Protesters demand release of Julian Assange at US vigils

Our reporters
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Protests were held at a number of cities across the United States yesterday as part of international demonstrations demanding the release of WikiLeaks journalist Julian Assange. June 19 marked six years since Assange was forced to seek refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he has remained imprisoned in order to avoid arrest and extradition to the United States.

Protests and vigils for Assange took place in Melbourne, Australia, in London, United Kingdom and in Sri Lanka and India. The protests in the US were largely organized by small local groups and individuals. They received no coverage within the media, and were boycotted by the entire political establishment, including pseudo-left organizations such as the International Socialist Organization, *Jacobin* magazine, the Democratic Socialists of America and Socialist Alternative, which have maintained a silent complicity in the face of the escalating campaign against Assange.

Protests occurred in New York, Los Angeles, San Diego, Washington D.C., and elsewhere. In New York a small demonstration was called in front of the British consulate in mid-town Manhattan. The demonstration, which was called by an unaffiliated activist, drew a crowd of roughly 30 protesters many of whom brought homemade signs and chanted "Free Assange!" outside of the consulate.

Christian, who is an actor and screenwriter, said, "Julian Assange has sacrificed so much for us, I feel the least we can do is to assemble here and raise awareness of his grave circumstances and the grave circumstances for freedom of speech and the freedom of the press. If these freedoms do not apply to any one of us, it does not apply to any of us."

"I wish more people in the arts would speak out for him," he added. "If we allow his sufferings and basic human rights to be infringed on, then it will only escalate from there. This is totalitarianism. The system as a whole needs to change."

Anthony, an adjunct at a community college, explained that he came to the protests because "I feel like Julian Assange is the only connection between the public and the facts without back stories. This is what our elite are trying to hide—that they break the laws and work not in the public interest. Without the public's ability to monitor our government, there is no hope of democracy. Anyone who is in opposition to WikiLeaks or Assange is ignorant or complicit in the suppression of the truth."

Anthony noted that "liberal Democrats in this country got so shocked when Hillary Clinton lost to Trump that many of them resent Assange. They don't want to address the reality of the Democratic Party and the corruption that exists in there."

Adam Ozcelik, a student at LaGuardia Community College who was passing by the protest, said that he had donated to Assange with BitCoin and noted that Visa and Paypal had blocked payments to WikiLeaks. "I respected what he does, "he said.

Referring to the trumped-up sexual misconduct allegations used by Swedish authorities against Assange, Adam said, "I don't believe the accusations against him. He has done a lot of whistleblowing and that has made him a target."

"Journalism has gone down the toilet," he continued. "Assange has become a headache to a lot of people and that is what we need. I don't know what is being monitored. I don't know what is real or what on Google or Facebook is being censored. That is why I want to get my news from WikiLeaks."

Many of the demonstrators came to the Socialist

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Equality Party table and expressed their appreciation of the campaign by the *World Socialist Web Site* in defense of Assange, and took WSWS articles to distribute to passersby.

At the vigil held in San Diego, California, Eve Lee, a restaurant worker, told WSWS reporters, “In 2012 I had heard the establishment arguments that he was threatening national security when really he was exposing corruption. Only once he was imprisoned in the [Ecuadorian] embassy did I realize his importance. He's a leader in defending free speech and human rights. We're kept in the dark. If you don't know independent news sources, you repeat the mainstream sound bites that keep us divided and ignorant.”

In Washington, D.C., a protest of approximately 20 people was held outside of the White House. Ross told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “I completely support Assange and think we need more people like that all across the globe exposing the truth and bringing that information to the people. The more access to information we have, the better off we will be. Incriminating whistleblowers will not strengthen democracy or improve our values.”

Manish said he came because "I wanted to share some support for Julian Assange and support for WikiLeaks. I think he has been unfairly imprisoned through false allegations. The man is a hero."

The protest was addressed by Socialist Equality Party member Alex Gonzalez. In the course of her remarks, Gonzalez declared, “For the working class, free and open access to the Internet is a life-and-death issue. The defense of Julian Assange is the defense of all the democratic rights that the ruling class wants to attack, censor, and dismantle.”

Cynthia, a real estate investor, organized the LA rally in front of the UK and Australian consulates. She told the WSWS, “I first heard about your website on Twitter because of your rallies in Sydney and Melbourne.

“I just hate what is going on in my country. And I wish that Australia would stand up to America and the UK and bring Julian home.

“The UN has stated that Assange is being illegally detained by the UK and US. Our government is not abiding by international law. It’s just ignoring the UN.”

Currie, a limousine driver, has been reading the WSWS for many years. He said,

“The media is using everything under the sun to smear Assange because he had the courage to tell the truth about the crimes of this government. When whistleblowers like Chelsea Manning and Snowden came out with their information, they knew if you submit it to WikiLeaks, it would get published.

“All of so-called leftists are freaking out and not supporting him. I think this is really separating the real left from the fake left.”

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