

Prominent Australian parliamentarian declares extradition of Julian Assange to US “totally unreasonable”

James Cogan
14 October 2019

In comments to reporters over the past 24-hours, Australian parliamentarian Barnaby Joyce, the former leader of the rural-based National Party and one-time deputy prime minister, opposed the extradition of Australian citizen and WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange to the United States to face charges of espionage.

Joyce stated: “If a person is residing in Australia and commits a crime in another country, I don’t believe that that is a position for extradition. If they weren’t actually there, that is a question for Australian law. We have to follow the principle, even if we don’t have regard for the person.

“It would be totally unreasonable, for instance, if China were to say the actions of an Australian citizen while in Australia made them liable to extradition to China to answer their charges, of their laws, in China.”

Joyce’s statements on the case of Julian Assange have a significance that goes far beyond his past or current status within the Australian establishment. They reflect anxiety in both political and media circles that the widespread disquiet over their collaboration in the US-led persecution of an Australian citizen is going to burgeon into public anger over the coming weeks and months.

Assange, an internationally recognised and awarded journalist and publisher, is being held in solitary confinement and harsh conditions in the maximum-security Belmarsh prison in London. His family members and high-profile supporters who have been able to visit him are making strident warnings that his psychological and physical state is deteriorating. His father John Shipton stated this month: “His health has been declining and has reached a point where he may die.”

Millions of people in Australia and around the world know that the only reason Julian Assange is being persecuted is because WikiLeaks published information

that exposed war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as sordid diplomatic intrigues and shameless political corruption.

On February 25 next year, Assange is scheduled to be hauled before a British court which will decide whether to comply with the request filed by the Trump administration’s Justice Department for his extradition to the US.

He will not get a fair hearing. The judge that has been assigned to the case is Emma Arbuthnot. Her husband, House of Lords’ member James Norwich Arbuthnot, is intimately connected with the British armed forces and security services, whose criminal operations were exposed by WikiLeaks. Her hostility to Assange and WikiLeaks is well-known.

If Assange is extradited, there is no possibility that he would get a fair trial in the United States. For years, he was demonised and vilified by the Obama administration and throughout the American media. The Trump administration labelled WikiLeaks a “non-state hostile intelligence service” in February 2017 after it published “Vault 7”—a vast mass of leaked information revealing how the CIA has software it uses to hack into phones, computers, smart televisions and even vehicle operating systems.

The American state apparatus is determined to condemn Assange to life imprisonment or worse in order to threaten publishers and journalists, everywhere in the world, not to even think about exposing US imperialist crimes.

There will be escalating protests and other political action in defence of Assange in the UK, the US, and internationally, and especially in Australia.

The issues raised by Barnaby Joyce go to the heart of the undeniable responsibility of the government in Canberra to use all possible diplomatic and legal means to

protect Assange from the US vendetta, secure his immediate release from imprisonment in the UK and arrange his return to his home country.

Assange was not in the United States in 2010 when WikiLeaks, in partnership with major newspapers around the world, published leaked information that exposed American criminality and intrigue—the actions for which the US has charged him and is seeking to extradite him from the UK.

Under Australian law, Assange has committed no crime. In 2010, the Greens-backed Labor government headed by Prime Minister Julia Gillard ordered a top-level investigation as to whether Assange could be charged. It advised that he could not. WikiLeaks and its international media partners did not “steal,” “hack” or “conspire” to obtain the information.

Assange and WikiLeaks insisted from 2010 that the sole agenda behind an attempt to extradite him to Sweden—to purportedly answer “questions” over allegations of sexual assault for which he had not even been charged—was to engineer his extradition to the US. They argued this case all the way to the highest court in Britain which, in a gross miscarriage of justice, upheld the Swedish extradition warrant in June 2012.

The Australian government did not intervene once. Instead, Gillard’s Labor government, unable to prosecute Assange, repudiated its responsibility to defend an Australian citizen from blatant political slander and persecution.

On June 17, 2012, Assange sought sanctuary in Ecuador’s embassy in London, whose government recognised and granted his right to political asylum. He did so because he feared for his life and had been denied any protection or support from the Australian government.

The Ecuadorian government betrayed Assange and handed him over to the UK on April 11 this year. He was convicted on the charge of absconding on his bail conditions in 2012 and given a vindictive 50 weeks’ sentence of imprisonment and remand.

The custodial time of that sentence ended on September 22. The only reason Assange is being kept in Belmarsh is because a British judge declared he is a “flight risk” before the February 2020 extradition trial. That is, Assange is a political prisoner who is being detained so a legal charade can occur before he is handed over for personal destruction by the American state apparatus.

For years, the Australian establishment have attempted to suppress and censor any discussion about Assange and

the immense issues of democratic rights that it poses. His case has generally only been reported in the media to slander him and undermine his popular support.

The basic truth is that the Australian ruling class do not want to raise a word about Assange because opposing his persecution would cause friction and tensions with Washington.

As Joyce suggested, if it was the Chinese government treating an Australian journalist in the manner that Assange is being treated, Canberra would be under pressure from every quarter to make the most strident diplomatic protest. Every media publication and parliamentary party, however—from Labor, the Liberal-National Coalition, to the Greens and self-styled “independents”—have thrown an Australian citizen to the wolves to avoid “problems” for the strategic and military alliance with the US.

The trade unions, civil liberties’ organisations and pseudo-left groupings all fell into line with the pro-US stance of the establishment and abandoned any posture that they defended Assange and freedom of speech.

Barnaby Joyce admitted this morning what has been the situation since 2010. The attempt to extradite Julian Assange is a flagrant attack on his rights as an Australian citizen.

The only social force that can be relied upon to defend Assange and democratic rights is the working class.

Morrison’s government must be compelled, by political protest and industrial action, to cease its collaboration with Washington. Canberra must be forced to exercise its diplomatic power and the legal discretion to secure Assange’s immediate and unconditional release from a British prison.

To clear the way for Assange to return to Australia, if he chooses to do so, he must be given a public guarantee, by both Morrison and Labor Party leader Anthony Albanese, that any application by American authorities to extradite him will be rejected out-of-hand.



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