

Australian Greens cover for Labor government in Julian Assange witch hunt

Patrick O'Connor

20 April 2012

A public meeting held last night in Melbourne, "WikiLeaks, Assange and Defending Democracy," highlighted the key role being played by the Australian Greens in providing political cover for the minority Labor government over the US-led conspiracy against Julian Assange.

About 300 people attended the meeting sponsored by the WikiLeaks Australian Citizen's Alliance and the Wheeler Centre. Christine Assange, Julian's mother, had been scheduled to appear but was unable to participate because of illness. The speakers were lawyer Lizzie O'Shea, *Crikey* journalist Bernard Keane, Australian Lawyers Alliance president Greg Barnes, Greens Senator Scott Ludlam and Suelette Dreyfus, author of a 1997 book about computer hackers titled *Underground*.

Ludlam's remarks laid bare the duplicitous role played by the Greens throughout the Assange affair. After WikiLeaks began publishing the leaked US diplomatic cables in November 2010, sparking demands for Assange's prosecution and execution from senior American and international political figures, the Greens remained silent for a week before party leader Bob Brown sniffed the political wind and issued a statement. They have since postured as defenders of WikiLeaks and Assange, while at the same time loyally maintaining their de facto coalition agreement with Prime Minister Julia Gillard.

Ludlam's opening remarks amounted to an unwitting self-indictment. "If the Howard government, with a Philip Ruddock attorney general, had been doing the

things that these folk are up to," he declared, "probably we would have been holding demonstrations 10,000 strong out the front of parliament house. And that's something to reflect on, because we're not."

Ludlam's statement was an admission that the Greens are serving as accomplices to the Labor government, which has played a critical role assisting the US vendetta against WikiLeaks. After Gillard and her colleagues joined the anti-Assange slander campaign, they provided every assistance possible to the frame up. Recently, the Labor government, at Washington's behest, blocked a freedom of information application for the release of diplomatic cables between Australia and the US that could have detailed their collaboration in the attempted prosecution. In February, with the support of the Greens, the government passed new extradition laws that could potentially be used against Assange if he wins his pending British appeal and returns to Australia.

Ludlam last night covered up the government's record, declaring simply that it had been "either absent from the debates or been deeply unhelpful when they have occurred." He added that since late last year he had been "gradually changing my views around whether there's a certain amount of neglect going on here, whether they [government ministers] are too busy, or whether this is hostile action." The senator said he had only recently concluded that the government was involved in the "criminalisation of dissent right across the board."

Ludlam urged the audience to look to sections of the state apparatus itself to come to Assange's defence. "There are people," he declared, "there are allies all the way into the PM's office, all the way through state and

federal governments, in the intelligence agencies, in the army I found out last week. We have got friends and allies—people who believe the same basic things that we believe about freedoms and democracy—all through the system.”

The Assange case demonstrates the opposite—there is no constituency within any section of the Australian ruling elite, including the Greens, for the defence of democratic rights. In fact, the Labor government instigated a coordinated operation by the security agencies to unearth any material they could find to back the US efforts to frame-up Assange on espionage charges.

Ludlam was asked by an audience member about the Greens’ agreement with the minority Labor government. In September 2010, when Bob Brown and Julia Gillard struck the minority government deal, Ludlam said, Assange was not on the list of policy issues to be considered. “I have not sought to add it to the list two years later,” he continued. “If the question is, will I be able to persuade my colleagues to crash the government and elect Tony Abbott in Gillard’s place unless they get Julian out of trouble, I’m not sure that’s the best course of action.”

The Greens raise the bogey of a government headed by opposition leader Abbott to justify their partnership with a Labor government that has worked to eviscerate democratic rights, align Australia with the US war drive against China, and implement savage austerity spending cuts aimed at lowering the living standards of the working class.

Ludlow’s comments are typical of the “lesser evilism” that is used to confine opposition on every issue to the framework of parliamentary manoeuvre and prevent an independent political fight against the Labor government and its program of war and austerity. Such a struggle has to be based on a socialist program, which includes the defence of basic democratic rights.

The Greens are organically hostile to such a perspective. Ludlam’s empty declarations of support for Assange at last night’s forum were designed to camouflage the role of the Greens in propping up the

Labor government and to channel the opposition to Assange’s persecution into futile appeals to his persecutors.

The other speakers made various criticisms of the government’s record on the Assange case, but none raised the need for a political struggle against the government and its various props, including the Greens. Author Suelette Dreyfus summed up the tenor of the discussion when she insisted that people needed to become active on Twitter and write to their politicians, because “this works.”

The author recommends:

Australian government reinforces conspiracy against Assange
[12 April 2012]

Greens remain silent on witch-hunt against Australian citizen Julian Assange
[4 December 2010]



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact