

Prominent Australian journalist Mary Kostakidis calls for campaign to free Assange

18 June 2019

Mary Kostakidis, a prominent Australian journalist, provided the following statement to the WSWs yesterday, calling for a campaign against the extradition of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to the United States and to secure his freedom. She expressed support for upcoming Socialist Equality Party rallies in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, which will demand that the Australian government take action to defend Assange.

Kostakidis has been a leading figure in the Australian media for many years. She was the main presenter for the national television program “SBS World News” for over two decades, until 2007. The journalist has been one of the few internationally who has been outspoken in defending Julian Assange, issuing public statements, attending and speaking at public demonstrations, and participating in Unity4J online vigils in his defence.

The British Home Secretary rubber-stamped UK government approval for the extradition of Julian Assange to the US, on the anniversary of the publication of the Pentagon Papers by the *New York Times*—48 years to the day that the NYT commenced reporting on the Vietnam Archive.

On the day Assange was indicted under the Espionage Act for releasing “Collateral Murder” and publishing the Afghan and Iraq war logs—factual material revealing war crimes and wrongdoing by the US government—the NYTimes Editorial Board—its editor and publisher—recognised immediately the full force and intent of the Indictment: the US government was seeking to redefine what journalists can and cannot publish, and warned it would have a chilling effect on journalism.

It would also set a new low benchmark for the public’s right to know.

Assange is now in Belmarsh High Security Prison where he is deprived of the means to adequately

prepare for the full hearing that will decide next February, whether he is extradited to the US to face a 175-year sentence for publishing the truth.

The US now reveals there are indeed *further charges and targets* associated with this investigation. They will be determined to shut down WikiLeaks and intimidate anyone associated with the organization. And the persecution of Chelsea Manning continues as they are able to deprive her of her freedom though she was released from jail by President Obama and though she is clear she has nothing more to say.

This is about truth and those who want to ensure secrecy prevails so they are not held to account. It is about ensuring that in future whistleblowers are not given a voice though they are driven by the right and moral obligation to expose wrongdoing and war crimes.

We must not wait till it is too late to recognise the broader significance of the persecution of Julian Assange and fail to defend his human rights.

Punitive laws to rein in press freedom in our country were passed with the support of both major parties. The two recent AFP raids on journalists, including the national public broadcaster, brought the intent of those laws into stark relief. Several whistleblowers currently face jail for revealing information in the public interest—David McBride, Richard Boyle, Witness K and his lawyer Bernard Collaery.

This is a galvanising moment for our country. Our democracy is being undermined by those laws passed with such ease.

Journalists and publishers here are calling on our parliament to protect our democracy by enacting laws that instead protect whistleblowers, journalists and publishers to reveal information in the public interest.

They must also call on our government to intervene and prevent the extradition of an Australian journalist/publisher to the US, where he will face what

the UN describes as torture in a US prison and a prosecution that will set a terrible precedent for journalists around the world.

The British Home Secretary abrogates his responsibility in accepting the validity of an extradition warrant to prosecute a journalist for political reasons. He joins the US government in the persecution of an Australian citizen under a domestic US law intended to target spies that reveal damaging information to an enemy state. We must not let our government continue to abrogate its responsibility towards its own citizen.



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