

Assange lawyer hits out at Australian government

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The Australian Labor government has tried to deflect opposition to its support for the international campaign against Wikileaks founder Julian Assange by issuing a pro-forma statement that he has the rights of an Australian citizen.

Attorney-General Robert McClelland declared that Assange had “the right to return to Australia and also to receive consular assistance while he is overseas, if that is requested.”

The statement was issued in response to an online interview given by Assange to the British *Guardian*, in which he denounced his treatment by the Labor government, likening it to the treatment of Guantánamo Bay prison camp detainee David Hicks, who endured six years of illegal imprisonment.

In London, Assange’s lawyer Mark Stephen told the Australian Broadcasting Commission: “He has had no assistance and offers of assistance. ... One has to question what the value of an Australian passport is, whether you agree with what he has done or not. One would think that having an Australian passport you would get some assistance, but thus far, I have to say the [Australian] high commissions and embassies have been shutting their doors to Julian Assange.”

In the week since Wikileaks began publishing some 250,000 US diplomatic cables, senior American political figures have repeatedly labelled Assange a “terrorist”. The Obama administration is attempting to manufacture criminal charges against the 39-year-old Australian, while the internet is full of death threats, forcing him to go into hiding. One American blog site has gone so far as to call for the kidnapping of Assange’s son from his home in Australia, in order to “flush him out”.

The Australian Labor government has joined the international lynch mob. Prime Minister Julia Gillard

labelled the publication of leaked US diplomatic cables as “illegal” and McClelland and Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd have announced that Australian police are investigating whether they can lay criminal charges against Assange and emphasised that Australia would assist any US prosecution.

Even the right-wing Liberal-National Party opposition has displayed more concern for legal procedure than the Labor leaders. Foreign affairs spokesperson Julie Bishop issued a statement that the government “has been quick to condemn Wikileaks” but there should not be a “rush to judgment until it can confirm that any Australian laws have been broken.”

Greens’ leader Bob Brown, who has refused to speak out against the campaign against Assange until now, issued a statement that Australian citizenship should be respected and Assange should be assured that his citizenship was safe.

“Mr Assange has had no criminal conviction and there is a lot of conjecture and juggling of claims against him,” he said.

But Brown, who postures as an alternative to the Liberal and Labor Parties, failed to denounce either the attacks on Assange or the actions of the Labor government. Nor did he defend the right of Wikileaks to publish its damning exposures of the US and other major powers. Instead he tried to downplay them by sowing illusions in the role of the Australian media.

“If this material had gone straight to one of the Australian newspapers they would have published it. The press works from leaks like this all the time,” he said.

The historical record, however, speaks otherwise. In the build-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Australian mass media were well aware of the real situation, but nevertheless endlessly regurgitated all the

lies about “weapons of mass destruction.”

The latest round of Wikileaks disclosures has included the record of a 75-minute conversation between then Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on March 24, 2009.

According to the US diplomatic cable, Rudd told Clinton that while seeking to engage diplomatically with China, the US should be “all the while also preparing to deploy force if everything goes wrong”. (See: “WikiLeaks continues exposure of predatory US foreign policy”)

Greens’ leader Brown defended Rudd’s comment and criticised concerns expressed by Julie Bishop that Rudd’s advice was “troubling.”

“Goodness me, I’d ask the question of Julie Bishop, should we abandon the defence forces? Are there no circumstances in which force may be used?” he declared to ABC radio.

Besides the discussion on China, the other significant revelation of the Rudd-Clinton talks was the offer by Rudd to send Australian special operations troops into Pakistan to assist in efforts to hunt down and kill insurgents fighting the US-led occupation of Afghanistan—providing the US could get an agreement for such actions from the Pakistani government.

Earlier cables had already exposed that American special forces units were in fact given permission to deploy inside Pakistan by the government of President Asif Ali Zardari, as part of an overall escalation, during 2009, of military operations against alleged insurgents inside the country. Thousands of people were slaughtered in the tribal agencies that border Afghanistan by Pakistani offensives, special operations death squads and American Predator drones.

The obvious question posed by Rudd and Clinton’s conversation is whether Australian forces were also deployed into Pakistan, without the knowledge of the Australian parliament and the population as a whole.

Rudd, who now serves as foreign minister in the Labor government, refused to comment on the cable over the weekend. He did, however, complain bitterly over Wikileaks’ exposure of imperialist diplomacy.

In Bahrain for conferences, Rudd told the *Al Arabiya* newspaper: “Diplomacy is done in secret because diplomacy seeks to solve problems for which there are no other public solutions... And when this is all put into

the public domain, it’s a problem for all of us to combine our efforts to deal with some of our fundamental challenges.”

In other words, behind all the condemnations and threats against Julian Assange and Wikileaks is the fact that they have exposed the manner in which imperialist governments plot wars against their rivals and organise criminal operations against oppressed people behind the backs of the world’s population.



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