

On Australian TV, Julian Assange's father calls for son's freedom

By Oscar Grenfell
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On the nationally-televised “60 minutes” program last night, John Shipton, Julian Assange’s father, issued a powerful call for his son’s freedom. The program was aired on Channel Nine some two weeks after Assange was illegally expelled from Ecuador’s London embassy, where he was granted asylum in 2012, and arrested by British police.

Shipton responded to footage of the brutal arrest, commenting: “I’m 74. He looks as old as me. He’s 47. It’s terrible.” Asked how he thought Assange would have felt at the time, he said: “Being dragged out, I imagine I would feel confused, bewildered.”

He said that as a result of the protracted persecution, Assange had lost “most everything, most everything human,” including regular contact with his parents, his adult son and primary school age daughter.

Shipton, however, pointed to his son’s extraordinary determination and defiance, despite years of virtual detention, stating: “His eyes look good and firm, and steady. He still has that fighting spirit there. Everything seems okay.”

The “60 minutes” program was screened days before Assange is due in court, on May 2, for a hearing on the Trump administration’s application for his extradition to the US on manufactured conspiracy charges.

Shipton warned that the US was “determined to ruin” Assange’s life, because of WikiLeaks’ exposures of war crimes, mass surveillance operations, and illegal diplomatic intrigues.

“They want to demonstrate that publishers and whistleblowers will be destroyed,” he said, adding that he feared Assange would be “dragooned to the United States and thrown into a jail cell, never to get out.”

Also on the program, Greg Barnes, a long-standing legal advisor to Assange, demanded that the Australian government take immediate action to secure the release

of the WikiLeaks founder, and arrange for his return to Australia, with a guarantee against extradition to the US.

Barnes stated: “They want to teach the media a lesson, which is: ‘If you mess with us, you mess with our security state, you reveal our secrets, we will come after you, even if it takes nine or ten years.’” He warned that Assange could face torture in the US.

In line with the hostility of the corporate press to Assange, many of the lies and smears, aimed at poisoning public opinion, were featured on the program.

These included the degrading personal attacks levelled against the WikiLeaks founder by the corrupt Ecuadorian regime of President Lenin Moreno. It is seeking to justify its unlawful termination of Assange’s status as a political refugee, which had been upheld by the United Nations.

Shipton noted that just days after Assange’s expulsion, Ecuador had received a \$4.2 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund, doubtless with the approval of the US.

Tara Brown, who hosted the program, asked Shipton if he thought Assange was a “Russian asset.” This was in line with the hysterical claims of the US Democratic Party and intelligence agencies, that Hilary Clinton lost the 2016 presidential election as a result of a nefarious Russian plot.

Assange has been targeted in the McCarthyite campaign because WikiLeaks released true and newsworthy emails, demonstrating that the Democratic National Committee had sought to rig the party’s primaries against Bernie Sanders, and in favor of Clinton. Her secret speeches to Wall Street banks, in which she pledged to do their bidding, were also published by WikiLeaks.

Shipton was scathing in reply. He noted that the claims “fit the need” of Clinton to attribute her loss to “the Russians” and to cover up her own responsibility for Trump’s victory. As he explained, Clinton “called half the population of the United States ‘deplorables’,” “destroyed Libya” in a 2011 regime-change operation, and “giggled like a madwoman” when that country’s President Muammar Gaddafi was bayoneted to death by a US-backed Islamist.

The program underscored the support of the Australian political establishment for the persecution of Assange. Despite the fact that he is an Australian citizen, successive governments, beginning with the Greens-backed Labor government of Julia Gillard, have refused to defend the WikiLeaks founder, instead supporting the US-led vendetta against him.

Jim Molan, a prominent senator in the Liberal-National Coalition government, and a former high-ranking general with close ties to the US military-intelligence apparatus, was provided with a platform to denounce Assange.

Molan condemned Assange for exposing the crimes and intrigues of the US and its allies, including Australia, declaring: “In my opinion, he is a villain. Because he gave away what we call tactics, techniques, procedures. What he revealed is how we operate. And for an enemy that is working against you, that is absolute gold.”

Molan’s comments amount to a call for the police-state repression of the media. In this conception, which would not be out of place in a dictatorship, journalists must function as the servile mouthpieces of the government and the military, including covering up their crimes.

The senator explicitly supported the Trump administration’s attempts to prosecute Assange. He declared that WikiLeaks was “not a media organisation,” and that Assange was “not a journalist.” Both, therefore, could not “rely on freedom of the press as a principle.”

Molan’s statement give the lie to the claims of government ministers, since Assange’s arrest, that they would provide him with unspecified “consular assistance.”

They demonstrate that the Australian government is a co-conspirator in the Trump administration’s attempts to set a precedent for abolishing freedom of the press

and free speech through the prosecution of Assange. The government and the opposition Labor Party are both committed to the US military alliance, participating in its predatory wars and suppressing those who expose them.

Barnes issued a strong condemnation of the role of the Australian political and media establishment, stating: “If he were, for example, detained in China for this period of time, and ill-treated, there would be a hue and cry, not only on the part of the government but the Australian media. Because it’s the United States, we seem to think there’s some form of exception.”

The program demonstrated that an Australian government will only fulfil its obligations to Assange if it is compelled to do so by mass pressure.

The Socialist Equality Party is standing in the federal elections, and holding rallies and meetings, to build a political movement that will force the Australian government to secure Assange’s return to Australia with a guarantee against extradition.

The basis for such a movement exists in the mass support for Assange among millions of workers and young people. Hundreds of people have commented on the “60 minutes” Facebook page, condemning Molan, rejecting the media slanders, expressing appreciation for Assange’s tremendous sacrifices, and calling for his immediate freedom.

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