

# As anger mounts over Assange's persecution, former foreign minister Carr calls for moral appeals to Australian government

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Popular opposition to the ongoing imprisonment and state persecution of WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange is increasing following last week's extradition hearing in Britain. The four-day show trial, which blatantly violated Assange's basic legal rights and subjected him to even more psychological torture, has deeply shocked many people and intensified the determination of those fighting for Assange's release.

Addressing a public meeting last week in the New South Wales (NSW) parliament, Bob Carr, a former federal foreign minister and state Labor premier from 1995–2005, denounced the bogus espionage charges against Assange and warned that if extradited to the US, he would die.

Carr and other speakers, including Assange's Australian lawyer Greg Barns and former SBS television journalist Mary Kostakidis, insisted, however, that those defending Assange should concentrate on lobbying state and federal MPs.

This orientation, they suggested, would pressure the Liberal-National Coalition government and Foreign Minister Marisa Payne to ask Washington to release the WikiLeaks publisher.

Carr called for Payne to have a “friendly chat” with Mike Pompeo, the former CIA chief and current US Secretary of State, and offered some talking points.

“Listen old buddy, we get along on so many fronts,” Carr suggested Payne say. “We have people in Syria and Iraq—the trainers, the advisors and the air force—and have a ship up there in the Gulf...”

“Mike, just let Assange go. Just let the thing drop and... think about the criticism you cop in Australia and the disillusionment you produce in the Australian population towards the US.”

Carr said nothing about Pompeo's threatening denunciations of WikiLeaks as a “non-state hostile intelligence service,” his visit to Sydney last August when he demanded greater Australian involvement in Washington's aggressive confrontations with Beijing and Iran, or his role as former CIA chief.

As for Payne, she rejected any defence of Assange, declaring in the Senate a day earlier that the WikiLeaks publisher would receive a fair trial and disparaging UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer's reports on the decade-long persecution of Assange.

Carr's opposition to the US-led vendetta against Assange, which he first voiced in May, appears to constitute a remarkable political turn around. Eight years ago, as foreign minister in the Labor government of Prime Minister Julia Gillard—from early 2012 to September 2013—Carr, like other federal Labor MPs and the party as a whole, was virulently hostile to Assange.

The WikiLeaks publisher was “amoral” and had released secrets “without inherent justification,” Carr declared. He insisted that “there's not the remotest evidence” Washington wanted to extradite the Australian citizen. The WikiLeaks founder, he claimed, was “no [Daniel] Ellsberg.”

Carr's “change of heart” towards Assange, however, is driven by the same political imperatives that underpinned his previous attacks. His primary concern in both instances is to ensure that nothing disrupts the US-Australian military alliance or public confidence in the official parliamentary set-up.

As he explained to last week's NSW parliament meeting: “I'm not arguing for a dumping of the [ANZUS] alliance but for Australia's international

personality to be expressed without apology under the architecture of the alliance.”

Carr’s claim that the attacks against Assange can be defeated “under the architecture of the alliance” and by lobbying members of the parliamentary parties that collaborated in the US-led persecution of the WikiLeaks’ founder is false and a political trap.

The decade-long US-led operation targeting Assange is precisely because WikiLeaks exposed “the architecture of the alliance” and the war crimes and illegal activities perpetrated in its name. US diplomatic cables published by WikiLeaks also revealed some “protected sources” of the US embassy operating inside the Labor Party, including Carr himself, who had been a US informant during the mid-1970s.

The demonisation of Assange by Australia’s political establishment and the corporate media, which is part and parcel of its commitment to the US alliance, has not convinced tens of thousands of ordinary Australians. Important layers of workers, young people, students and middle-class people have taken up Assange’s defence as part of a growing international movement.

Carr fears this movement because it has developed independently of and in opposition to all sections of the political establishment.

The former foreign minister and veteran Labor bureaucrat’s real concern is that the movement to free Assange will become a focal point for a mass political mobilisation against war, social inequality, attacks on democratic rights and the existing parliamentary setup.

As he warned in an address last October to a meeting in the European Parliament, if Assange “were to die in prison” or “the US win extradition... there would be a serious political backlash in this country. Unless you want to be subject to a serious political backlash in Australia you should quietly withdraw from this.”

Carr’s insistence that those demanding the release of Assange confine themselves to lobbying MPs is designed to entrap this movement and politically suffocate it in dead-end appeals to the non-existent moral values of the Australian parliament.

The struggle to free Assange and US whistleblower Chelsea Manning and to defend fundamental democratic rights can only be waged through the independent mobilisation of the international working class. This is the political content of the meetings,

rallies, speak outs and other events being conducted by the Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality.

This vital work is not to offer friendly “appeals” to the Australian government but to demand that it condemn the legal travesties against Assange in the UK courts, and use its undeniable legal and diplomatic powers to block extradition and secure Assange’s release.

The turn that must be made is not to parliament but to the independent organisation and political mobilisation of working class—through the formation of community action committees, workplace organisations and student formations to explain the political implications for democratic rights if Assange is extradited.



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