

Anti-surveillance demonstrators speak to WSWS

Our reporters
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On July 27, thousands of people demonstrated in New Zealand cities against new laws that will extend the powers of the country's external security agency, the Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB). The legislation is designed to legalise the GCSB's spying on citizens and residents—a practice previously carried out illegally.

In the capital, Wellington, about 1,500 marched from Cuba Street to rally in the Parliament grounds. Protests were also held in Auckland, Christchurch, Dunedin, Gisborne, Hamilton, Invercargill, Napier, Nelson, Palmerston North, and Tauranga.

A WSWS reporting team interviewed workers and young people who attended the Wellington protest.

Jack, an officer worker, said: "It's really good that we have these protests, but we've seen from [Prime Minister] John Key in the past that people can rise up and can voice massive protest to things like the asset sales, and he can just ignore them. I think we're getting very close to an authoritarian state, and it's really concerning. John Key is a former Merrill Lynch executive. He's a big banker, what more do you need to know? He left his integrity a long way down the road."

William said: "We've seen in countries like the US just how bad these things can get. So I think we should definitely take an interest in New Zealand. I think the state does want more powers in terms of being able to push the agendas they care about." He stressed that state surveillance "impacts on all people in society."

Renee said "privacy is a human right." She remarked on the importance of a free press: "If critical journalists—or anyone who has a view that is critical of government—feel their privacy is threatened then that's a direct threat on all of us."

Sue said the legislation was "infringing on our

democracy and I don't think that we need a bar of it." Referring to police raids on activists carried out under the previous Labour government in 2007 (see "New Zealand: 17 arrests in nationwide 'anti-terrorist' raids"), she explained: "We have friends who were caught up in the Urewera business and I know for a fact that while they were living with us our phones were tapped by somebody—police presumably but GCSB potentially—and I think that's unnecessary and wrong".

Sue described the campaigns to silence whistleblowers Edward Snowden and Julian Assange as "an infringement of human rights." She added: "People are entitled to an opinion and if it differs from the prevailing government opinion of the day, so be it. When things are wrong, you have to be able to stand up and speak out against it."

Lindy spoke on the importance of Snowden's revelations. "I think he's a real hero. He's put his life on the line, basically to tell everybody else how much of the information that we think is private is actually publicly available. I think it's very threatening to governments generally when people stand up against the prevailing ethos, put their own self-interest aside and put the collective interest ahead of that."

The authors also recommend:

New Zealand: Thousands protest domestic spying laws

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