

The French “left” attacks WikiLeaks

By Antoine Lerougetel and Alex Lantier
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The worldwide witch-hunt against the jailed founder of WikiLeaks data-journalist site, Julian Assange, an Australian national, has received rabid support in French political circles. Some of the most poisonous statements have come from the bourgeois “left” Socialist Party (PS) and its middle class ex-radical satellites, such as the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) of Olivier Besancenot and *Lutte Ouvrière* (Workers’ Struggle, LO).

WikiLeaks has published diplomatic cables revealing US imperialism’s predatory designs, including documents about the torture and murder of civilians carried out secretly in Iraq and Afghanistan and discussion of going to war with China. It also exposes the extensive collaboration of regimes in Europe and around the world with Washington. Assange has received death threats, and media figures in the US and Canada have suggested that he should be assassinated.

The US and its allies have as yet been unable to find or concoct grounds for criminal charges against Assange for his investigative journalism and his public service in whistle-blowing against secret diplomacy. However, he was arrested in England on December 7 on trumped-up charges, issued by a Swedish judge, of “rape” allegedly committed in Sweden. The Westminster court has ruled that he be kept in custody until December 14 and has refused him release despite offers of bail by several personalities such as filmmaker Ken Loach and well known journalist John Pilger.

As might be expected, the ruling conservative UMP (Union for a Popular Majority) of President Nicolas Sarkozy, allied with US imperialism in its neo-colonial military adventures, has condemned WikiLeaks. The Minister of the Digital Economy, a former leading PS member, Eric Besson, who deserted to Sarkozy during the presidential elections in 2007, is making attempts to stop WikiLeaks’ French server from hosting it.

Besson told the press: “When a site is considered criminal by a friendly democratic country, is it normal that it can be hosted in France? ... It’s not acceptable.” When asked whether he would also act against *Le Monde*, France’s main newspaper of record, for publishing the WikiLeaks cables, he ambiguously replied: “It’s not up to me to decide.”

As Minister of Immigration and National Identity in Sarkozy’s government until the reshuffle last month, Besson led the campaign to ban the burqa and the Islamophobic national identity debate. The WSWS’s warnings that these attacks on the democratic rights of vulnerable minorities were the prelude to a general attack on democratic rights are being fully confirmed.

However, it is from the “left” that some of the most insidious attacks on Assange and WikiLeaks have come. The November 25 editorial in the pro-PS daily *Libération* outrageously equates the “damage” done by WikiLeaks to the devastation wreaked on the populations of Afghanistan and Iraq by American imperialism: “Julian Assange can be reproached, because publishing these messages, often with the names of informers and collaborators, as is the case with Afghanistan, shows the same contempt for collateral damage as a US air force strategist.”

The claim that there is a moral or political equivalence between state officials carrying out war crimes and secret diplomacy, and journalists exposing this behavior, is a repugnant lie. The paper’s reference to “collateral damage” from US air force bombings is utterly cynical, in that *Libération* presents itself as opposed to these crimes, while slandering those who try to expose them. This reflects the politically compromised position of the French “left,” which aligns its foreign policy with Washington while making cynical appeals to anti-Americanism.

Libération also absurdly denies any connection between the trumped-up charges against Assange and Assange’s campaign to expose government crimes: “It is not our job to judge the serious accusations of acts of sexual aggression which are directed at Julian Assange. Nothing in the case makes it possible to link these charges, as the inventor of WikiLeaks does, to the attacks directed at his organisation.”

One of the most virulent outbursts against WikiLeaks came from Hubert Védrine, former minister for foreign affairs in the Plural Left (PS, Communist Party, Greens) government of Lionel Jospin (1997 to 2002). The Plural Left government supported and participated militarily in the invasion of Afghanistan by the US and its allies in 2001. Védrine has also been accused by the “Genocide made in

France” association of responsibility for France’s complicity in the preparation and carrying out of the 1994 genocide of Tutsis in Rwanda, during the presidency of the PS’s François Mitterrand.

Védrine told France Inter radio that WikiLeaks “is the very proof that transparency, that sort of false golden calf, brings nothing. Contrary to President Wilson [US president during the First World War], who opposed secret diplomacy, I tend to think that in diplomacy which is entirely public there is always a risk of fanaticism.” Védrine denounced the “myth of absolute transparency” as “masked totalitarianism.”

Védrine’s attempt to smear WikiLeaks supporters as defenders of fanatical or totalitarian beliefs, simply because they want major political and economic decisions affecting the lives of billions of people—including planning large-scale war—to be made public, is cynical and absurd. That a major public official could insist that such decisions be made unbeknownst to the public testifies to the profound decay of French democracy, and the criminal record of its leading officials. Indeed, it is quite likely that Védrine is currently worrying about how many of WikiLeaks’ cables mention him, and what they reveal about his actions.

Most despicable of the reactions to the persecution of Julian Assange have been statements from the fake-left ex-radicals. They have made no attempt to use WikiLeaks’ invaluable revelations to publicly expose the brutality of US, French, or world imperialism. Instead, they have echoed the line of the bourgeois media, downplaying the significance of WikiLeaks’ documents.

Lutte Ouvrière, which still at times claims to be Trotskyist but is often in electoral alliances with the Socialist Party, only devoted some ten lines to the subject. They expressed some amusement at the embarrassment of diplomats whose “little secrets” have been revealed. They note that WikiLeaks has revealed that in 2006 Sarkozy had proposed the sending of French troops to Iraq, and point out that they actually are in Afghanistan “and over there they kill and oppress civilians.”

However, LO does not report Assange’s arrest and makes no appeal for his release or his defense.

The site of the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) has posted only two short references to WikiLeaks. Its article dated December 10, three days after Assange had been jailed, makes no mention of this and no call for his defence. It simply notes that WikiLeaks’ activities “have provoked violent polemics and intimidation at the highest level, causing big technical and financial problems for Julian Assange and his collaborators.”

The one other article on the issue, dated December 2, seeks to minimise the significance of WikiLeaks’ work:

“For the moment little of the information published by WikiLeaks is basically a surprise.” The article goes on to question the motivations of Assange: “the personalities, the functioning and above all the motivations of the founders of WikiLeaks are obscure, and the love of truth alone based on hacking or stealing cannot suffice to make a progressive political programme.”

This position is false and reactionary. WikiLeaks has not “stolen” the documents that were leaked to it, it merely published them as a public service. As for Assange’s motivations, he has succeeded in giving the public a detailed look at the corrupt plans and war crimes of capitalist governments around the world. Parties like the NPA or LO, who despite their deceitful pseudo-left rhetoric do not seek to mobilize the working class in struggle against these governments, react with a combination of indifference and slander.

This reflects not only their generally right-wing outlook, but the implications of their political orientation to the Socialist Party. As parties who could become coalition partners in a PS government after the 2012 elections, they have no interest in making diplomacy a public affair. Indeed, they have every interest in preventing future cables written about a PS-led government’s crimes from becoming public.

The fact that the French “left” has lined up in the anti-Assange camp demonstrates how far they are to the right of French society. A poll carried out on December 9 and 10 revealed that 54 percent of the French people support WikiLeaks. The 18 – 24 age bracket records 73 percent support, and the rate for under-35s is 67 percent. 66 percent of workers defend WikiLeaks. The NPA and LO are significantly at odds with their own electoral base, 78 percent of which declared itself in favour of WikiLeaks.

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