

Germany: Protest vigil in Dusseldorf demands release of Julian Assange

Our reporters
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On Wednesday last week, the “Free Assange Committee Germany” organized a protest vigil in front of the consulates of Britain and the United States in the North Rhine-Westphalian city of Düsseldorf to demand the immediate and unconditional freedom of Julian Assange.

The US has now officially requested the extradition of the founder and publisher of WikiLeaks from the UK. Assange is being held in the Belmarsh maximum security prison for almost a year for breaching his bail conditions. The British government has already agreed to the extradition.

Members of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) participated in the vigil and a subsequent rally, where they distributed leaflets with the WSWs article, *The Global War on Journalism*. SGP member Dietmar Gaisenkersting spoke at the rally in front of Düsseldorf Central Station. His speech—as well as that of the committee spokeswoman—was streamed live on Facebook.

In front of the two consulates at Bertha-von-Suttner-Platz by the main train station in Düsseldorf, Isi of the “Assange Committee Germany” drew attention to the fate of Assange.

“He has not committed any crime except to present the truth, especially about US war crimes,” she said. That is why he had been detained for over seven years now. He had had to live in just 20 square meters, “without being able to move about, without fresh air, without sunlight.” He had to fear for his life daily. “From the sixth year of his detention, he was not allowed to receive visits, his Internet access was blocked, his bed taken away, his heating turned off, and so on.” In April, he was taken to a high security prison.

This treatment of a critical journalist, Isi stressed, did not take place in Russia, China or Turkey, but in the

“democratic West,” in England.

“Freedom of the press and expression stands and falls with Julian Assange’s fate,” she continued. Assange’s surrender to the US would mean that war crimes, spying on the population, or government intrigues and conspiracies would no longer be reported. If Julian Assange was convicted for carrying out journalistic work, other journalists would also be charged. This was already happening in Australia and France, and could happen in future also here in Germany.

At the beginning of June, officers from the Australian Federal Police entered two separate press offices within 24 hours. Both raids followed the publication of leaked information. These revealed war crimes committed by Australian special forces in Afghanistan and plans to legalize mass domestic surveillance by the Australian intelligence agencies.

In France, the government of Emmanuel Macron is persecuting journalists who have revealed that France, as an accomplice of Saudi Arabia, is participating in the illegal war in Yemen. They have also documented the Macron government’s efforts to cover up this fact.

In Germany, the government is preparing a head-on attack on editorial offices and journalists with the “Harmonization of the Secret Service Law.”

Isi met the SGP during the European elections, during which the SGP intensified its campaign for the release of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning.

In his speech, Dietmar Gaisenkersting spoke about the class issues involved. Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning were victims and prisoners of the class war of the ruling elite, he said. “They are being mercilessly persecuted by the world’s most powerful governments for their services to the international working class.”

The persecution and detention of Assange was directed against all opposition to the policies of the

ruling class. “Not only the past crimes of the US and its allies are to be hushed up, but the even bigger ones that are coming.”

Washington was intensifying its threats, above all against Iran, but also against Syria and Venezuela, escalating its economic war and its military confrontation with China.

The governments in Europe—above all the grand coalition of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats in Berlin—were responding by rearming the state and with militarism abroad and police state laws at home. In Germany, the secret service was already denouncing all criticism of capitalism as being “left-wing extremist” and “anti-constitutional.”

Just as most of the major media and pseudo-left organizations were bent on supporting the wars of their ruling elite, so too they also defended the repressive measures against Assange, Manning, and Edward Snowden.

“The defence of freedom of speech and of the press cannot be based on these social circles,” emphasized Gaisenkersting. “It has to rely on the international working class.”

A free press and freedom of expression on the Internet were crucial for the working class to organize the fight against war, racism, dictatorship, inequality and all the other social ills of capitalism. “Now that they are increasingly engaged in battles around the world, workers must uphold the demand for freedom for Assange and Manning and resist the persecution of journalists.”

Gaisenkersting called on workers and youth to take up this fight. He called on passers-by who stopped and listened to discuss these important issues.

Following the speeches, Gaisenkersting and other SGP members talked to many workers and young people. One was Timo, a mechanic from Essen. He had come to the vigil to express his solidarity with Assange. “I’m for free journalism,” he said. “Journalists should go about their business without fear of prosecution. They should enjoy special protection because they carry out our right to information.”

The persecution of Assange and Manning was just one of many developments that fundamentally concerned him. “Actually, everyone should ask themselves, what sort of society do we want to live in, and act accordingly to oppose the governments and

those in power, so that they no longer restrict our rights, monitor us, etc.” However, he thought that governments would not voluntarily give up their powers, recalling the “civil war-like conditions” facing the “yellow vests” in France. There, the state was using force against protests. “I fear there will be violent attacks when we stand up for our freedoms.”



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