

Rally in defence of Julian Assange held in Zurich

Our correspondents
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Coinciding with last week's opening of the shameful show trial of Julian Assange in London, opposition is developing across Europe to the extradition of the WikiLeaks founder to the United States.

On February 25, the first rally in Zurich, Switzerland in support of Assange was held. Marianne Arens spoke on behalf of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party—SGP) and called for the mobilisation of the working class in Assange's defence.

Despite the cold and wet weather, some 120 demonstrators gathered at a pavilion on Zurich's Bürkliplatz to put forward their demand for the freedom of the courageous WikiLeaks founder. The rally was called by the Free Julian Assange Committee Switzerland.

In her contribution, Arens said the disgraceful show trial in London was a mockery of the rule of law and an outrageous crime. She explained the political issues involved: "The defence of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning requires one thing above all, the mobilisation of working people against capitalism and war."

An example was being made of Assange, she continued. "Anyone who dares to expose war crimes is to be intimidated. And why? Because new wars and new war crimes are being planned and prepared." She referred to the current large NATO military manoeuvres titled "Defender 2020," saying their purpose was "clearly to rehearse war against Russia."

She went on to discuss the scandal involving the Swiss company Crypto AG, with whose help the CIA and the German Federal Intelligence Service (BND) had spied on more than 100 countries of the world for decades.

"The supposedly neutral government of Switzerland knew all about this," Arens said. All the governments, including the German and Swiss governments, were part of a conspiracy in the current show trial in London.

"And this is not a surprise," she continued, "because they all advocate the same policies of war, private

enrichment and social attacks on the working population. What we see today is the return of fascism and war."

She spoke of the horrific terrorist attack that had taken place a few days earlier in the German city of Hanau, in the state of Hesse, saying: "In Germany, the grand coalition government has taken over the policies of the AfD [Alternative for Germany] in many areas, thereby strengthening the radical right-wing forces. As in the 1930s, right-wing and fascist forces are needed to enforce a war policy against a population that does not want this at all."

The policies of militarism and extreme social inequality were incompatible with democracy, she explained. That was why there was no constituency for the defence of democratic rights within the ruling elite.

She cited the historical example of the German journalist Carl von Ossietzky, who was convicted and imprisoned for "espionage" and "betrayal of secrets" in 1929—that is, even before the Nazi regime came to power. He died nine years later as a result of his mistreatment in a fascist concentration camp.

It was important to learn the lessons of this historical precedent, she said, because it was strikingly similar to the London show trial. Assange too was threatened with conviction under the US espionage act. "Therefore, his defence is directly linked to a fight against militarism and war and against capitalist exploitation," she said. "For this it is necessary to mobilize the working class on the basis of an international socialist programme."

Her contribution was interrupted by applause several times. Arens concluded with the appeal: "The only way to prevent Assange's extradition and gain his complete freedom is through the independent mobilization of a politically conscious, international mass movement."

The administrator of the Free Julian Assange Committee Switzerland, Marlene Jost, welcomed each speaker with a personal introduction. In between the

speeches, she skilfully provided musical interludes on her violin.

The first speaker of the evening was the lawyer and journalist Dr. Milosz Matuschek, who supports the Geneva initiative for a humanitarian Swiss visa for Julian Assange. “For me, the Assange case is the Dreyfus case of our days,” he explained, with the conspiracy against Assange being even worse.

“Four states—Ecuador, Sweden, Britain and the United States—have conspired against a single person,” he noted. He then warned, “If the powerful are above the law, then we no longer live in a state based on the rule of law. We live in a despotic state.”

He continued, “The right of Assange to publish is our right to be informed,” and that is why it was so important “to get him out of the cell, because otherwise we will all end up in this cell—perhaps not immediately physically, but certainly spiritually. For who should dare to publish such things in the future when the truth carries such a price tag?”

Matuschek asked his journalist colleagues to draw the appropriate conclusions, saying, “Either journalists are willing to take on the powerful, or they are pure show business.”

In his speech, Zurich lawyer Dr. Philip Stolkin dealt with the importance of investigative journalists for society. He said they are the only ones who explain to us where our tax money goes and that “our governments are involved when weapons and wars are financed, when bombs explode in Yemen, and when children are torn to shreds.” This reference to the fact that the Federal Council (the Swiss government) spends billions of Swiss francs on its own armaments and authorizes huge exports of war weapons was met with strong applause.

Stolkin raised the question: “Should human rights really apply only to holiday speeches in which we celebrate ourselves as wonderful democrats?” He was not ready for that, he said. It was important that investigative journalists continue to speak out, so it was important to free Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning.

The last speaker, Basel lawyer Dr. Andreas Noll, addressed the accusation against Assange that WikiLeaks had endangered individuals by publishing thousands of names. He emphasized: “This is wrong! On the contrary, Assange was the only one to take care of the anonymization of tens of thousands of names, while the *Guardian* and other media outlets had already published the material.”

Noll reminded the audience of the time when the

Second World War ended in Europe on May 8, 1945, with tens of millions of dead. The wish “Never again war” had been universal, and on this basis the United Nations had adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the four Geneva Conventions.

“Because of these achievements,” he said, “we felt comfortable for a long time. But behind our backs, the secret services have created a very different reality.” It was Julian Assange who had opened people’s eyes “and showed the world that our governments are responsible for systematic war crimes and torture. We have been living in a dream world.”

Since May 2019, Andreas Noll, together with Stolkin and other Swiss lawyers, have been calling on the Federal Council to grant asylum in Switzerland to Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning.

The Federal Council acknowledged that Assange, “as an information technology expert, investigative journalist and political activist,” had indeed contributed to “uncovering cases of human rights violations” by disseminating confidential information. However, it said it “had no intention” of promoting and protecting human rights through the violations he uncovered.

Consequently, “Julian Assange could not be recognised as a human rights defender nor could he receive the protection provided for in the Swiss guidelines” (quoted from a written reply by the Foreign Ministry).

Noll commented on this disgraceful attitude, pointing out that Assange was apparently no longer subject to any fundamental democratic rights, neither the prohibition of torture nor the right to a fair trial, nor freedom of the press, nor the UN Refugee Convention. “The rule of law is behaving in this case no differently from the medieval clergy,” he declared.



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