

ISSE/SEP meetings in Germany defend Julian Assange and WikiLeaks

Our correspondents
24 December 2010

The slogans “Free Julian Assange” and “Hands off WikiLeaks!” featured prominently on the posters and leaflets distributed by the International Students for Social Equality (ISSE) and the Socialist Equality Party (Partei für Soziale Gleichheit, PSG) to advertise meetings held during the past week in Berlin and Bielefeld.

Both events were well attended. In Berlin, an audience of close to 100, consisting mainly of students, crowded into the auditorium of the city’s Technical University. Lively discussions took place at both events following the introductory presentations.

The meeting in Berlin was opened by Christoph Dreier (national executive of the ISSE), who said: “The attacks on WikiLeaks and the arrest of the initiator of the Internet platform, Julian Assange, are the most blatant attacks on democratic rights for many years, if not decades. The attacks on WikiLeaks and Assange strike at basic democratic rights: the right to freedom of expression and freedom of information.”

Dreier drew attention to the contradictions in the statements made by many politicians and media outlets which claimed that the WikiLeaks revelations contained “basically nothing new.” At the same time, a veritable barrage of attacks was being launched against WikiLeaks and Assange by governments, political parties, the judiciary, law enforcement agencies and a majority of the media.

The massive offensive against WikiLeaks is directly related to the explosive content of the revelations coming to light, Dreier noted. He then went on to summarize some of the key facts, including: “The close collaboration between the US government and Australia over possible military confrontations with China, the revelation that major corporations such as Shell control entire African states such as Nigeria, and reports that several Arab regimes with close links to the US government have pressed for a war against Iran.”

At the same time the offensive being conducted against WikiLeaks must be examined against the background of the

rapid intensification of the international financial and economic crisis. Governments across the globe made hundreds of billions of euros and dollars available to the international financial aristocracy in order to secure their profits. Now broad masses of the population are now being forced to pick up the tab in the form of vicious austerity programs.

“Such attacks on the vast majority of the population are incompatible with democratic rights. The growth of social inequality is incompatible with democracy”, Dreier said. He went on to describe the series of attacks on striking workers: for example, the Greek truck drivers last spring; the massive police operation against striking French refinery workers; and the assault on air traffic controllers in Spain, who had sought to oppose the austerity diktats of the government and the decimation of their wages only to be forced to return to work at the barrel of a gun. “The socialist government of Prime Minister Zapatero in Spain declared a state of emergency and forced the workers back to work at gunpoint”, he said.

All over the world, similar dictatorial measures are being prepared and implemented for the eventuality that the working class frees itself from the control of the trade unions and conducts independent struggles. This is why the defence of WikiLeaks is so crucial. The defence of democratic rights must be understood in direct relation to the political mobilisation of the working class, Dreier concluded.

The next speaker was the chairman of the PSG, Ulrich Rippert. He welcomed the fact that many had heeded the call for the defence of WikiLeaks and Julian Assange. “But protest alone is not enough”, Rippert said. “We are currently experiencing the aggressive manner in which the ruling elite in the world of finance, their governments, their judiciary and their media, fight back when they feel challenged.” The defence of WikiLeaks and the free exchange of information must be considered in a broader social context.

Just as is the case in the natural sciences, definite laws also apply to politics, Rippert stressed. Unrestrained enrichment at the top of society and the systematic impoverishment of the vast majority of working people make major social conflicts inevitable. The contents of the WikiLeaks revelations make clear how representatives of the US and other governments are openly talking about military adventures and war.

The fight against the dismantling of democratic rights and freedoms, as well as the struggle against war and militarism, requires a political program and a party capable of giving the growing popular resistance a clear political orientation.

Such a program would combine two principles. It must be directed against capitalism and be based on a genuine socialist perspective. The growing social crisis cannot be resolved within the framework of capitalist society on the basis of reforms. Such a perspective must be international because no problem can be solved nationally. In addition, this program must be based on the historical lessons of the past century, which was marked by wars, civil wars and revolutions.

The meeting in Bielefeld was addressed by PSG executive member Dietmar Henning. He pointed out the thoroughly criminal nature of the war preparations being undertaken by the imperialist powers, especially the US, revealed in the currently available secret cable dispatches. He then elaborated on the mainly hostile reaction by the political and media establishment to the WikiLeaks revelations and placed such reactions within the context of the decline of democracy in the US and many other countries.

Henning also pointed out the direct connection between the attacks on WikiLeaks and growing social inequality, the sharp social attacks on the population in the wake of the economic and financial crises and the preparations for new wars and military adventures.

In the subsequent discussions, two main questions were raised. First, a number of speakers in the discussion expressed their doubts about the necessity for a new party. WikiLeaks had won influence and had made such an impact, it was argued, because its organisers did not organise in the form of a party, but as an open Internet platform. The defence and organisation of support for Julian Assange had also taken place through Internet networks rather than parties. In addition, it was claimed, parties had to operate in one way or another way within the existing framework of capitalist society and must inevitably adapt themselves.

The PSG and ISSE speakers responded, noting that WikiLeaks had uncovered many important things. This disclosure of documents and interview protocols was important and made clear the advanced stage of the attacks on democracy and the preparations for a police state and war.

The uncovering of social problems, however, should not be equated with the solution. Otherwise, one hopes that by merely holding up a mirror to society, it will be possible to persuade the ruling elite to change course. Just as a medical diagnosis cannot be equated with a successful operation, the disclosure of documents is only a first step. The solution of social problems requires the political intervention by the great majority of working people, and that is not possible without a political program and party.

While it is true that none of the existing parties even begin to represent the interests of the people, it would be wrong to make a virtue of this and reason that a party is not required to intervene in political developments.

It is misguided to conclude from the fact that all former parties of the labour movement had degenerated in opportunist organisations, that the same path would be followed by all parties. Rather, it is necessary to study the specific causes of the opportunist adaptations of these organisations and draw lessons for the construction of a principled revolutionary party.

A second question, which occupied a great deal of time in the discussion, revolved around the actual defence of Julian Assange and WikiLeaks. It was stressed in response that it was no coincidence that the *World Socialist Web Site*, the ISSE and the PSG were at the forefront of defending WikiLeaks. The principled defence of free speech and all democratic rights is a fundamental component of our program.

At both meetings it was decided to continue discussion on further practical and political action at upcoming events. The dates and details of further events will be posted on the WSWWS.



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