

The Australian Labor government—a key accomplice in the vendetta against Julian Assange

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The Socialist Equality Party condemns Prime Minister Julia Gillard and her Labor government for its role in forcing WikiLeaks editor Julian Assange to seek asylum in Ecuador. Assange took this desperate step after the British courts paved the way for his extradition to Sweden to be questioned on trumped-up sexual assault allegations, a move that is widely expected to lead to his prosecution in the US on espionage charges.

From the very beginning of the US drive to silence Assange and WikiLeaks, the Australian government has provided unstinting support to the conspiracy against its own citizen. Like the Obama administration, the Australian government regards Assange as a criminal simply because of WikiLeaks' exposure of the operations of US imperialism, including its war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, and of the sordid machinations behind the facade of international diplomacy.

After the first release of the leaked US diplomatic cables in late 2010, Gillard immediately weighed in to denounce the publication as a “grossly irresponsible thing to do, and an illegal thing to do.” Attorney General Robert McClelland declared that the government would “provide every assistance to United States law-enforcement authorities,” adding that Assange's passport could be cancelled, depending on whether this proved “constructive or counter-productive to the law enforcement.”

Widespread public outrage over these statements subsequently compelled the government to mouth platitudes about providing Assange with consular assistance. Behind the scenes, however, Canberra continued its collusion with the US drive to extradite the

WikiLeaks chief and prosecute him under the reactionary Espionage Act.

The full extent of this collusion by Australian security and intelligence agencies is yet to be exposed. It is known, through heavily redacted diplomatic cables sent from Washington to Canberra in December 2010, that Australian diplomats were aware that Assange was the target of an “unprecedented” criminal probe and that reports of a secret Grand Jury convened in Virginia were “likely true.” The cables showed that the Labor government issued no objections, with diplomats only requesting advance notice of a prosecution under the Espionage Act, “so that ministers could respond appropriately”—i.e., so that appropriate public relations arrangements could be put in place.

At every stage, the Gillard government has treated Assange's legal and democratic rights with contempt. The final straw for the WikiLeaks' founder was reportedly a letter written by the current attorney general, Nicola Roxon, to one of his lawyers, Jennifer Robinson. Assange aptly described it as a “factual statement of abandonment.” Roxon declared that, “Australia would not expect to be a party to any extradition discussions that may take place between the United States and the United Kingdom or the United States and Sweden, as extradition is a matter of bilateral law enforcement cooperation.”

She added that if Assange were to be prosecuted in the US, “he would be subject to the procedural fairness and due process enshrined in the United States Constitution and under United States law.”

Who does Roxon think she is kidding? The Obama

administration has declared its contempt for any constitutional or legal restrictions on its executive “right” to detain indefinitely, or for that matter assassinate, anyone targeted under the so-called war on terror. American citizens have been among those murdered after being placed on Obama’s “kill list.” Assange has been labelled a terrorist by Vice President Joe Biden and there have been demands for his murder by leading American political and media figures. Bradley Manning, the alleged whistleblower who is accused of providing WikiLeaks with classified material, has been placed in solitary confinement, tortured and subjected to intense pressure by American authorities who are no doubt desperate to extract testimony implicating Assange.

Assange’s fear of being murdered in the US or plunged into a legal black hole in Sweden and the US is wholly justified. His asylum claim is legitimate and ought to be quickly approved.

The Labor government now insists that the application to Ecuador is a private matter. Gillard declared: “Mr Assange’s decision and choices are a matter for Mr Assange.” She expressed her agreement with Foreign Minister Bob Carr’s absurd claim yesterday that, “He’s received more consular support than any Australian in a comparable timeframe and he’ll continue to get it.” WikiLeaks issued a statement last month denouncing such self-serving claims, explaining: “In the last 12 months the Australian government has provided no legal, financial or logistical assistance or advice to Mr. Assange, whatsoever.”

The Greens posture as defenders of Assange, but they have continued to provide loyal support to Gillard as she has collaborated with Washington against the WikiLeaks editor. The Greens’ votes in parliament prop up the minority government, and they bear political responsibility for all its actions.

The Greens’ response to the Ecuador asylum bid demonstrates that their “support” for Assange amounts to a cover-up of the Labor government’s role in the affair. Senator Scott Ludlam yesterday complained that “the government’s contribution has amounted to malign indifference.” Deputy leader Adam Bandt said “the Australian government is not doing enough to ensure his safety.” Far from being indifferent or insufficiently engaged, the government has actively colluded and

connived in the US-led vendetta against Assange.

The Greens are also responsible for the government’s recent amendments to the extradition laws to remove previous safeguards against extraditing Australian citizens to foreign countries for political offences. Assange no longer has that legal avenue to fight a US extradition request in the event that he were able to return to Australia. Last February the Greens moved some token amendments to other aspects of the legislation, and after these were rejected, remained silent as the bill cleared the Senate without any votes in opposition.

The fight to defend the legal and democratic rights of Julian Assange and WikiLeaks involves a political struggle against the Labor government and its various props, including the Greens and their pseudo-left supporters.

The accelerating assault on democratic rights in Australia and internationally is a direct consequence of the crisis of the capitalist system. Governments around the world are driving down the living standards of the working class, promoting militarism and war, and further accelerating already enormous social inequality. This agenda cannot be advanced through democratic methods, which is why there is a growing resort to authoritarian methods in every advanced capitalist country.

The working class needs to mobilise in defence of democratic rights on the basis of a struggle for the socialist reorganisation of society that ensures social equality and a rational economic system based on the satisfaction of social needs, not private profit. I will raise these critical issues centrally in the Socialist Equality Party’s campaign in the Melbourne by-election.



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