

No record of Australian Labor government's diplomacy to US about Assange

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In response to freedom of information (FOI) requests by former federal parliamentarian Rex Patrick, multiple departments of the Australian Labor government have confirmed that they have made no representations to the US administration of President Joe Biden relating to Julian Assange.

The information, revealed in an article by Patrick on the *Michael West Media* website, is a damning indictment of the Labor government.

Since it was elected last May, Labor has said as little as possible on Assange. Its representatives, including Albanese, have hinted at backroom discussions with the Biden administration, but their content and purpose has remained entirely opaque.

These purported conferences have been used to justify the refusal to forthrightly defend the persecuted Australian journalist on the grounds that diplomacy is best conducted, in Albanese's words, without a "megaphone."

In response to growing condemnations of these claims as a cynical dodge, Albanese made his most explicit comments on Assange since becoming prime minister last November. In response to a question from independent MP Monique Ryan, Albanese restated earlier declarations that "enough is enough" in relation to Assange's legal plight.

Albanese said: "The government will continue to act in a diplomatic way, but can I assure the member for Kooyong that I have raised this personally with representatives of the United States government. My position is clear and has been made clear to the US administration that it is time that this matter be brought to a close."

Contrary to Albanese, many things remained decidedly unclear. What exactly was the government requesting of the US administration? Had it explicitly demanded an end to the US attempt to extradite and prosecute Assange for exposing American war crimes? Were these demands backed by any threats of retaliatory action if they were not met, and more?

Previous FOI documents obtained by lawyer Kellie Tranter in July, had highlighted these questions. Internal talking points from the office of Labor's Attorney-General

Mark Dreyfus had focussed solely on the prospect of a "prison swap" involving Assange. That would presuppose his extradition to the US and conviction on trumped-up Espionage Act charges carrying a maximum-sentence of 175-years imprisonment.

Assange's relatives and medical experts had long before warned that he would not survive being dispatched to the US.

The latest FOI request by Patrick paints an even grimmer picture of Australia's role in the continued persecution of Assange.

Patrick wrote: "In response to a Freedom of Information request to the Prime Minister for all correspondence or other records of communication sent after 23 May 2022 by or on behalf of the Prime Minister, the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, to United States President Joe Biden that related to Julian Paul Assange, his office has come up with nothing."

A bland, pro forma reply by the Senior Legal Advisor to the Prime Minister simply stated that there was no relevant material. Identical responses were also made by representatives of Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Attorney-General Dreyfus. They cover all of the key government ministries that would be engaged in any intervention on Assange's behalf.

MP Monique Ryan responded to the revelation by telling *Michael West Media*: "If the Albanese Government was serious about working to secure an end to the US prosecution and Mr Assange's release, then he and his Ministers would have raised the matter formally, in writing, with their counterparts at the top levels of the US Government. It is now confirmed that they have not done so via any formal means."

Patrick added: "The Albanese Government has been caught out saying something but not meaning it. They just want to appear that they're doing something, when behind the scenes they're doing very little, if anything much at all."

Some have suggested that such negotiations may be conducted in the first instance verbally, thus not leaving a paper trail. It is inconceivable, however, that any actual

progress in ending the persecution of Assange would be made without some sort of written communication or commitment.

In reality, while spouting occasional, exceedingly vague and non-committal weasel-words of concern for Assange's plight, Labor is to all intents and purposes continuing the more than ten-year collaboration of Australian governments in the assault on the WikiLeaks founder.

Since Assange was expelled from Ecuador's London Embassy and arrested by British police in April, 2019, the justification for this collaboration has been the assertion that Australia is not a party to the "legal process" involving Assange, and thus can do nothing to halt it.

In a little reported comment during an interview with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation earlier this month, Albanese restated this line in a particularly callous manner.

The host, James Valentine, stated: "All right, a couple of other issues that listeners have raised, are we likely to see Julian Assange back in Australia anytime soon? We had three or four texts on this, people saying, 'Could you put pressure on the US to ask them to stop trying to get the extradition? Why can't the UK just release him? Isn't he Australia's issue now?'"

Albanese replied: "Well, he's not Australia's issue, because it's the US seeking to extradite someone under US law from the UK under UK law."

Only when Valentine pressed the matter with follow-up questions did Albanese trot out the talking points about diplomacy and enough being enough.

In other words, just as the previous Coalition government, Labor upholds the pseudo-legal extradition as a "legal process" that must be respected and that it cannot interfere with.

This line has become even more brazen, since it was revealed in late 2021 that the US Central Intelligence Agency had secretly plotted to kidnap or assassinate Assange in 2017, while he was an internationally-recognised political refugee in the Ecuadorian government. Only after those illegal plans failed or were abandoned was a frame-up indictment issued together with an extradition bid.

Some figures who support Assange, including Patrick, have pointed to Australia's growing importance to US military and diplomatic operations around the world. This, they have claimed, provides the Labor government with leverage that it could utilise to pressure Biden to drop the charges and the extradition request.

This position is profoundly false. It serves to sever the fight for Assange's freedom, from the struggle against war, with which it is inextricably tied.

Since assuming office in May, Labor has accelerated Australia's integration into advanced US preparations for an

aggressive war against China. Every week brings announcements of new weapons purchases, together with diplomatic missions by Wong, Albanese and others aimed at furthering Washington's confrontation with Beijing.

The inevitable and necessary corollary of this imperialist warmongering is the suppression of widespread anti-war sentiment. The persecution of Assange is the spearhead of this crackdown on civil liberties which always accompanies war. In other words, Labor's support for stepped-up militarism and its tacit backing for the slow state murder of Assange are two sides of the same coin.

These attacks recall those which developed under the last Labor government headed by Julia Gillard and in office from 2010-13. It aligned Australia with the first stages of the US plans for war with China, the "pivot to Asia," a massive military build-up throughout the region. At the same time, Gillard falsely accused Assange of having broken Australian laws and sought to strip him of his passport. Assange stated publicly that he thought the Labor government was secretly collaborating with the CIA and other American agencies in covert operations against WikiLeaks, including its Australian members.

More than ten years on and the turn to war, the development of authoritarianism and the crisis of global capitalism that underlie both are far more advanced.

That, together with the entire record, demonstrates that the fight for Assange's freedom can only go forward through an independent political movement of the working class against war, capitalism and those who represent it, including the Labor government.



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