

Albanese's comments expose charade that Australian government is trying to free Julian Assange

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For the past year, the Labor government has claimed to have been defending Julian Assange through private representations to the Biden administration, which is seeking to extradite and prosecute the WikiLeaks publisher, who is an Australian citizen.

Comments by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese on Sunday confirmed that these government assertions have been a cynical charade all along. The Labor government, in fact, has greenlighted Assange's extradition to the US, signalling that it will do nothing to block his dispatch to his persecutors in the American state.

Albanese made the comments in an interview for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's "Insiders" program on Sunday morning.

Albanese had just returned from a visit to Washington, where he was feted by the Biden administration. In turn, Albanese gave his hosts his government's ironclad commitment to American militarism all over the globe, from the genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza to the US-NATO proxy conflict against Russia in Ukraine and the preparations for a catastrophic war against China.

On October 27, the *Sydney Morning Herald* "confirmed" that Albanese had raised the issue of Assange with Biden. The article was incredibly thin on details. It had the character of a story planted by the government to appease Assange supporters.

Then three days later, on Sunday, Albanese was briefly asked about the issue on "Insiders." Questioned as to whether he had mentioned Assange to US officials on his latest visit, Albanese initially made vague comments about previous encounters. Eventually, he asserted that he had brought up the question of Assange, including with Biden.

Albanese would not discuss the contents of the discussion except to say he had reiterated Labor's highly

ambiguous talking points, "that enough is enough" and "it is time that this issue is brought to a conclusion."

The interviewer, David Speers, then asked: "Time that Joe Biden stepped in and ordered that the case be dropped?"

Albanese replied, emphatically: "No. Joe Biden doesn't interfere with the Department of Justice. Joe Biden is a president who understands the separation of the judicial system from the political system. That's an important principle. We just had an important discussion about democracy and the nature of it."

Every word of that statement is an obscene lie.

An obvious question arises: If the Labor government is of the view that the Biden administration cannot, under any circumstances, intervene to end the prosecution of Assange, what is the point of the representations it claims to have been making to the US president?

Why express concern to Biden and supposedly repeat, as though it were a mantra, "enough is enough," if it is accepted ahead of time, that he can and will do nothing?

Plainly, Albanese's comments for more than a year, and the purported lobbying by the government, have been a fraud. Its sole purpose has been to dampen down widespread anger within Australia over the US persecution of Assange. At the same time, Labor has greatly expanded the US alliance, providing for vast American basing arrangements and militarising the country in preparation for war with China.

The assertion that Biden cannot do anything because of the independence of the Department of Justice is the claim of the US administration itself. Whenever top Biden officials have been asked why they are proceeding with the prosecution of Assange, initiated by the Trump administration, they have trotted out this line.

It is entirely false. As Speers' question implied, Biden

could, if he wanted to, order an end to the prosecution immediately.

The depiction of the protracted pursuit of Assange as some high-minded exercise in legal principles, untainted by political interference, is so ludicrous as to be absurd.

It is on the public record that consecutive US administrations have pursued Assange, with every tool at their disposal, since the 2010–11 WikiLeaks publications exposing American war crimes, including in Iraq and Afghanistan, for which he is charged.

Biden himself was integral in the early stages of this political witch-hunt, branding Assange a “high-tech terrorist” for his journalistic activities in 2010 when Biden was vice-president. The Obama-Biden administration convened a Grand Jury to try to concoct criminal charges against Assange and dispatched FBI agents around the world to hunt, intimidate and threaten WikiLeaks supporters.

The formal issuing of criminal charges against Assange, in March 2018, was connected to political machinations and dirty tricks operations directly involving the Trump administration.

Throughout 2017, top Trump officials, including the president and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, had allegedly been in discussion with the CIA about kidnapping or assassinating Assange in London. The writing up of a criminal indictment by the Department of Justice was initially conceived as a pseudo-legal cover in the event that Assange was illegally rendered to the United States.

The US pursuit of Assange has involved illegal CIA spying on him, while he was an internationally-protected refugee in Ecuador’s London embassy, the surveillance of his privileged conversations with lawyers, and the theft of his legal documents. But Albanese would have the public believe that this is some sort of high-minded legal case, an exercise in best practice.

The Espionage Act charges are completely illegitimate. The US is seeking to extradite a foreign journalist for publishing true information revealing war crimes. All credible press freedom and human rights organisations have branded this as a frontal assault on freedom of speech and civil liberties, but Albanese has the temerity to pontificate “about democracy and the nature of it.”

The prime minister’s comments confirm what has been evident to all politically-literate individuals for some time, namely that the rhetoric of “enough is enough” and “this matter should be brought to a conclusion” is simply hot air, aimed above all at demobilising support for Assange.

To the extent that Albanese has gotten away with the charade, it has been thanks to a complicit media, which increasingly functions as a pro-war mouthpiece of the state, and has been involved in the vilification of Assange for more than a decade.

Albanese’s comments confirm previous reports stemming from freedom of information requests by former independent Senator Rex Patrick and lawyer Kellie Tranter. The documents they obtained from multiple government departments indicated that Labor was not seeking to block Assange’s extradition or end his prosecution.

Labor’s focus was instead on public relations and a hypothetical prison transfer, after Assange had been dispatched to the US and convicted.

Under conditions where Albanese insists that Biden can do nothing, the conception of “enough is enough” and “this matter should be brought to a conclusion” could be interpreted as encouragement to proceed with the extradition and his trial.

With Assange closer to extradition than ever, it is high time that lessons be drawn from these experiences. His freedom will not be secured through fawning appeals to militarist governments in the US or Australia. Gullibility or an uncritical acceptance of statements made by right-wing politicians like Biden or Albanese have never been characteristics associated with a successful political struggle.

The timing of Albanese’s remarks, moreover, underscores the connection between the Assange case and the broader political context within which it is unfolding. As they are backing a genocide in Gaza and preparing for wars against nuclear-armed states such as Russia and China, the imperialist powers are determined to suppress widespread anti-war sentiment through police-state measures.

That shows that the fight to free Assange must be fused with the struggle to build an international anti-war movement of the working class. It can only develop in a political offensive against the warmongers, and the capitalist system itself, which is hurtling toward catastrophe.



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