

Condemn UK police arrest of French publisher Ernest Moret under anti-terror legislation!

International Editorial Board of the World Socialist Web Site
18 April 2023

The International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site* condemns the arrest of French publisher Ernest Moret under anti-terror laws, justified by his participation in mass protests in France against Macron's pension cuts.

Moret, 28, works as a foreign rights manager for the Éditions La Fabrique publishing house. He arrived in London St Pancras Station by the Eurostar train at 7:15 p.m. Monday evening. There he was stopped under Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000 by plainclothes counterterrorism officers who demanded he disclose the passcodes to his phone and computer, to which he refused.

Questioned for six hours in the Islington police station, north London, Moret was then arrested Tuesday "on suspicion of wilfully obstructing a schedule 7 examination, contrary to section 18 of the Terrorism Act 2000," according to the London Metropolitan police.

Protests were held Tuesday evening outside the French Institute in London and the British Embassy in Paris. Media outlets report that he has now been released on bail.

Schedule 7 gives the police powers to search, without grounds, people at border crossings to investigate involvement in terrorism. Moret's colleague and travelling partner, Stella Magliani-Belkacem, told *The Guardian* the police officers "said they had the right to ask him about demonstrations in France."

Éditions La Fabrique and its British partner Verso Books issued a joint press release Tuesday confirming, "The police officers claimed that Ernest had participated in demonstrations in France as a justification for this act—a quite remarkably

inappropriate statement for a British police officer to make and which seems to clearly indicate complicity between French and British authorities on this matter."

The publishing houses condemned the "outrageous and unjustifiable infringements of basic principles of the freedom of expression and an example of the abuse of anti-terrorism laws.

"We consider that this assault on the freedom of expression of a publisher is yet another manifestation of the slide towards repressive and authoritarian measures taken by the current French government in the face of widespread popular discontent and protest."

The WSWs has well documented political differences with the traditions of the Frankfurt School and postmodernism upon which Verso Books and Éditions La Fabrique base much of their work. However, the WSWs maintains a principled and irreconcilable opposition to this draconian assault on democratic rights.

Moret's arrest is the action of a UK police state, which has grave implications for democratic rights. Millions of people have joined protests against French President Emmanuel Macron's unilateral raising of the retirement age against the popular will and without a vote in parliament. Are they all now suspects under "anti-terror" laws?

The deployment of counterterror police against a publisher is in keeping with the rapid move to ever more authoritarian forms of rule on both sides of the Channel and internationally. French police have used extreme violence against strikes and protests in recent weeks. Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin has repeatedly defended their actions, denouncing the "far left" for wanting "to attack the Republic."

In Britain, this is not the first time anti-terror laws have been used to intimidate an individual for opposing state policies. In 2013 David Miranda, partner of journalist Glenn Greenwald, was detained by police in exactly the same circumstances as Moret following Greenwald's involvement in the Edward Snowden exposure of industrial-scale state surveillance.

Miranda was held for nine hours, denied the right to a lawyer and to remain silent, with his property including journalistic material confiscated and demands made for his passcodes.

"They got me to tell them the passwords for my computer and mobile phone," Miranda told *The Guardian* at the time. "They said I was obliged to answer all their questions ... They were threatening me all the time and saying I would be put in jail if I didn't cooperate."

The High Court ruled later that the police had acted lawfully.

Since 2019, the UK government has held the WikiLeaks publisher and founder Julian Assange in its maximum security prison at Belmarsh, following nearly seven years in which it kept him confined to the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, where he had claimed political asylum. Assange's crime, in this case prosecuted under the US Espionage Act, is to have exposed the atrocities and antidemocratic intrigues of US imperialism and its allies in Iraq, Afghanistan and all over the world.

In recent months, a raft of legislation has been moved through Britain's parliament to eviscerate the most basic democratic rights, including the right to strike, protest and speak freely. The Public Order Bill will outlaw protests causing "serious disruption to two or more individuals, or to an organisation," with serious disruption including "noise." It grants the police vastly expanded stop-and-search powers and the right to issue orders forbidding individuals from attending protests for up to two years and to fit them with electronic tags.

The Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill will force a minimum proportion of workers in six sectors to keep working during industrial action, allowing employers to order individuals to cross picket lines.

The National Security Bill adds more sweeping and draconian provisions to the Official Secrets Act, severely restricting journalistic activity.

The British police arrest of Moret confirms that the

ultimate target of these repressive laws is the opposition in the working class. With protests and strikes raging against government austerity measures, amid a deeply unpopular war waged by NATO in Ukraine against Russia, the ruling class is resorting to ever more naked state repression.

In 2019, a report by the government's Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE) branded swathes of left-wing opinion "extremist" and linked "revolutionary workerist ideas" with sympathy for "violent extremist tactics." Among the examples of views to be criminalised were expressions such as, "We should always support striking workers," "This country needs revolutionary change" and "Protesting against the Government makes the world a better place."

In 2020, a Counter Terrorism Policing Guidance Document was leaked listing organisations, such as the Stop the War Coalition, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), Greenpeace, Extinction Rebellion, PETA, Stop the Badger Cull, the Socialist Workers Party, Stand Up to Racism and the Socialist Party.

In 2021, the UK government announced a "landmark" review into "left-wing extremism."

Above all, Moret's arrest on terrorism charges related to the protests in France speaks to the gnawing fear of the British ruling class that the movement will spread and the strikes of French and British workers, animated by fundamentally the same issues, will be unified. This is just one manifestation of the concern in the ruling class everywhere, facing growing resistance in the working class to its policies of mass impoverishment and war.

But the international class struggle cannot be stopped at the border, no matter how dictatorial the laws imposed. Workers must defend Moret and all those whom capitalist governments target in order to establish precedents for wider repression.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact