

Greens remain silent on witch-hunt against Australian citizen Julian Assange

James Cogan
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The Greens, whose parliamentary votes help keep the minority Labor government of Prime Minister Julia Gillard in power, have maintained a deafening silence on the global witch-hunt that has been mounted against WikiLeaks' editor and Australian citizen Julian Assange.

A matter of principle is at stake. Julian Assange has courageously risked his personal liberty, safety—and even his life—to publish documents provided to WikiLeaks by whistleblowers within the American political and military establishment. The web site has brought to the light of day evidence that the United States' government is responsible for mass killings, torture, illegal spying on its international counterparts, and other crimes.

In retaliation, the US government of President Barack Obama is attempting to destroy WikiLeaks. It has declared the media organisation's actions to be “criminal” and is trying to whip up an international lynch mob against Assange. American internet regulators have been pressured to close down WikiLeaks' domain name, forcing it to establish a raft of new web addresses, such as www.wikileaks.ch, which currently remains accessible.

High ranking figures within the American political establishment, such as Sarah Palin and Senator Joe Lieberman, have called for Assange to be prosecuted and sent to prison. Others have made open death threats against him, including an advisor to the Canadian prime minister, who told a television audience that the web site editor should be “assassinated”.

Under such conditions of persecution and threats by a

foreign government, any Australian citizen living overseas would expect to find sanctuary in the closest Australian embassy or consulate and support from diplomatic staff. The Australian government would be obligated to do everything it could to defend the democratic rights of its citizen.

Julian Assange, who is believed to be in England, has been denied any such protection. The Gillard Labor government has closed ranks behind its US ally and condemned Assange's actions as “illegal”. Like the Obama administration, it is trying to fabricate criminal charges against him under Australian law, and Attorney-General Robert McClelland has declared the Labor government will provide “every assistance” to the prosecution of Assange in the US.

McClelland has also demanded that other governments detain the WikiLeaks' editor and extradite him to Sweden, where he faces politically-motivated allegations of sexual misconduct. Assange's lawyer Mark Stephens has condemned the Swedish arrest warrant as “persecution and not a prosecution”.

Not a single member of the parliamentary Labor Party has raised one word of opposition to the witch-hunt being conducted against Assange or condemned the death threats made against him. The opposition Liberal and National parties have thrown their support behind Gillard, while the rural independents, Rob Oakeshott, Tony Windsor and Bob Katter, have also kept their mouths firmly shut. Tellingly, they have been joined by Andrew Wilkie—a former whistleblower on the Iraq war lies, and now an independent supporting Labor. This is despite the fact that Wilkie told journalists on Wednesday that the Swedish charges of

sexual misconduct against Assange “could be a set-up”. From the mass media through to civil liberties organisations, barely a voice can be heard speaking out in defence of Assange.

The silence of the Greens is, however, the most politically significant. Greens’ parliamentarians such as leader Bob Brown and MP Adam Bandt have spared no effort in presenting themselves as the “progressive force” in Australian politics, and staunch defenders of human rights and civil liberties. Yet they have felt no need to issue so much as a press statement in defence of Assange and WikiLeaks.

On Thursday, the WSWs contacted Bob Brown’s office, seeking an interview with him on his attitude to the persecution of WikiLeaks and Assange. Two days later, there has still been no response.

On Thursday, Brown took the time to arrange a press conference to condemn Japanese whaling, but made no mention of Assange. On Friday, Bandt issued a press release on workers’ Christmas pay, and gave an interview later in the day to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, but, like Brown, made no condemnation of the Labor government’s blatant attacks on Assange’s democratic rights, and no calls for the Australian’s citizen’s defence.

Yesterday, Julian Assange issued a passionate statement over his treatment by the Australian government. In a posting to the British *Guardian* web site, he wrote:

“I am an Australian citizen and I miss my country a great deal. However, during the last weeks, the Australian prime minister Julia Gillard, and the attorney-general Robert McClelland, have made it clear that not only is my return impossible but they are actively working to assist the United States’ government in its attacks on myself and our people.”

Assange concluded: “This brings into question what does it mean to be an Australian citizen—does that mean anything at all? Or are we all to be treated like David Hicks at the first possible opportunity, merely so that Australian politicians and diplomats can be invited to

the best US embassy cocktail parties?”

David Hicks was the young Australian detained by the US military in Afghanistan and illegally imprisoned without charge—with the endorsement of both the former Howard Liberal government and the Labor opposition—for almost six years in the Guantánamo Bay prison camp. In order to avoid indefinite detention in what he has since described as a hell on earth, Hicks was ultimately forced to plead guilty to fabricated terrorism charges and serve an additional period of imprisonment in Australia.

The fate of Julian Assange could be far worse.

For the Labor Party and the Australian ruling class as a whole, the liberty and lives of Australian citizens count for nothing when measured against their desire to preserve the Australia-US strategic alliance. Australian imperialism depends upon Washington’s backing to assert its economic and geo-political domination in what it regards as its “sphere of influence” in the South Pacific and South East Asia.

The silence of the Greens makes clear that, for all their posturing, they line up completely with the ruling elite when it comes to defending the crimes and secret machinations of the capitalist state.



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