Socialist Equality Party intervenes at Paris rally in defence of Assange

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Socialist Equality Party (Parti de l'égalité socialiste, PES) supporters intervened at the rally in Paris on Saturday in defence of Julian Assange, at the invitation of the alternative newspaper *Le Grand Soir*. Hundreds of people, including "yellow vests," some Unsubmissive France militants, Australians and Latin Americans were present to denounce Assange's arrest at the Ecuadorian embassy in London. Assange is threatened with extradition to the United States where he could face the death penalty.

Le Grand Soir had organized the rally in front of the offices of the *Le Monde* newspaper to denounce the silence and contempt of the French press in response to Assange's persecution. Viktor Dedaj for *Le Grand Soir* denounced the Trump government as being behind the arrest and demanded Assange's release. He also highlighted the cowardice of newspapers which used the material published by Assange and WikiLeaks to write and sell their articles, but which are now abandoning Assange to his fate.

Dedaj said that further mobilizations will take place in Paris in the coming days.

PES supporters distributed hundreds of leaflets titled "Free Julian Assange." Alex Lantier, speaking on behalf of the *World Socialist Web Site* and the PES, condemned "categorically the forcible arrest of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. We call for a worldwide campaign in the United Kingdom and internationally to defend Assange; to oppose his extradition to the United States; and to guarantee his freedom and return to Australia, with guarantees against any future prosecution."

Lantier concluded his speech by explaining that the defence of Assange, who fought to reveal the truth to workers, requires the intervention of the international working class: "It is the working class, the great mass of the population, that must be mobilized to defend Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning and all the class-war prisoners. The demand for their freedom must be a rallying cry for the world working class."

After the speech, which was favourably received by the demonstrators, the WSWS spoke to Eliane. She said she had "come because I am revolted to see the way Julian Assange is treated, when he risked his life to inform us, so as to denounce everything that is happening around the world."

When asked about her opinion of NATO's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Eliane replied: "I think they were a fraud, they always use lies to justify dragging people into war. Fortunately, there are whistle-blowers, but they should not be abandoned. All the countries are implicated against Assange, no one will want to take him."

When the WSWS asked what she thought of the conduct of the May government and Moreno, Eliane found their attitude "revolting": "Ecuador should not have agreed to it. If I understood correctly there was very strong pressure on the Ecuadorian government. ... Moreno did not keep his predecessor's word. Britain could well not have been obliged to arrest him either."

Eliane condemned the French government's silence on Assange's persecution, which she linked to the rise of social anger: "This silence is shameful. I don't know if it's complicit, but at the very least it's cowardice. And then we are ashamed of this way of doing things, it doesn't correspond at all to our values. So we're revolted, we're revolted about a lot of things right now. This is just one more issue."

Eliane fears that "if he [Assange] is extradited to the United States, it will not be limited to prison. In my opinion it will be the death penalty."

The WSWS also met Alexandre, who came "just to

demonstrate in support ... In general it is important to support those who are now called whistle-blowers."

He added, "I think it's important to have people who fearlessly get information and disclose it. Then, there is a lot of work to be done to find out if this information is true, if it really contributes something. But from the moment it is verified, the information must be accessible to the general public."

To the question of what he thinks of the silence of the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) and Lutte Ouvrière (Workers' Struggle) on Assange, and Unsubmissive France leader Jean-Luc Melenchon's terse tweet on his arrest, Alexandre answered, "Indeed, in France there is no support. The proof is that there are not thousands of us here either. I don't expect much support on the Assange issue, even less from politicians on all sides."

Finally, the WSWS spoke to Carmen, an Australian of Chilean origin, who was "concerned about the Assange case. Australia has done nothing to support Julian Assange, we only have journalists like John Pilger who have rallied. ... The government is silent on this issue and it is shameful."

Asked about the Australian Socialist Equality Party's interventions to mobilize workers' opposition to Assange's persecution, Carmen said: "There have been rallies in Sydney and Melbourne where people have spoken out against it. The Australian population in general was against all the wars that were taking place in Iraq; millions of people gathered to fight these wars. It was not a decision of the people. It was a decision by governments to finance the military-industrial complex and pay for their contracts."

For Carmen, Assange is a "hero": "I think that as a journalist, who led WikiLeaks, he exposed all the illegalities and atrocities that governments have committed and we, the people, have the right to question our governments."

On the charges of rape against Assange in Sweden, Carmen considered that "these are fraudulent charges, frame-ups to send him to Sweden so that he can then be extradited to the United States. I think that WikiLeaks and Julian Assange, in the eyes of governments, have done a lot to damage them, because they can no longer hide behind the façade of a clean government."

Carmen said that it was necessary to "see that this is a violation of press freedom and its long-term implications."

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