

Australian prime minister dismisses renewed calls to defend Julian Assange

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In the most contemptuous manner, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has flatly rejected new calls, from the family and supporters of WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange, for his government to secure the basic right of the Australian citizen to return home, free from the threat of extradition to face trumped-up espionage charges in the United States.

Both Assange's father, John Shipton, and mother, Christine Assange, have renewed their demands for the Australian government to discharge its responsibilities to their son, who is now in serious ill health and in danger of the Ecuadorian government terminating his political asylum in its London embassy.

Morrison made no mention of these pleas when he was asked about Assange's plight on a Gold Coast radio station on Monday. Instead Morrison tried to laugh off a call by actress Pamela Anderson, issued on the Nine Network's "60 Minutes" program on Sunday night, for him to defend Assange, return his Australian passport and ensure his free passage home.

Asked if he intended to heed Anderson's advice, Morrison chuckled loudly before replying: "No." He added: "I've had plenty of mates who have asked me if they can be my special envoy to sort the issue out with Pamela Anderson. But putting that to one side, the serious issue is no, our position on that hasn't changed."

Leaving aside Morrison's crude innuendo, his remarks constitute the first direct statement by the Liberal-National Coalition government of its unwavering support for the drive by the US administration, assisted by the British government, to get its hands on Assange.

Like the Labor government before it, the Coalition government is determined to see Assange locked away for life in the US, or even executed, because his brave

and principled work on WikiLeaks over many years has helped expose the war crimes, mass surveillance and anti-democratic machinations committed by the US and its allies.

The public response to Morrison's stand, however, pointed to the widespread support for Assange in Australia, as is also the case internationally. "60 Minutes" conducted an on-line poll on Morrison's rejection of Anderson's request. Referring to "WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange," it asked: "Do you think he should be allowed to come home?" Of the 5,448 respondents before the poll closed, 91 percent said "yes."

Reflecting these underlying sentiments, Anderson used the "60 Minutes" interview to declare: "Scott Morrison, defend your friend and get Julian his passport back and take him back to Australia and be proud of him and throw him a parade when he gets home."

Shipton, Assange's father, backed Anderson's statement in a letter to the prime minister. Shipton had also written, unsuccessfully, a similar letter to Morrison's predecessor, Malcolm Turnbull before Turnbull was ousted via a backroom Liberal Party coup on August 24.

Christine Assange posted a video on Youtube saying her son was in "urgent, critical danger," suffering a "slow and cruel assassination," with his health seriously deteriorating. "His examining doctors have warned that these conditions are life-threatening," she said.

Assange said her son was "an award-winning journalist, much loved and respected for his courageous exposure of serious high-level crimes, in the public interest," yet "he is right now alone, sick and in pain." She emphasised that he had been effectively detained

since 2010 without a single charge being laid against him.

Christine Assange condemned the latest “protocol” imposed on the WikiLeaks publisher by Ecuador’s government. In essence, the protocol continues an eight-month cut off of all his communications with the outside world unless he agrees to give up his right to make political comments deemed detrimental to Ecuador’s foreign relations.

Assange said her son was being subjected to “silence in solitary confinement, cut off from all contact and being tortured in the heart of London. The modern-day cage for political prisoners is no longer the Tower of London, it is now the Ecuadorian Embassy.”

Assange explained: “For the past six years the UK government has refused his request to access to basic health needs, fresh air, exercise, sunshine for Vitamin D, and access to proper medical and dental care. As a result, his health has seriously deteriorated.”

She warned that the US government would “stop at nothing” to incarcerate her son. US Vice President Mike Pence had visited Ecuador to secure a pledge from the country’s president Lenín Moreno, to eject the WikiLeaks founder from the embassy, but Moreno judged “the political cost too high,” so the new protocol was part of a bid to “break” her son and “force him to leave.”

Ecuadorian Foreign Minister José Valencia underscored that intent this week by again declaring that Julian Assange would “face the consequences” if he breached the protocol. Valencia falsely declared that the right to political asylum did not include a right to free speech, citing a redundant 1929 convention. At the same time, nervous of the public reaction, he told Ecuador’s state-owned Radio Public: “Up to now, as far as we know, there is no extradition request from any country.”

In reality, both the Ecuadorian and British governments continue to refuse to give Assange any guarantee against being extradited to the US. Assange has offered to leave the embassy and be jailed for supposedly breaching bail on a European arrest warrant that was issued over concocted, and later dropped, Swedish sexual misconduct complaints—but only if he is protected against extradition to the US.

The intensification of the US government’s pursuit of Assange is being spearheaded by the Democrats and

associated media outlets, such as the *New York Times*, which have sought to link Assange, without the slightest credible evidence, to their Russian “interference” allegations. As for the Republicans, some have in the past called for the WikiLeaks founder to be assassinated or sent to Guantanamo Bay.

In 2012, Assange was forced to turn to Ecuador for asylum because the then Australian Labor government lined up completely behind the Obama administration’s efforts to pursue him. Likewise, the Liberal-National government, in office since 2013, has collaborated to the hilt with Washington, refusing to use its diplomatic powers and legal discretion to secure Assange’s right to freedom and safe return to Australia.

The Socialist Equality Party in Australia organised a powerful protest in Sydney in June, which included well-known journalist John Pilger, to demand that the Australian government intervene. Anxious to maintain Washington’s backing, Prime Minister Turnbull refused to even reply. Now his successor, whose installation US President Donald Trump immediately welcomed, has gone further by publicly declaring that “our position on that hasn’t changed.”

This development underlines the necessity for the mobilisation of the working class, as an independent force, in Australia, the US, Britain, Ecuador and internationally to defend the WikiLeaks founder from the attacks of the American state. Assange’s fate cannot be left in the hands of capitalist governments. More than ever, the demand must be raised that Julian Assange be afforded his basic democratic rights, and allowed to leave the Ecuadorian embassy, unharmed and unimpeded, and with a guarantee against extradition to the US.



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