

Australian establishment collaborates in US vendetta against Julian Assange

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A court document surfaced last week confirming that the United States Department of Justice has secretly filed criminal charges against Australian citizen Julian Assange for his journalistic work as the editor of WikiLeaks. For exposing US and allied war crimes and diplomatic conspiracies, Assange has been threatened since 2010 with extradition to the US for a show trial on charges of “espionage” or “conspiracy.”

The revelation that US charges have been laid vindicates the position taken by Assange and his defenders to fight against the arrest warrant issued against him, in November 2010, to answer “questions” over spurious allegations he had committed sexual assault in Sweden. The allegations were fabricated to give ammunition for pro-US mouthpieces to discredit Assange and as the means of rendering him to a country from where he could be rapidly extradited.

The US-motivated Swedish warrant, and the support given to it by the British government and courts, forced Assange to seek political asylum in the small Ecuadorian embassy in London on June 19, 2012. For over six years, he has lived under fraught conditions, deprived of direct sunlight and adequate medical care.

Since March this year, the Ecuadorian government, adapting itself to the Trump administration’s demands, has denied Assange the ability to communicate with the outside world or receive personal visitors, in a vindictive attempt to force him to leave the building. If he does, he will be detained by British police and imprisoned during a protracted legal battle against a US extradition application.

The case of Julian Assange is, and always has been, at the forefront of the fight to defend fundamental democratic rights against the attempt by US imperialism and its allies to intimidate, censor and silence independent and critical journalism. The confirmed existence of the sealed US charges underscores the danger facing Assange and the perfidy of those who have supported his persecution.

The Australian political and media establishment has responded by doubling down on its shameless collaboration with the US state in its vendetta against Assange.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison has explicitly reiterated the Liberal-National Coalition government’s support for the persecution of Assange, while the Labor Party and the various “minor” parties and independents in the parliament have remained silent. This includes the Greens and Andrew Wilkie, a former intelligence officer who blew the whistle in 2003 on the lies about “weapons of mass destruction” that were used to invade Iraq.

In 2010, the Greens and Wilkie sought to bolster their fraudulent claim to represent a genuine opposition to the Coalition and Labor by posturing as defenders of Assange and freedom of speech. However, as Australian imperialism has ever-more closely aligned with the US drive toward war with China over domination of the Indo-Pacific, they have abandoned Assange and openly aligned with the major parties.

The Labor Party’s stance is consistent with its record in office. In November 2010, as WikiLeaks published damning exposures of US criminality, Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard rushed to ingratiate herself with the Obama administration by declaring Assange’s actions were “illegal.” She vowed her government would investigate whether he could be charged with crimes under Australian law—which he could not. The Labor Party, which committed Australia to the US “pivot to Asia” against China and expanded US military access across the country, has never shifted from its hostility toward WikiLeaks.

The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and its affiliated unions have likewise made no statement. Most notable in its silence is the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA). In December 2010, it arranged for then ACTU president Jed Kearney to award honorary union membership to Assange, in recognition of his services to journalism.

At the time, Kearney tamely criticised Gillard. She stated: “Mr Assange’s rights should be respected just the same as other journalists. WikiLeaks has broken no Australian law and as an Australian citizen, Julian Assange should be supported by the Australian government, not prematurely

convicted.”

The MEAA and ACTU soon dropped their fraudulent pretensions to defend journalists and democratic rights, and lined up behind the Obama administration and the Labor government.

The pseudo-left groups, most prominently Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative, are also continuing their years of silence on the persecution of Assange. Their stance flows from their politics. They repudiated any defence of Assange because it requires opposition to the Labor Party, the Greens and the trade unions. The pseudo-lefts orbit around and promote those parties and organisations, reflecting the interests of a privileged middle class layer with vested interests in maintaining the political status quo.

The “Victorian Socialists,” a pseudo-left electoral front standing candidates in the November 24 election in the Australian state of Victoria, is preferencing its votes to Labor and the Greens, lauding them as “progressive” parties. Predictably, none of its candidates, particularly its main personality Stephen Jolly, have said a word about Julian Assange.

Last weekend, the Australian print media did little more than republish articles from the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* or news agencies, noting that Assange had been charged in the US. Most of the television news did not even report that development.

On December 22, 2010, the editors or news directors of virtually every Australian television station or print media publication signed a joint “open letter” to Prime Minister Gillard which stated: “To aggressively attempt to shut WikiLeaks down, to threaten to prosecute those who publish official leaks, and to pressure companies to cease doing commercial business with WikiLeaks, is a serious threat to democracy.”

The verification that Assange faces US prosecution has not prompted a single editorial defending him, freedom of speech or the rights of journalists.

Indeed, it has taken actress Pamela Anderson to even raise in the Australian media that the government should take action on behalf of a persecuted citizen and journalist. In an interview on “60 Minutes” on November 4, she defended Assange against accusations he had caused “harm” and called on Prime Minister Morrison to secure his freedom and return him to Australia.

On November 17, Anderson replied in an open letter to Morrison’s mocking response laced with sexual innuendo. He had outrageously said on radio that while his government would do nothing to assist Assange, he had “plenty of mates who’ve asked me if they can be my special envoy to sort the issue out with Pamela Anderson.”

Anderson stated: “You trivialised and laughed about the

suffering of an Australian and his family. You followed it with smutty, unnecessary comments about a woman voicing her political opinion.

“Rather than making lewd suggestions about me, perhaps you should instead think about what you are going to say to millions of Australians when one of their own is marched in an orange jumpsuit to Guantánamo Bay—for publishing the truth.”

Millions of workers and youth around the world have been educated by the exposures published by WikiLeaks and still view Assange, like Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden, as a heroic political figure. They must be mobilised in his defence.

In Australia, the crucial issue is the development of the broadest campaign in the working class and among students demanding that the Australian government exercise its undeniable diplomatic power to insist that Assange be unconditionally returned to his country of birth, and its legal discretion to take action in the British courts to force the British government to do so.

The lesson of the past eight years is that such a campaign will not be built by appealing to the Greens or the trade unions to organise or lead it. The defence of Assange and democratic rights must be developed independently of, and in opposition to, the entire official political establishment. The Australian government, whether headed by the Coalition or Labor, would take action only if it believed its position were threatened by a movement from below.

The June 17 rally, called by the Socialist Equality Party and endorsed and addressed by film-maker John Pilger, was an important step toward the development of such a movement. Against the pro-imperialist hostility to Assange by the Australian ruling class and its political agents, the speakers articulated the widespread support in the working class for his freedom.

Over the coming weeks and months, it is imperative that the defence of Assange and WikiLeaks be raised as widely as possible in the workplaces, universities, TAFEs and high schools, and that protests and other actions be organised.



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