

Activist Review of the Support Don't Punish Campaign

by Mantes La Galette

As part of the international **Support. Don't Punish** campaign, the crack users' association **Mantes La Galette** mobilized in **Mantes-la-Jolie**, in partnership with **Sida Paroles**, to make a clear statement: people who use drugs do not need more repression, control, or stigma, but rights, support, recognition, and freedom. This campaign was an opportunity to bring forward a political voice built from the lived experience of those directly concerned, who are too often excluded from the spaces where policies affecting them are decided.

Initially, we had planned to organize a **barbecue at the SP78 CAARUD**, together with a photo session around the campaign. Due to the **heatwave**, this convivial moment had to be cancelled. This cancellation limited our ability to create an open and accessible collective space, even though such informal spaces are essential for rebuilding social bonds, breaking isolation, and encouraging the participation of drug users. However, **photos were still taken in Mantes-la-Jolie**, allowing us to keep a visual record of the mobilization and to make the commitment of the people involved visible.

Despite this constraint, the campaign took shape through **t-shirt creation workshops**, using a reworked version of the **Support. Don't Punish** logo, produced through **flocking and screen printing**. These workshops were not merely creative moments: they were spaces of political appropriation. Making and wearing these t-shirts meant publicly affirming that drug users are not objects of care,



policing, or charity, but political subjects capable of organizing, creating, demanding rights, and taking their place in public debate.

A key moment of the campaign was our participation, on **June 18**, in a debate at the **French National Assembly**, at the invitation of **La France Insoumise** and **the Greens**. There, we reaffirmed the need for a profound paradigm shift in drug policy. For us, harm reduction must not be reduced to a gateway to care, nor understood only

as a step towards abstinence. It must also be understood as a struggle for **individual freedom**, respect for life choices, autonomy, and resistance to all forms of control imposed on people who use drugs.

We also offered to contribute to deeper reflections on what underpins current repressive policies. Behind the “war on drugs,” there is often a war on the poor, on racialized people, on precarious people, and on those who are visible in public spaces. In this context, we campaigned against the **RIPOST bill**, which we see as another step in the escalation of punitive and security-based policies. This bill carries a deeply **liberticide** logic: it strengthens control, surveillance, and punishment, while further reducing the freedoms of people already most exposed to poverty, policing, and exclusion. By targeting drug use with even more repression, RIPOST does not protect people; it pushes them away from health services, increases their vulnerability, and turns a social and public health issue into a public order problem. We therefore expressed our opposition to this bill in the name of individual freedoms, community health, and the right of people not to be criminalized for their practices, lifestyles, or presence in public space.

Mantes La Galette also took part in organizing a **demonstration in Paris**, alongside medico-social institutions, community-based associations, and activist organizations such as **Act Up** and the **sex workers’ union**. This mobilization, accompanied by a concert, alternated between speeches from medical supporters, committed professionals, and directly concerned people. Above all, it helped rebuild connections with other community and activist organizations, strengthen alliances, and remind everyone that our struggles intersect: the fight against repression, against stigma, for community health, for rights, for public freedoms, and for dignity.

Contrary to what we had hoped, and despite our efforts, we were not able to meet with **local political actors in Mantes-la-Jolie**. This lack of dialogue shows how difficult it remains for the voices of drug users to be recognized locally as legitimate political voices. This is an important limitation, but also a reason to continue our work of advocacy and political interpellation. Refusing to engage in dialogue with those directly concerned means maintaining policies decided without them — and often against them.



The overall assessment of this campaign is therefore both combative and positive. Despite the obstacles, it allowed us to create, to be visible, to speak out, to build alliances, and to assert that nothing should be done about drug users without drug users. **Support. Don't Punish** is not just a slogan: it is a political demand. It is the refusal of a society that responds to poverty with policing, to drug use with punishment, and to vulnerability with the deprivation of freedom.

