ultimately laid in the US.

McClelland left no doubt that if Assange returned to Australia—where he is a citizen and supposedly protected from political persecution by other states—the Labor government would provide “every assistance” to his deportation and prosecution in the US.

In a separate statement, McClelland also made clear that the Australian government would demand that any country providing Assange refuge, before charges are laid in the US, hands him over to Swedish authorities. The prosecution in Sweden, he declared on Tuesday, “places an obligation on those countries that are part of the Interpol arrangements to actually detain him when he arrives”.

Australia’s foreign minister, Kevin Rudd, told journalists in the United Arab Emirates, where he is attending forums on the Afghanistan war, that “our attitude, like most governments, is one of absolute condemnation” of WikiLeaks. “The Australian government” he said, “like other governments, is looking at full recourse to its legal jurisdiction, in terms of whether any of these actions have breached the Australian criminal law as well”.

The treatment being meted out to Assange demonstrates the contempt for democratic rights and international law within the Australian ruling elite and its political parties. Not one figure in the Labor government, the conservative opposition or the Greens has even expressed concern, let alone condemnation, of the implied death threats against Assange that were made by former Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin—who wrote that he should be hunted down like “Al Qaeda”—or the hysterical calls in the US for WikiLeaks to be declared a “terrorist organisation”.

WikiLeaks is a media organisation. It has both a legal and moral right to make available to the public the mass of documents made available to it regarding the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and US diplomatic activity around the world. By doing so, it has brought

into the light of day such atrocities as the killing of tens of thousands of Iraqi and Afghan civilians and the US use of death squads and torture in Iraq to repress resistance.

The initial leaks since Sunday of some 250,000 cables from US embassies and consulates around the world have already revealed that US imperialism is actively plotting a war against Iran and carrying out secret bombing missions in Yemen. US diplomats have been ordered by the Obama administration to systematically collect personal information and even DNA samples on officials of foreign governments and the United Nations. It does not take a great deal of imagination to envisage the filthy purposes for which such information could be used, from frame-ups to blackmail.

All the outrage in the Australian political establishment, however, has been reserved for Assange and WikiLeaks. It is prepared for one of its citizens to be hounded, persecuted, imprisoned and even killed because he has contributed to exposing, before the world's population, the criminality of the foreign policy of Australia's primary ally.

For the Australian ruling class, the US alliance is the so-called "bedrock" of its foreign policy. It depends upon Washington's backing to assert economic and strategic influence in the South Pacific and South East Asia—Canberra's own "sphere of influence". The democratic rights, liberty and lives of Australian citizens count for little in comparison.

There are parallels in the treatment of Assange with the willingness of the Howard Liberal-National government to allow two Australian citizens—Mamdouh Habib and David Hicks—to be held for years without charges in the Guantánamo Bay prison camp. Instead, Canberra supported the criminal treatment of the two men, doing nothing to assist them in defending themselves and securing their release.

Above all, the Australian government's hostility to WikiLeaks is conditioned by the role it plays as junior partner in US military aggression and imperialist intrigue around the world. Australian troops have

participated in both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars; Australian ministers and diplomats vocally defend US foreign policy in every international forum, and Australian intelligence agencies cooperate closely with their US counterparts in spying on perceived rivals, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. Moreover, the Australian government hosts Pine Gap, one of the most important satellite bases and missile-targeting facilities in the US network.

Evidence revealed by WikiLeaks may well provide the basis for war crimes charges against several politicians and military personnel in Australia. There may also be concerns within the Labor government about the contents of the 1,003 cables from the US embassy in Canberra and US consulate in Melbourne reportedly in the hands of WikiLeaks.

In particular, there could be highly revealing information on any US involvement in the June 23-24 political coup that removed Kevin Rudd as prime minister, especially given the well-known acrimony between the Obama administration and Rudd over Afghanistan and other foreign policy issues.

Since Rudd's removal, his replacement, Prime Minister Julia Gillard has made an indefinite and unconditional commitment to the war in Afghanistan and aligned her government with US efforts to stem rising Chinese influence in Asia, despite the fact that China is now Australia's largest trading partner. The documents from the US embassy in Australia may contain highly embarrassing and diplomatically damaging revelations about joint US-Australian activity directed against Chinese interests. As the WikiLeaks cables from Australia are released, the WSWS will comment further.



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