

Authorities confirm Assange's Australian passport was renewed last October

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The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported overnight that the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) confirmed to a parliamentary committee this week that it renewed the passport of Australian citizen and WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange in October 2018.

According to the *Herald*, Jennifer Robinson, who has served as one of Assange's legal representatives for over eight years, submitted an application to renew his expired passport in "mid-2018."

DFAT initially refused to process the application, according to the *Herald*. It reportedly informed Assange:

"Specifically, we understand you may be the subject of an arrest warrant in connection with a 'serious foreign offence' within the meaning of section 13 of the Australian Passports Act 2005.... In order to progress your application, we require confirmation that section 13 is not enlivened by your circumstances. To this end, we ask that you provide us with confirmation that section 13 no longer applies to you. Until this time, your passport application will remain on hold."

The implication is that DFAT's decision to renew the passport several months later was based on an assessment that Julian Assange is "not the subject of an arrest warrant in connection with a 'serious foreign offence.'"

This only underscores the importance and necessity of applying the greatest possible pressure on the Australian government to intervene on behalf of Assange.

An Australian citizen is being arbitrarily detained by Britain inside the small Ecuadorian embassy in London. He is being denied medical treatment and access to direct sunlight, conditions that the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention compared with torture.

The only possible charge that can be laid against Assange is that he breached British court bail conditions when he sought political asylum inside Ecuador's London embassy. Deprived of any support by the Australian government, Assange applied to Ecuador for asylum in

2012 to avoid being extradited to the US to face a show trial on false charges of espionage or conspiracy and the prospect of life imprisonment or the death penalty.

Assange is not wanted by US authorities because he committed a crime. He is being pursued because as the editor of WikiLeaks, he played a leading role in publishing leaked documents that exposed American war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq, and diplomatic cables that revealed the sordid intrigues and conspiracies conducted by Washington around the world. He is the target of a state-organised vendetta to silence all independent media and intimidate all future possible whistleblowers.

The British establishment—with the complete backing of successive Labor and Coalition Australian governments—has fully collaborated with the US state apparatus to try and railroad Assange into a prison cell, or worse.

In a gross miscarriage of justice, successive British courts in 2011 and 2012 upheld the politically-motivated warrant issued by Swedish prosecutors to extradite Assange to answer "questions" over manufactured allegations he was under "suspicion" of sexual assault.

British judges ignored the clear evidence presented by Assange's legal team that the motive for extradition to Sweden was to facilitate his rendition to the US, where, by at least late 2010, a secret grand jury in Virginia had sanctioned espionage or conspiracy charges against him.

The fabricated nature of the sexual assault slanders has been fully exposed. In April 2017, after finally questioning Assange in London, Swedish prosecutors were compelled to abandon their purported investigation.

This fact makes Australia's DFAT reference to Assange proving that he was not the "subject of any serious foreign offence" is highly significant.

A breach of bail is not, by any legal criteria, a serious offence, especially in regard to a matter that the authorities of Sweden have admitted they do not have any

evidence to press charges for, let alone put Assange on trial.

Moreover, Assange has already paid for the breach by forfeiting the £250,000 he was compelled to pay, with the generous assistance of supporters, to win bail from British custody. And, as UN experts have noted, his years of involuntary confinement in the Ecuadorian embassy to avoid the prospect of rendition to the US would have to be taken into account by any serious judge.

Based on purely legal considerations, a court hearing over the bail issue should take minutes for the matter to be dismissed and for Assange to be freed and allowed to immediately leave the United Kingdom.

The question is, therefore, what “serious foreign offences” was DFAT referring to in mid-2018? It could not have been the Swedish allegations, which had been dropped more than a year before, or the bail breach, because that offence is not, by any legal standard, “serious.”

The DFAT response therefore strongly suggests that the Australian government is concealing from the Australian people that it knows Assange has been secretly charged by the US Justice Department with espionage, or other criminal offences, due to his work as the publisher and editor of WikiLeaks

The attempt to prosecute Assange is an effort to establish a precedent for the persecution and jailing of any media organisation or journalist that publishes leaks exposing, embarrassing or offending the ruling elite.

The vendetta against Julian Assange and WikiLeaks is aimed at overturning the principles set out in the 1971 Supreme Court ruling on the publication of the Pentagon Papers, which upheld the right of journalists to publish information leaked by a government source. It is an attempt, initiated by the Democratic administration of Barack Obama and continued under the Republican administration of Donald Trump, to obliterate freedom of speech and freedom of the press.

This underscores the urgency of the campaign in Assange’s defence.

News that Assange’s Australian passport was renewed last October does not reduce by one iota the danger that he confronts. He still faces immediate detention by British authorities if he leaves the Ecuadorian embassy, and the prospect of extradition to the US on the most draconian and anti-democratic pretexts.

Canberra has given an Australian citizen an updated passport. The fundamental issue, however, is that the Australian government must use the full weight of its

diplomatic and legal powers to compel the British government to allow Julian Assange to leave the Ecuadorian embassy. Assange must be immediately able to return to Australia, to rejoin his family and to continue his work as the publisher of WikiLeaks.

The demonstrations called by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Sydney and Melbourne next month take on added importance in light of these revelations.

By re-issuing his passport last October, the Australian Liberal-National Coalition government has confirmed it knows that Julian Assange has not committed anything that, under Australian or international law, constitutes a crime.

But the Coalition government and the Labor Party have refused to intervene on Assange’s behalf. The Greens, the trade unions and the official media have maintained a deafening silence over the ongoing persecution of an Australian journalist and publisher.

The SEP demonstrations are being fought for in direct opposition to this wall of silence and complicity with a government vendetta against independent media.

The rallies have been endorsed by workers and students, as well as prominent media, academic and cultural figures, who recognise that what is at stake are fundamental democratic rights and who are therefore prepared to fight to defend Assange as a matter of principle. Join us on March 3 in Sydney and March 10 in Melbourne.

The author also recommends:

Rally to demand the Australian government acts to free Julian Assange!

Sydney Martin Place Amphitheatre, March 3! Melbourne State Library, March 10!



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