

Australian Labor government complicit in Assange extradition threat

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A ruling on Tuesday by the British High Court places WikiLeaks publisher and Australian citizen Julian Assange a hairs breadth away from extradition to the US. There, he would be imprisoned for up to 175 years for exposing historic war crimes, diplomatic conspiracies and human rights abuses.

The Court rejected most of the substantive grounds on which Assange was seeking to appeal extradition. That included a ban on extradition between Britain and the US for political offenses, and the fact that he was being persecuted for publishing activities and expressing his political opinions.

The court allowed Assange to appeal on only three of the nine grounds he was seeking a challenge over. But it permitted the US to issue “assurances” within the next three weeks that would nullify even those three avenues of appeal. All the American Department of Justice has to do is send a note, promising not to execute Assange or to deny him very limited First Amendment protections.

The judgment means that Assange could be dispatched to his US persecutors almost immediately after the next court hearing on May 20.

To describe the response to Tuesday’s judgment by the Australian political and media establishment as muted would be an understatement. Coverage was bland and tended to downplay the immense perils facing the Australian journalist. There were no editorials or opinion pieces by official journalists calling for an urgent campaign to save their incarcerated colleague.

Senior leaders of the Labor government, including Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Foreign Minister Penny Wong, do not appear to have mentioned Assange since the decision.

The reaction reflects the fact that the Australian ruling class and its servants are no less hostile to Assange than their counterparts in Britain and the US. Australia participated in all of the criminal wars exposed by Assange and WikiLeaks. Labor is continuing a protracted cover-up of Australian involvement in the war crimes, including the well-

documented fact that Special Forces troops murdered Afghan civilians.

The silence is aimed at obscuring the reality that successive Australian governments, including Labor, have been complicit in the persecution of Assange. None of them have sought to block it, by using their diplomatic and political powers.

In practice, Labor has continued this record, while adding a dose of mealy-mouthed hand wringing for cover.

This has consisted of the repetition, generally at intervals of several months, of deliberately ambiguous slogans. Albanese, Wong and others have stated that “enough is enough” in relation to the Assange case, and “it is time for this matter to be brought to a close.” That commits the government to nothing and does not place demands on anybody.

Asked in the Senate about the danger of Assange’s imminent extradition on Tuesday, hours before the British decision, Wong repeated those phrases. She asserted that the government had made unspecified representations relating to Assange to the US and Britain, but added “we are not in a position to intervene in the legal processes of another country.”

That last remark is the essence of Labor’s position. They present the railroading of Assange as a bona fide “legal process,” which must be allowed to take its course. Labor has maintained that position despite the revelations that the Trump administration and the CIA considered abducting or murdering Assange in 2017; that the US government unlawfully spied on Assange’s legally-privileged discussions with lawyers, and above all, that he is being prosecuted for exercising fundamental rights to freedom of the press and freedom of speech.

Labor has extended its line, on the impermissibility of any political intervention into the unfolding judicial frame-up, to the British and US governments.

In October, Albanese was asked if he had raised Assange, and called on US President Biden to drop the prosecution, when they met earlier that month.

Albanese responded: “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.”

If Labor does not want Biden to end the prosecution, what representations is it actually making, to whom and to do what? Albanese effectively blurted out the reality that Labor’s occasional statements are solely aimed at dampening down public anger.

That is entirely in line with its agenda of escalating Australian involvement in US-led militarism on every front. Since coming to office, Labor has intensified Australia’s transformation into a frontline hub of preparations for a US-led war against China. It has backed the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and has provoked mass outrage by supporting Israel’s genocide in Gaza.

Were Assange a persecuted Australian citizen in Iran, China or another country in the crosshairs of US imperialism, Labor’s response would be very different. This is not a matter of speculation.

To mark the one year anniversary of the Russian government’s imprisonment of US *Wall Street Journal* reporter Evan Gershkovich, the Murdoch-owned *Australian* has launched a campaign drawing attention to his plight, in a cynical bid to whip-up support for the US-NATO proxy war. Gershkovich has been charged over unsubstantiated accusations of espionage, likely concocted by the Russian state.

In response to the *Australian’s* campaign, Albanese penned a public letter to Gershkovich, which declared: “You have been wrongfully detained for doing your job. We urge you to stay strong and we stand with the United States as the Biden Administration works to secure your release. Journalists speak truth to power and should never be in prison for doing their job.”

Wong similarly wrote: “Australians commend your bravery and resolve. Your ongoing detention by Russian authorities is baseless. We will continue to support those working tirelessly to secure your release. Journalism holds those in positions of power to account. Freedom of expression and a diverse and independent media are vital to any democracy.”

What happened to the impossibility of intervening in the legal affairs of another nation? Wong and Albanese must have forgotten.

The hypocrisy is breathtaking. Russia must not persecute and imprison journalists who work for official US media outlets. But the US lynching of Assange, an Australian journalist, is a “legal process” to be respected and allowed.

The exposure of Labor’s phony posturing underscores the bankruptcy of the whole perspective of issuing moral appeals to his persecutors to free the WikiLeaks publisher. That line has dominated the official Assange campaign for the past five years.

As part of this futile effort, the Assange camp has continuously been in search of potentially powerful allies. One who has been lauded, for criticising the persecution of Assange, is retired Labor parliamentarian Bob Carr. It is politely forgotten, or not mentioned, by the Assange campaign that as Labor’s foreign minister in 2011, Carr was involved in vicious attacks on the WikiLeaks publisher.

The value of “support” from such figures was underscored by Carr’s response to the British court ruling. Carr wrote on social media that Albanese “has done everything to highlight the case for the US dropping extradition of Assange...”

Albanese, as Carr well knows, has done nothing. The comment was simply a crude attempt to shield Labor from anger if the extradition goes ahead.

That outcome, which would be the equivalent of a death sentence, can and must be defeated. But lessons must be learnt.

The fight to free Assange requires an independent political movement of the working class, directed against war and all of the capitalist governments. The perspective of plaintive appeals to those persecuting Assange has been tried. It has failed.

The issue now is to fuse the fight to free Assange with the mass movement that is emerging against the Gaza genocide and the eruption of militarism. Assange’s supporters and all those who fight for civil liberties must convince workers that defeating the frame-up and liberating Assange is central to the defence of all their social and democratic rights—above all, the struggle to prevent a new world war.

The Socialist Equality Party, as part of our world movement, is the only political party that has fought for Assange’s freedom on those lines for more than a decade. Join it as an electoral member today to ensure that a socialist and anti-war party, that defends Assange and all class war prisoners, is on the ballot at the next Australian federal election!



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