

# Australian protests demand release of WikiLeaks founder

**Our reporters**  
**1 June 2012**

Several hundred people rallied at demonstrations in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and other Australian cities yesterday to protest the British Supreme Court ruling that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange can be extradited to Sweden on bogus sexual assault allegations. Assange has just 14 days to try to appeal the decision.

Protestors carried placards denouncing the court ruling and demanding that Assange be released from house arrest in Britain, which has lasted for over 540 days. He has not been charged with a single crime in Sweden, Britain or any other country. According to Stratfor emails, the US has a grand jury espionage indictment against Assange and will extradite the WikiLeaks founder on conspiracy or espionage charges after he arrives in Sweden.

Former Guantánamo Bay prisoner David Hicks addressed the Sydney protest and said that Assange “was a brave and selfless journalist who had acted in the spirit of freedom of speech and transparency,” but now faced torture and other illegal treatment if extradited to the US. “The message that is being sent to him and other journalists is ‘publish what we don’t want you to and we’ll destroy your life.’”

Hicks said he had “first-hand experience of what it is to like to be an Australian citizen and a political prisoner of the US.” Anything that Australian governments— Liberal or Labor—said about protecting its citizens was “meaningless” and “could not be trusted.”

Australian Lawyers Alliance president Greg Barns told the Melbourne rally the Gillard government had to “tell the US and the Swedes that enough is enough”, but later admitted to *World Socialist Web Site* reporters that the government “won’t do anything [for Assange]. They’re very happy to shop [hand over] him.”

The Melbourne and Sydney rallies were dominated by the Greens and various pseudo-left organisations, such as

Socialist Alliance, who, while denouncing the attacks on Assange, slavishly appeal to the Gillard government, which is deeply implicated in the conspiracy against Assange, to defend the Australian citizen. Far from protecting Assange’s democratic rights, the Gillard government is doing everything it can to help Washington railroad him to jail and silence WikiLeaks.

In December 2010, Gillard denounced Assange and declared that posting US diplomatic cables on WikiLeaks was “grossly irresponsible” and “illegal”. The attorney-general at the time, Robert McClelland, pledged to “support any law enforcement action that may be taken.”

The Greens, whose votes in parliament ensure the Gillard government remains in power, were given pride of place at the protests.

New South Wales upper house Greens member David Shoebridge addressed the Sydney rally. Statements from federal Greens Senator Scott Ludlum were also read at the Sydney and Melbourne protests. Ludlum said Labor should be “doing more” to assist Assange: “They need to decide whether their allegiances are with Washington or the Australian public.”

The allegiance of Labor, and indeed the Greens, to Washington is already perfectly obvious. While claiming to support Assange, the Greens backed government legislation in February—the Extradition and Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation Amendment Act 2012—that would make it easier to extradite him to the US if he returned to Australia. The new law allows the government to override restrictions on extraditing people accused of “political offences” against foreign governments and to introduce regulations to do likewise for other offences, such as espionage or sedition.

None of the ex-lefts challenged the Greens at yesterday’s

rallies over their support for the legislation or the Labor government more broadly. In Sydney Pip Hinman from the Socialist Alliance appealed to Prime Minister Gillard to defend Assange and avoided any mention of the duplicitous role of the Greens.

While yesterday's protests were called at short notice and were relatively small, there is widespread popular opposition to the Labor government's treatment of Assange. Surveys reported last year that 80 percent of those polled opposed the attacks on Assange. Last week UMR Research polling revealed that 25 percent of those questioned would vote for Assange if he contested a Senate seat at the next federal election.

Yesterday Jeffrey Bleich, the US ambassador to Australia, dismissed as "an invention" any suggestion that Washington was preparing a warrant for Assange's arrest and declared that there was "absolutely no basis for the US to be interested" in his extradition.

Labor government ministers, who are acutely sensitive to the deep-seated support for Assange, echoed the ambassador, insisting they had "no evidence" of any US extradition. Attorney-General Nicola Roxon insisted that the government had "no information from the United States to indicate that it has laid, or is about to lay, any charges against Mr Assange."

Roxon's claims, however, are refuted by recently released Australian embassy cables, obtained under Freedom of Information by the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Despite extensive redactions, the cables show that the US and Australian governments maintained high-level exchanges on WikiLeaks last year. The Australian embassy in Washington has provided the Labor government with regular updates, including a report that the Justice Department was "casting the net beyond Assange to see if any intermediaries had been involved in communications between Assange and [Bradley] Manning."

Australian diplomats have closely monitored the US Department of Justice investigation into WikiLeaks over the past 18 months. The embassy in Washington reported "a broad range of possible charges are under consideration, including espionage and conspiracy."

Foreign Minister Bob Carr yesterday claimed that Assange had been receiving ongoing Australian consular support since December 2010. This statement was immediately refuted by Christine Assange, mother of the WikiLeaks

founder, who told ABC Radio: "[The Labor government has been] absolutely useless. In fact, contrary to help, they've done everything they can to smear Julian and hand him up to the US."

As the resolution "Defend Julian Assange" adopted at the SEP (Australia) first national congress in April this year states, the defence of the democratic rights of Julian Assange and Bradley Manning and their immediate release "is inseparable from the fight to mobilise the working class against the Labor government, which is a direct accomplice of Washington's conspiracy against them.

"Democratic rights cannot be defended through the decayed façade of parliament, but only through the fight for a workers' government, committed to the reorganisation of society on the basis of human need, not private profit, and the establishment of genuine democracy in every aspect of economic, political and social life."

This resolution and the revolutionary perspective required to defend democratic rights will be discussed at the forthcoming SEP public meetings in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth.

### **Sydney SEP Public Meeting**

Defend Julian Assange!

Sunday, June 10, 2.30pm

Redfern Town Hall

73 Pitt St, Redfern

(Short walk from Redfern Station)

Tickets \$3/\$2 concession

Details of meetings in Melbourne and Perth will be announced shortly.

*The authors also recommend:*

"The Labor government just wants to shut Assange up"

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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