

WikiLeaks: Labor numbers man, Mark Arbib, is traitorous US informant

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Oz Labor Party has lost its core values

FEDERAL Labor powerbroker Mark Arbib has been outed as a key source of intelligence on government and internal party machinations to the US embassy.

[After Labor PM Paul Keating sold Oz to Wall St, is anyone surprised to learn that the rot had never been removed from the Party.]



Mark 'traitor' Arbib

New embassy cables, released by WikiLeaks to Fairfax newspapers today, reveal the influential right-wing Labor MP has been one of the embassy's best ALP informants, along with former frontbencher Bob McMullan and current MP Michael Danby.

The documents say the Minister for Sport had been secretly offering details of Labor's inner workings even before his election to the Senate in 2007, dating back to his time as general secretary of the party's NSW branch from 2004.

Senator Arbib was one of the "faceless men" who was instrumental in the decision to oust Kevin Rudd and install Julia Gillard as Prime Minister in June.

The documents also identify Senator Arbib as a strong backer of the Australia-US alliance.

"He understands the importance of supporting a vibrant relationship with the US while not being too deferential. We have found him personable, confident and articulate," an embassy profile on Senator Arbib written in July last year says. "He has met with us repeatedly throughout his political rise."

The embarrassing revelations come as lawyers for whistleblower Julian Assange say the 39-year-old Australian will not be safe if he is sent to Sweden for trial because the "endgame" of US authorities is to move him there to be charged with espionage.

The US Justice Department is considering charging Mr Assange with espionage over the website's release of a mass of classified documents and Britain's The Independent newspaper said US and

Swedish officials had already held informal discussions about the possibility of him being delivered into US custody.

Mr Assange was yesterday refused bail and sent to London's Wandsworth prison after appearing in a British court to answer a Swedish extradition application.

In the latest of a series of secret cables obtained by Mr Assange's WikiLeaks outfit, US officials reportedly described Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd as abrasive, impulsive and a "control freak" who insisted on micro-managing issues.

The cables, published in Fairfax newspapers, revealed how an initially favourable US response to Mr Rudd becoming prime minister quickly changed to strident criticism of his leadership style. Mr Rudd was dismissed in one US cable as a "mistake-prone control freak".

In a series of interviews yesterday, Mr Rudd dismissed the US criticism as "water off a duck's back" but was quick to blame lax US security rather than Mr Assange for the humiliating leaks.

"Mr Assange is not himself responsible for the unauthorised release of 250,000 documents from the US diplomatic communications network," Mr Rudd told Reuters news agency. "The Americans are responsible for that. I don't, frankly, give a damn about this sort of thing. Just get on with it."

Julia Gillard was quick to reaffirm her strong support for the beleaguered minister, saying he was doing a first-class job.

As Mr Assange awoke from his first night in British custody, his lawyer, Mark Stephens, told The Australian the Townsville-born computer hacker had formally approached Australian consular officials in London and Sweden for help in fighting a Swedish extradition request over sexual assault allegations.

Describing Sweden as the US's "lickspittle state of choice", Mr Stephens said he feared the Swedish extradition order was merely a prelude to Mr Assange's ultimate removal to the US, where possession of 251,000 state department cables has caused a political uproar and calls for retribution.

"His Swedish lawyer has said explicitly to me that it would be quite unsafe for Julian in Sweden at this time," Mr Stephens said. "Not in terms of he would be harmed in Sweden, but that Sweden is not the end game."

The lawyer said he had asked the Australian high commission in London and Australia's embassy in Sweden for help in contesting the allegations against Mr Assange, which centre on the use or otherwise of a condom during consensual sex.

Mr Stephens said he had asked Australia to petition Swedish authorities for information about the allegations against Mr Assange and the evidence against him. He has also asked Australia to help him gain access to Mr Assange, who is due to reappear in a London court next Tuesday.

Mr Stephens said British prison authorities refused him access to Mr Assange until Monday, which did not leave him enough time to organise a defence.

Australian consular officials responded to Mr Assange's request for assistance on Tuesday. Consular staff attended his court hearing and were preparing to make regular visits to check on his welfare while being held in custody.

Mr Assange's defence team will be headed by high-profile Australian barrister Geoffrey Robertson QC, who flew back from Sydney on Tuesday.

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates described Mr Assange's arrest as "good news".

Mr Assange faces two counts of sexual molestation, one count of unlawful coercion and one count of rape involving two women in Sweden in August. He has denied the allegations. He sat impassively through the hour-long hearing and merely blinked a few times when the judge announced that he was refusing bail.

But Mr Assange saw a glimmer of hope in his battle against the allegations yesterday, with senior district judge Howard Riddle saying he might be released from jail next week unless Swedish prosecutors produced evidence in London to back up their claims.

Current US ambassador Jeffrey Bleich yesterday moved quickly to defuse the controversy surrounding predecessor Robert McCallum's unflattering assessment of Mr Rudd, saying the Foreign Minister was a good friend of the US and enjoyed the full confidence of the Obama administration.

"On a personal level we're good mates," Mr Bleich said. "You've seen us walking around the lake together - we have a little bromance - he's a very good person."

That message was reinforced in a personal phone call to Mr Rudd by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Mrs Clinton also issued a statement reaffirming her administration's commitment to the US-Australia relationship. It emphasised her gratitude to Mr Rudd for "leadership and vision" in helping guide the alliance.

Opposition foreign affairs spokeswoman Julie Bishop said the revelations backed up what the opposition had been saying about the government's handling of foreign policy, and Mr Rudd's suitability for the foreign portfolio. "These cables reveal a pattern of behaviour on the part of the government that is quite disturbing, arrogant and incompetent . . . making half-baked announcements without prior consultation with other nations," she said.

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