Assange's partner Stella Moris calls for Australian government to intervene in his defence

Oscar Grenfell
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In an appeal prominently featured in the national media yesterday, Stella Moris, the partner of Julian Assange and mother of his two young children, called on the Australian government to uphold its obligations to defend the WikiLeaks publisher, as an Australian citizen and journalist, take action to prevent his extradition to the US and secure his freedom.

The comments were contained in an interview with Moris published on the front pages of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age*, two of the country's most widely-read daily papers, under the headline "Assange's fiancée asks Scott Morrison to guarantee family's safety." An accompanying photo was published of Morris with the couple's young children.

The article was one of the few instances in which a defender of Assange has been afforded the opportunity by the Australian corporate media to outline the politically-motivated and anti-democratic implications of extraditing him to the US, where he faces life imprisonment for exposing war crimes, and to refute the official slanders used to undermine public support for the WikiLeaks publisher.

Since British extradition hearings resumed early this month, a pall of silence has hung over Assange's plight. The major newspapers have still not published a single editorial calling for his defence, despite their professed commitment to press freedom, and Assange's name has not passed the lips of a single Liberal-National government minister or prominent representative of the Labor Party opposition.

Moris condemned the Australian government's abandonment of Assange. "What he has asked for and what I have asked for directly to [Prime Minister] Scott Morrison is for political intervention, for a political intervention because this is a political case," she stated, adding that it had been "frankly very disappointing," that the government had not given any commitment to protect Assange.

Importantly, Moris placed this refusal in a broader context, with the *Sydney Morning Herald* reporting that she "feared it was part of a widespread pattern of increasing attacks on free speech across the Western world that had ensnared her fiancée."

Moris specifically referenced unprecedented federal police raids, targeting the Sydney headquarters of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the home of Newscorp political editor Annika Smethurst in June last year. Those operations, overseen directly by the government and conducted in discussion with US agencies, were over separate stories exposing Australian involvement in alleged war crimes in Afghanistan and secret plans for expanded government surveillance.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* and WikiLeaks warned at the time, the raids were a direct application of the "Assange precedent." That is, an escalating assault on press freedom, drawing on the playbook employed by the US administration of President Donald Trump, when it unveiled 17 Espionage Act charges against Assange in May, 2019, over WikiLeaks exposures of war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, human rights abuses at Guantanamo Bay, and global diplomatic conspiracies, spanning from coups to the presence of US informants in major politics organisations, including Australia's Labor Party.

Moris insisted that the Assange case "is not something that the Australian government can just hide its head in the sand and say 'nothing to do with us.'" The human rights lawyer revealed that she would like to live with Assange and their children in Australia, but only if there were official guarantees of their safety.

Moris pointed to the immense hardships they were experiencing as a result of Assange's imprisonment in Britain's maximum-security Belmarsh Prison, and the prospect of his extradition, stating: "I don't want Julian to become a martyr. We're a family, he's not a symbol to us. He's part of ... he's Daddy. So I just tell them that Daddy's coming home."

Moris's strong appeal was made as the criminality of successive Australian governments to defend Assange is clearer than ever.

The British court proceedings are a show-trial, that have been condemned by human rights organisations, more than 150 leading legal experts and over 160 prominent international political figures.

The British and US authorities have done everything they can to prevent Assange from participating in his defence. Witnesses

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have been denied adequate time to present their evidence, the court has upheld US government demands that torture at Guantanamo Bay and CIA black sites be a proscribed topic, and prosecutors issued a superseding indictment, weeks out from the hearings, introducing a host of new allegations after Assange's lawyers had finalised their defence case.

Evidence this week from psychiatrists has substantiated earlier warnings that Assange displays medically-verifiable symptoms of psychological torture. Testimony from medical experts that Assange would be at a "very high risk of suicide" if he were extradited, have been waved away by prosecutors representing the US government, who have touted the "medical care" supposedly on offer in maximum-security American prisons.

Despite all of this, it does not appear that a single corporate journalist has challenged a government or Labor representative on their failure to defend Assange. Morrison has previously alternated between assurances that Assange will be provided with worthless "consular assistance," and prejudicial declarations that he must "face the music." Labor leader Anthony Albanese has said nothing.

Over the past two years, the Socialist Equality Party has extensively refuted official claims that the Australian government is powerless to intervene in legal proceedings abroad, under conditions where the rights of an Australian citizen are being trampled upon.

A detailed WSWS article by legal expert Richard Hoffman, published in June, 2018, noted that: "The Australian government has the legal right to seek the diplomatic protection of Julian Assange. Such action may involve diplomatic requests and representations to the British government, and, in some circumstances, the bringing of proceedings against Britain, in British courts of law. The factual bases for the exercise of Australia's discretion to protect Assange are both extreme and momentous. The circumstances in which a sovereign nation may act to protect its subjects are wide-ranging."

The "factual bases" have only been extended since, as it has become public that the US government is seeking to imprison Assange for life for publishing the truth.

Claims that the government can do nothing are refuted by a raft of precedents. In an article last December, the WSWS cited the following cases:

• Melinda Taylor, a lawyer who has previously represented Assange and WikiLeaks, was appointed by the International Criminal Court to advocate on behalf of Saif al-Islam Gaddafi in 2012, a year after his father's government was overthrown by a NATO regime-change operation. In a flagrant violation of international law, the US-installed "rebel" government arrested Taylor and accused her of spying. The Australian Labor government intervened, with then Foreign Minister Bob Carr personally flying to Tripoli to secure Taylor's release and her return to Australia.

• James Ricketson, a documentary filmmaker, was convicted of bogus espionage charges in Cambodia. He was released in 2018 after the Coalition government made "high-level" diplomatic representations on his behalf.

• Peter Greste, an Australian journalist working for Al Jazeera, was detained by the US-backed military dictatorship of Egypt and found guilty of fabricated "terrorism" offenses. He was freed after Australian government action in 2015.

Many other examples could be documented. Earlier this month, the government escalated a Chinese police request to interview two Australian journalists in Beijing, into a major diplomatic incident. Despite the fact that there was no indication that the reporters faced detention or criminal charges, they were kept within an Australian embassy compound before being flown out of the country. At the time, government ministers made statements insisting that it was their duty to repatriate Australian citizens, and especially journalists, who face persecution abroad.

The response to the Assange case has been very different. Over the past decade, beginning with the Greens-backed Labor administration of Prime Minister Julia Gillard, governments have joined the US-led vendetta against Assange, echoing CIA-concocted slanders against him, and working behind the scenes with American agencies to destroy WikiLeaks.

This is inextricably tied to the political and media establishment's support for the US alliance, along with American military wars and preparations, including the 19-year long occupation of Afghanistan and Washington's confrontation with China. It dovetails with a domestic assault on democratic rights, motivated by the same fears of social and political opposition from the working class, that are spurring a turn to authoritarianism by governments around the world.

The experiences of the past three weeks have further confirmed the Socialist Equality Party's insistence that an Australian government will only intervene to secure Assange's freedom, if it is forced to do so by a mass political movement of the working class.

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