

French workers, “yellow vest” protesters support fight to free Julian Assange

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For the past two weeks, the Parti de l'égalité socialiste of France has campaigned throughout Paris and other cities for this Sunday's public meeting in defense of persecuted journalist Julian Assange and whistleblower Chelsea Manning, based on the fight to mobilize the working class internationally to secure their freedom.

The meeting will feature international speakers from the PES's sister sections in the International Committee of the Fourth International, including Socialist Equality Party (UK) National Secretary Chris Marsden, and a representative from the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei in Germany. It is part of an international series of events in defence of Assange and Manning organized by the ICFI, including public meetings across the UK this month, and rallies in June and July in Australia.

Campaigners have distributed thousands of leaflets across Paris, including at “yellow vest” demonstrations, at universities and metro stations, and won a powerful response. Many workers have requested to take leaflets to distribute in letterboxes in their neighbourhood, and hundreds have shared the event on Facebook. In the working class and among the youth, there is overwhelming support for Assange and Manning.

Stéphane, 33, spoke to WSWS reporters at the “yellow vest” protest last Saturday. He works as an industrial draftsman and lives north of Paris, and began attending the protests last December.

“I think this situation with Assange is very grave,” Stéphane said. “He is someone who has denounced horrible things in the interests of the people. He has to be freed, a person like that who has informed us of the dictatorial turn being taken around the world. He is a policeman actually, a policeman for the people against the crimes of the governments. I see him as like a

guardian angel, or a smoke detector. I did not know before the crimes that he exposed. That has to be shared everywhere.”

“I did not even know anything about him until a few weeks ago,” he explained. “I saw him on the television a couple months ago when they pulled him from the embassy, and asked myself, ‘who is that?’” Stéphane then researched and found out what Assange had done.

“We should all get together and go to where he is imprisoned in London and free him,” he said. “What you're saying about this being international is important. The ‘yellow vests,’ the symbol of the vest, has just been to show that we are not happy with what is happening. But we can also take off the vest as well, that is to say, the importance is the movement that we are fighting for. In the whole world we are almost 7 billion people. The class that is exploiting us is practically nothing. We should all unite against that class.”

Like 7 million others, Stéphane voted for Jean-Luc Mélenchon in the 2017 presidential election, but said he no longer supported him. “I think he is part of the same system,” he said. “He does not denounce the elected officials who have committed crimes for what they are. He is part of the same game.”

Noé, 30, works in Paris at a counselling and therapy office in an administrative role.

“This type of figure [Assange] must be defended,” he told our reporters. “It's not only now a question of freedom of expression. We are in a moment now where there is an attack on the right to information of the people. We have through social media access to more and more information, but the important things, which concern us the most, about a democratic system, are in the process of being wound back.”

“I remember I was quite shocked between 2012 and

2013 when the French government [of François Hollande] refused to provide Assange asylum. It was the Socialist Party, and a country that has more weight in international diplomacy.

“We see today that the army has actually more rights than citizens. I saw the ‘Collateral Murder’ video. It’s a phrase, but it is a fact that civilians were killed, hospitals bombed, for this war for control. And we are intervening also across the world, in Mali, and Africa, where there are rich natural resources, uranium, but where the population is nonetheless so impoverished.”

Mikaël has worked at Electricité de France for the last 13 years.

“Assange has told the truth to the whole world, and I don’t understand how he can not be recognized as a real journalist,” he said at the “yellow vest” demonstration in Paris on Saturday. “He has been recognized with awards on an international scale for contributions to peace, and now he is being attacked for publishing true information to the people. It’s the government officials who are afraid that Julian Assange is exposing information that discredits them.”

“It’s horrific that the United States want to get him and are threatening him with execution,” he added. “The world is against this. Why doesn’t the French government accept to help Assange? In fact, Macron has other considerations and we can see what he has done against the ‘yellow vests.’

“The media today are financed by the employers and the government, and support them. That’s why we have seen these journalists chased out from the ‘yellow vest’ protests. But Assange is a real journalist.”

The WSWS also spoke to Hamza, 30, an Algerian worker living in France who was previously a French-language teacher in Algeria.

“I am completely against what is happening with Assange,” he told us. “He made real revelations of what is happening in the world. He revealed a large number of secrets. And Wikileaks was able to expose many scandals of ministers in Algeria implicated in the Panama Papers of financial corruption.” These had had an impact in propelling the ongoing struggle of the Algerian masses against the military-backed regime in the country, he said.

“But to tell the truth is illegal today,” he added. “They want to terrify the people and protect themselves with violence. It is the same as what we see today in

Algeria.”

Chris (a different name), who works as a draftsman, spoke to our reporters at last Saturday’s “yellow vest” protest.

“Assange is brave,” he said. “What he is denouncing disturbs people in high places. Everything has been done to stop him and prevent him from doing what he is doing, and particularly to persuade people to not do the same thing as him, to not go in the same direction that he took.”

“We can see the same type of repression of the ‘yellow vest’ protests,” he commented. “We see the fact that the people who are against the state are being reprimanded, that an attempt is being made to prevent them from demonstrating, to not disturb the system that is in place.”

He noted that the Macron government is also pursuing whistleblowers, including Disclose journalists who published exposures of French arms sales for the war in Yemen. “The Disclose journalists have been accused of revealing French defence secrets, and now they have been summoned by the police.”

The PES urges all students, young people and workers, and all those committed to the defence of democratic rights, to attend this Sunday’s public meeting in Paris, and to take a stand in defence of free speech and against militarism and war.

Share the event on Facebook here.

Details:

Sunday, June 23, 3 p.m.

AGÉCA

177 rue de Charonne, 75011, Paris

Métro: Charonne, Alexandre Dumas



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