

Prominent WikiLeaks supporter Somerset Bean speaks out in defence of Assange

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Somerset Bean, a prominent WikiLeaks supporter and graphic designer, attended an urgent rally held by the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) in Melbourne last Friday, opposing the illegal expulsion of Julian Assange from Ecuador's London embassy and his arrest by the British police the night before.

Bean, who lives in Britain, has been a supporter of WikiLeaks for almost a decade. He has produced hundreds of poster and leaflet designs advertising protests, rallies and vigils in defence of Assange. Bean met with Assange in the Ecuadorian embassy on a number of occasions.

Comments he gave following the Melbourne rally, were prominently featured in a report on the protest by the *Age*, one of the city's most widely-read daily newspapers.

Bean spoke to the WSWS over the weekend.

Asked about his response to Assange's arrest, Bean stated: "With Julian Assange's illegal expulsion from the Ecuadorian embassy and arrest by the UK, a blatant and disturbing escalation of the US government's assault on the right to publish truthful information occurred.

"The actual scene of the arrest shocked me more than I had anticipated, having followed the case closely for years. It was so blatantly in contravention of the right to asylum, and of many international treaties the UK is signed up to.

"And yet the governments of Ecuador, the UK and the US conspired to make it happen, brutal and in broad daylight for the world to see. Clearly the powers-that-be want to use the persecution of a successful and effective publisher as a warning to us all not to challenge their power and their crimes.

"I attended the protest because silence is tantamount to complicity. I've also been wearing my 'Free

Assange' t-shirt around the city and getting some really supportive responses.

"The [Melbourne] rally was small but spirited. I'm sure it would have been larger with more time and resources to publicise it. And also were it not for the relentless character assassination of Assange over nearly a decade which so many involved in left politics in particular have fallen for. There was plenty of righteous anger, and we also need to celebrate our solidarity, our common interests, and our creativity in creating an alternative to the rotten status quo.

"The role of the British and Australian governments is, not surprisingly, shameful. These are governments who cause misery and suffering on an industrial scale. The former illegally detained Assange for nearly a decade, holding him for the US. The latter encouraged that persecution by feigning 'consular assistance' whilst abandoning an Australian citizen.

"There is a sliver of hope with Jeremy Corbyn and his Labour supporters, but on the whole they have been silent or hopelessly misinformed at best, and openly hostile to Assange at worst. A strong statement by Corbyn and Diane Abbott has now been diluted by Corbyn's spurious claims relating to the completely corrupted allegations of sexual assault. In opposition at least, when pushed, Corbyn acquiesces, a dangerous strategy if he is truly interested in challenging the status quo and the entrenched British establishment."

Bean explained that he had begun supporting Assange around 10 years ago, "when I first heard Julian giving a presentation about his thinking behind the concept of WikiLeaks. Having been politically inactive for many years, I realised that here was something with powerful potential to be a catalyst for systemic change by exposing the truth of our supposedly 'free world.' I decided to support with the skills I had available."

Asked about his encounters with Assange, Bean said, “Unfortunately I was unable to visit through most of last year due to the tight restrictions placed upon Assange by the new US-aligned Ecuadorian government. But even before that, when Julian was able to speak to the public, conduct his work from the embassy, and engage with regular visitors, the conditions were virtually intolerable. No sunlight or necessary medical care for nearly seven years in what is basically a small apartment/office.

“Julian Assange operates from a position of compassion and intelligence, and maintains a sharp sense of humour. He always has some new insight, perspective and/or knowledge to impart. He is also dedicated to the mission of WikiLeaks and obviously has a remarkably resilient character. If there’s a battle with Empire to be had, Julian needs no encouragement to step up and make a principled and impactful stand. He lives and breathes it.”

Bean concluded: “We must not keep quiet, for that is the end game of the psychopaths who rise to the top in our societies, where wealth is power. We need to organise and mobilise in our workplaces, our places of study and in our communities both online and offline, bypassing the ever-more powerful censorship algorithms.

“Everyone has some skill or passion that they can use to contribute to defending Julian Assange and a truly free press, and to promote the work of WikiLeaks.

“We must speak out about and support the principled dedication of whistleblowers such as Chelsea Manning, as solidarity nurtures courage, and courage is indeed contagious. And we need to continue to disseminate the brutal and deceitful workings of power that WikiLeaks' publications have exposed, to inspire others to act.”



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