

Canberrans stand in support of whistleblowers

Canberra Weekly, August 6, 2020. By Cassandra Power



Caption: Canberrans stood in support of former ACT Attorney-General Bernard Collaery at the ACT Law Courts on this morning, 6 August. Photo: Cassandra Power.

Around 100 socially distanced Canberrans stood outside the ACT Law Courts this morning (6 August) and applauded former ACT Attorney-General [Bernard Collaery](#) as he walked through the crowd and entered the building.

The crowd held signs of support for the barrister and his unknown client “Witness K” as the two people face charges relating to national security for their role in exposing the Australian Government’s bugging of Timor-Leste’s Government at a time the two countries were negotiating sovereignty of Timor Sea oil resources.

Labor Federal Member for Canberra, Alicia Payne, said all Australians were entitled to a fair and open justice system.

“This is fundamental to our civil liberties and way of life, which we are seeing attacked too often by the Liberal government,” Ms Payne said.

“It’s great to see so many Canberrans supporting Bernard, but this is an issue that affects all Australians, we are seeing a slide into secrecy and away from accountability too much under this government.

“We’ve seen it in the raids on the ABC and Annika Smethurst and we absolutely see it in this trial, that is political, and these men should not be scapegoats for what the government is trying to hide.

“[Australian Attorney-General] Christian Porter has consented to these prosecutions going ahead, and he does that in the name of all of us, but he has not explained why, nor has the Prime Minister at any point and it needs to be explained.

“Mark Dreyfus [ALP MP] has been continually asking for briefings at each turn of this case and he does get briefings, but they are not answering his questions, in particular, ‘why this is going ahead?’.

“We need not be silenced by this agenda of fear the government is pursuing.”

Canberra Quakers representative and protest speaker David Purnell led the crowd to a minute’s silence for the 75th anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing. He said we were taught World War II was fought for our freedoms and human rights so it was important for us as citizens to keep fighting for those rights.

“Australia had a major role in setting up the United Nations, we are a member of the UN Human Rights Council and have made commitments to advancing the goals of good governance, gender equality, freedom of expression. All while the government is prosecuting Bernard Collaery for communicating protected intelligence,” Mr Purnell said.

“It is now likely the trial will be held at least partly in secret, meanwhile parliament is debating adding a layer to ASIO’s powers under which minors of the age 14 can be detained and pressed.

“Another reason to support the precarious position of whistle-blowers in this country is research which says whistle-blowers are unlikely to make much of an impression on the power structures without strong community support.

“In Bernard Collaery we have an outstanding citizen with a wide view of his responsibilities.”

Protest attendee Marian Davidson said that at 74 years old, she just “cannot believe” her country was acting in a such a totalitarian way.

“For our own government to be involved in illegal things and then hide them from the Australian people they represent, it’s beyond the pale.

“That’s not my country, that’s not what we stand for. It’s wrong,” Ms Davidson said.

Bernard Collaery is appealing against the trial being held in secret.