

Montreal: Demonstration outside US consulate demands freedom for Julian Assange

By our reporters
27 February 2020

Supporters of Julian Assange held a spirited demonstration Monday outside the US consulate in Montreal to demand freedom for the award-winning journalist and publisher, and the release of whistleblower Chelsea Manning. The event, which was the first of its kind anywhere in Canada, drew approximately 20 people. It was co-organized, on short notice, by independent journalist Elizabeth Leier and the Socialist Equality Party (Canada).

Participants carried placards in both French and English with slogans including “Free Julian Assange!,” “Defend free speech,” and “No to imperialist war.”

The building housing the US consulate is located on a busy downtown street. Many passers-by took leaflets from SEP members and supporters detailing the legal and political issues in the Assange case and the mounting global movement demanding his freedom.

Opening the rally, Leier declared that she called the protest to “show solidarity with WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.” She continued, “We are gathered here in front of the United States Consulate to expose and denounce the unjust persecution he now faces.”

Leier summarized Assange’s courageous work in exposing the war crimes of US imperialism in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the torture practiced at Guantanamo Bay. WikiLeaks’ releases were of “undeniable collective importance,” she stressed.

“Julian Assange is today being blamed for having revealed the crimes of empire. He is being prosecuted for having the journalistic integrity and courage to reveal the truth of US criminality around the world,” declared Leier. “It is the war criminals, those who allowed the cold-blooded murder of two Reuters journalists as seen in the famous Collateral Murder

video, in addition to thousands of civilians, they are the ones who deserve to be in prison—not the man who had the courage to expose these crimes.”

If Assange is prosecuted, commented Leier, it will have grave implications for freedom of speech and press freedom around the world.

She also criticized Assange’s vicious persecution, denouncing the “decade of arbitrary detention” he has been exposed to. During his seven years locked up in the Ecuadorian embassy, he had no access to sunlight or proper medical care, added the speaker.

In conclusion, Leier emphasized that the rally was an important first step in building support for Assange’s freedom. “We may be a small gathering today, however we are part of a large and growing movement which demands loud and clear that the persecution of Julian Assange cease immediately and that he be granted his rights and his freedom,” she said.

Richard Dufour, a leading member of the SEP (Canada), also addressed the protesters. He began by pointing to the fact that the picket of Washington’s Montreal consulate was part of a global movement for the freedom of Assange and Manning.

Dufour denounced Assange’s show trial in London as a “legal travesty” aimed at “gutting basic democratic rights,” including freedom of speech and freedom of the press.

“Currently held in solitary confinement in a high security prison in Britain, Assange is facing extradition to the United States and a show trial on charges of espionage, with the prospect of a life sentence of 175 years,” he said. “Assange has already undergone what United Nations official Nils Melzer said was psychological torture at the hands of the governments

pursuing him. He now faces the prospect of being treated as a terrorist in the darkest reaches of a US prison for the rest of his life.”

Dufour explained that Assange is being persecuted because he helped “inform the public about the war crimes and diplomatic intrigues of their governments,” above all those committed by US imperialism in its wars of aggression.

He also denounced the “complicity” of Canada’s ruling elite in the journalist’s persecution. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and all of the parties who claim to be “progressive,” from the New Democrats to the Greens, Bloc Quebecois, and Quebec Solidaire, have “maintained a complicit silence about the prosecution and persecution of Assange.”

“The reason for this deafening silence is not hard to find,” continued Dufour. “The Canadian ruling elite, which is more reliant than ever on its military-strategic partnership with US imperialism to advance its own predatory interests on the global stage, fears the impact of WikiLeaks’ exposures.”

The SEP speaker stressed that the only social force capable of freeing Assange and Manning, defending democratic rights, and stopping the drive to authoritarianism around the world is the international working class. He summarized the growing upsurge of workers’ strikes and protests across the globe, from last fall’s national strike by US autoworkers, the first in four decades, to the Yellow Vest movement in France and last Friday’s one-day strike of 200,000 teachers in Ontario against the Ford government’s sweeping public education cuts.

“It is the urgent task of socialists to endow this movement with a revolutionary socialist perspective to transform the world on an egalitarian basis, free of war and dictatorship,” concluded Dufour. “We call on you to join the global struggle to secure the freedom of Assange and Manning, and become a regular reader of the *World Socialist Web Site*.”

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