

# Protest in New Zealand six months after Assange's arrest

Our reporters  
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The Socialist Equality Group (New Zealand) joined a protest called by Free Assange NZ in Wellington last Friday to demand freedom for Julian Assange. It marked six months since the WikiLeaks founder was arrested at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London and imprisoned in the maximum security Belmarsh Prison on a bogus charge of jumping bail.

Protesters gathered in Cuba Street and later protested outside the UK High Commission. The rally was one of dozens held throughout the world, including in Australia and the UK.

The British government is seeking to extradite Assange to the US to face a show trial for the “crime” of publishing evidence of war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan, and of US spying and political corruption. Assange faces life in prison and potentially the death penalty. Chelsea Manning, who leaked the war logs in 2010, along with the horrific “Collateral Murder” video, has been re-imprisoned in the US in an attempt to force her to give false testimony against Assange.

Tom Peters, from the SEG, addressed the rally, saying: “The persecutors of Assange and Manning should face trial for war crimes.” He noted that in a recent tweet President Donald Trump admitted that the US had killed millions of people in the Middle East because of “disproven” claims about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

“This means George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Trump himself should be in prison for these illegal wars based on lies,” Peters declared, “along with their cabinets and advisers, and successive British, Australian and New Zealand governments who supported these wars for oil.”

Instead, those who expose such crimes are imprisoned and subjected to conditions that amount to torture. Assange's father John Shipton, who recently

visited him in prison, said he feared for his son's life.

Peters explained that the treatment of Assange and Manning was part of a broader attack on journalists, whistleblowers and anti-war and socialist groups who are being censored and demonised by governments internationally. The aim is to prepare for new wars, including against Iran, China and Russia, by intimidating and suppressing opposition.

Peters denounced Jacinda Ardern's Labour Party-NZ First-Greens coalition government, which has remained silent on the persecution of Assange and has embraced the US war machine. “Last month Jacinda Ardern gave a disgusting performance at the UN, gushing about her friendly relationship with Trump, whose fascist policies inspired the Christchurch massacre. Meanwhile Foreign Minister Winston Peters has encouraged the US to send more of its military into the Pacific to gear up for war against China.”

The speaker appealed to the working class in New Zealand and internationally to demand the release of Assange and Manning. Pointing to recent mass strikes and protests against inequality and for democratic rights, from Puerto Rico to France, Algeria and Ecuador, Peters said: “This movement needs the truth, it needs free access to information, to build a conscious and unified fight against capitalism and for world socialism.”

Members and supporters of the Socialist Equality Group distributed the WSWS perspective, “Julian Assange's life is in danger!” and spoke with several people attending the protest and passing by. The warm responses point to growing support for Assange internationally.

**Rita**, who had immigrated from Germany, said Assange “is a hero of our time and people should recognise that and research more about him. This is one

of the most important cases of the last 20 or 50 years because freedom of information depends on this case. If he gets convicted and put away then nobody else will dare to say anything true anymore and we will be in total ignorance, which is extremely dangerous.”

She denounced the “totally inhumane treatment” of Assange. “He gets treated worse than a mass murderer just for revealing facts. Nobody has ever denied that the facts are true, that’s the interesting thing. We have to push the British government not to extradite him and to let him go. I’m surprised about Britain, I’ve lived there for many years and I thought it was a humane country, but unfortunately I can’t say that any more.

“My parents lived through the pre-Nazi years and the Nazi years and from their stories, I’ve heard all this before,” she said. “First we had the Reichstag burning, which is similar to 9/11, and then the floodgates opened, with all the opposition put away in concentration camps, and information was totally clamped down so people didn’t know what was going on.” She had followed “with great concern” the rise of the extreme-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), which is the official opposition party in Germany’s parliament.

**Michael**, an office worker, said he attended the protest “because I believe journalists are being silenced in every country, including our one. In New Zealand there’s algorithm bias. People aren’t getting the stories that actually matter to them because they’re being de-ranked in the algorithms by the media companies, by Google and Facebook.”

Michael said, “The US military complex has a lot to answer for in terms of how it’s treated people in the last century or so. We’ve discovered a lot about the practices of the US military from WikiLeaks.”

Peter, a doctor, said that Assange had been the victim of “a strategy to get him behind bars and dissuade other people from speaking the truth. It’s very hard for the individual to stand up against a government, especially the US government. That’s why it’s important that people like you are keeping up his side of the story.”

He added: “A lot of information is held in secret on the basis that it’s sensitive, when in reality it is to protect the powers that be. The publicly expressed reasons for a country going to war are not necessarily going to line up with the true motives, and I think that’s clearly the case with the war in Iraq and US

involvement in the Middle East generally.”



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