

Australia: NSW Greens pass motion “defending” Assange, but MPs remain silent

Oscar Grenfell
30 August 2019

A state delegates’ meeting of the New South Wales Greens last weekend passed a motion condemning “the Australian government’s failure to defend” persecuted WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, and calling for him to be “brought home and given the support and services he needs.”

The motion reflects an emerging groundswell of opposition to the US-led persecution of Assange and the Australian government’s refusal to uphold his rights as a citizen and journalist. It is undoubtedly also a response to anger at the protracted silence of the Greens over Assange’s plight, and the organisation’s failure to mount any campaign in his defence.

The motion is above all marked by its tepid and mealy-mouthed character. It does not call for Assange’s freedom or mention the Trump administration’s attempt to extradite him from Britain to the US, so he can face trial on 18 concocted charges, carrying a maximum sentence of 175 years imprisonment.

In fact, the Greens statement declares that the “legal matters” involving Assange should “proceed,” even if he is returned to Australia. The clear implication is that Assange should be imprisoned by the Australian government, while the US prosecutes him for the “crime” of exposing its illegal wars, mass surveillance operations and global diplomatic intrigues.

The motion does not call for a guarantee by the Australian government against Assange’s future extradition to the US or any other country, leaving open the possibility that he will be dispatched to a foreign prison at some point in the future.

When the motion was posted to the Greens NSW Facebook page on Wednesday, a Greens member responded: “We should argue against the extradition to US, but not for his immediate release.”

A prominent proponent of the motion, Ian Rose, responded: “Actually what the Greens NSW decided to call for is in line with what you are suggesting.”

Rose favourably referenced the case of David Hicks, who was returned from the US military’s Guantanamo Bay prison to Australia after a protracted public campaign. Under a legal agreement, Hicks was then jailed by the Liberal-National government. In other words, if the NSW Greens have their way, Assange will be behind bars in Australia, rather than Britain or the US.

Even more telling than the contents of the statement, is the fact that it has been met with silence by every Greens member of parliament, at the state and federal level. This makes clear that the motion is a political maneuver, and not the start of a campaign by the party in Assange’s defence.

Since the WikiLeaks founder was illegally expelled from Ecuador’s London embassy and arrested by the British police on April 11, Greens representatives have issued only a handful of token statements, expressing “concern” over his plight.

The party’s leader Richard Di Natale released a statement the day after the WikiLeaks founder’s arrest, warning that it was “a dark day for press freedom around the world.” Di Natale stated that the US was “seeking to punish Assange for exposing evidence of US atrocities” and called for the Australian government to prevent his extradition. Assange’s name has scarcely passed the Greens leader’s lips since.

Instead, senior Greens figures have lent credence to the bogus Swedish sexual misconduct allegations against Assange. They have sought to obscure the fact that Assange has never been charged in Sweden, that a “preliminary investigation” against him has been dropped twice, and that the case was a politically-

motivated frame-up from the outset.

At the same time, the Greens, along with Labor, the Coalition, and the corporate press, suppressed any mention of Assange during the May 18 Australian federal election, which was called immediately after Assange's arrest. Greens candidates expressed their willingness to form a coalition government with the Labor Party, which has played a central role in the US-led pursuit of Assange.

More recently, Greens leaders have ignored calls from Assange's legal team for Australian parliamentarians to speak out in his defence.

Last month, Jennifer Robinson, one of Assange's lawyers, delivered a briefing on Assange's legal situation and its grave implications for democratic rights, to federal members of parliament, including Greens representatives. None of them has so much as released a statement, or mentioned Assange in an interview since.

The refusal of the Greens to defend Assange is not an aberration. It flows inexorably from the party's increasingly right-wing, pro-business program, which has featured calls for coalition governments with Labor and the Liberals, assurances to big business that the Greens are "fiscally responsible," and the abandonment of any, even nominal, opposition to militarism and war.

The inability of the Greens, as a capitalist party of the affluent upper middle-class, to defend democratic rights is graphically demonstrated by its record on the Assange case.

The federal Greens were in a formal alliance with the minority Labor government of Prime Minister Julia Gillard between 2010 and 2013. They maintained the alliance, as Gillard responded to calls from leading US politicians for Assange's assassination, by branding WikiLeaks as a criminal organisation and pledging to assist the efforts of the US intelligence agencies to destroy it.

Individual Greens MPs, such as Scott Ludlam, claimed to support Assange. However, when challenged publicly, they insisted that Gillard's role in his persecution was not cause for ending their de facto coalition with the Labor government.

Over the ensuing years, the Greens have largely abandoned even rhetorical claims to defend the WikiLeaks founder.

This has gone hand-in-hand with their support for

Washington's regime-change operations in Syria and Libya, and their tacit support for a massive US-led military build-up in the Asia-Pacific, in preparation for war with China.

Prominent Greens figures, such as Professor Clive Hamilton, have played a central role in a McCarthyite campaign against supposed "Chinese interference" in Australian politics, aimed at legitimising these military preparations, and creating the conditions for the suppression of anti-war opposition.

The record is a graphic demonstration of the fact that a movement to defend Assange and democratic rights, will not come from the parliamentary establishment, which is turning to militarism, war and authoritarianism, amid the deepest crisis of capitalism since the 1930s.

As the Socialist Equality Party and the WSWs have insisted, the fight to free Assange and to defeat the onslaught on civil liberties, requires a turn to the international working class, the overwhelming mass of the population.

Around the world, millions of workers are entering into major struggles, expressed in a growing wave of protests, demonstrations and strikes.

Defenders of Assange should turn to this emerging movement, including through the passage of resolutions calling for his freedom at workplaces, participation in protests and rallies and support for the international campaign being waged by the Socialist Equality Parties and the WSWs to secure his unconditional freedom.

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