

SEG (New Zealand) rally in Wellington demands freedom for Assange and Manning

Our reporters**26 February 2020**

About 30 people attended a protest rally in Wellington on Sunday organised by the Socialist Equality Group (New Zealand) (SEG) to demand the release of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and whistleblower Chelsea Manning, who have been persecuted for the past decade for revealing US war crimes and other corrupt and illegal actions.

The Socialist Equality Parties in Australia and Britain have also held rallies and public meetings as part of the growing international movement to stop the illegal extradition of Assange from the UK, where he is currently in prison, to the US, where he would be subjected to a show trial and jailed for life in conditions that amount to torture.

On Monday, further rallies were organised by Free Assange NZ outside parliament in Wellington and the UK consulate in Auckland. In an extraordinary anti-democratic action, security guards told SEG and Free Assange NZ members they were not allowed to distribute leaflets on parliament's grounds, by order of the Speaker of the House Trevor Mallard, a prominent Labour Party MP.

Opening the SEG rally on Sunday, WSWS writer John Braddock explained that Manning was initially imprisoned under the Obama administration for supplying WikiLeaks with "the infamous Collateral Murder video showing the indiscriminate murder of civilians in Iraq, and thousands of documents showing evidence of war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan... [and] numerous diplomatic intrigues by American embassies to prop up or install pro-US regimes."

Manning was re-imprisoned last year in an attempt to force her to give false testimony against Assange. She has courageously refused to do so.

Braddock warned that "the persecution of Assange and Manning is setting the benchmark internationally

for the suppression of opposition to war and state secrecy." He pointed to the recent "totally anti-democratic court ruling, dismissing a legal challenge by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation over a police raid on its Sydney headquarters last June. Police sought to incriminate two reporters for publishing leaks that exposed war crimes committed by Australian forces in Afghanistan."

The SEG's Tom Peters denounced the Labour Party-Greens-NZ First coalition government for its complicit silence in the persecution of Assange and Manning. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, who is glorified in the world's media for her supposed kindness, has boasted about her good relationship with the fascistic US President Donald Trump and strengthened New Zealand's military alliance with Washington.

Peters explained that the relentless attacks on WikiLeaks and global moves toward censorship are connected with US acts of war, including against Iran and Syria, and the growing danger of war against nuclear-armed Russia and China. "Governments are intimidating, censoring and imprisoning those who reveal their crimes, because they are planning even greater crimes," he said.

The speaker noted the growing support for Assange in the UK, Australia and internationally. He warned that no confidence should be placed in the corrupt legal system or in politicians like UK Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, who is promoting illusions that Boris Johnson's right-wing government will stop Assange's extradition.

"Corbyn wants everyone to calm down and have a little faith in the government, when the entire government and most of the opposition deserve to be locked up for war crimes," Peters declared, prompting shouts of agreement from the audience.

The SEG leader called for a “turn toward the working class, especially young people who increasingly support socialism” and who are striking and protesting “for better living standards, against the destruction of the environment, against dictatorship and war.”

Peters said: “The fight to defend WikiLeaks is vital because working people must be armed with the truth about what governments and capitalists are doing, including the wars blacked out by the media.”

Alex Hills from Free Assange NZ also addressed the rally. She reported that the global movement Candles4Assange, which she helped to start, would hold 34 protests on February 24 and about 120 events over the week in opposition to Assange’s extradition.

Hills denounced the media for failing to report on the movement to defend Assange and ignoring the content of WikiLeaks’ revelations. She noted that leaks from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) last year demonstrated that a chemical weapons attack in Douma, Syria, was staged “and Trump bombed Syria the next week.”

The OPCW revelations—comparable to the exposure of lies about “weapons of mass destruction” used to justify the invasion of Iraq—were reported by independent journalists but “we’re not hearing anything, not even the slightest mutter” from the corporate media,” she said

The speeches met with a warm response. Several people thanked the organisers and spoke to WSWS reporters after the protest.

Mohamed, who recently moved to NZ from Lebanon, said “people should be more aware” about Assange’s plight. “There isn’t enough coverage, especially in the mainstream news, which is to be expected.” The media, he said, is “owned by rich people who have ties to the government or ties to weapons manufacturing companies, which are also exposed by WikiLeaks.”

Mohamed pointed out that WikiLeaks had not only exposed “countries like the US and United Kingdom, it’s also other countries in the Middle East that were exposed, that will benefit from having [Assange] dead or silenced.” He described Assange as “a symbol” for journalists being persecuted, including in “countries with dictatorships supported by Western governments.”

Wendy, originally from Western Australia, said it was striking “how little you hear over there about

Assange. The way the government has, many times, let him down and thrown him to the wolves is an absolute sin. Because if you’re the citizen of a country and you haven’t committed war crimes or something atrocious then you’re going to expect to be supported, and that’s just not happened with him.”

Ali Scott, an artist and potter, said: “We have to maintain our freedom to find out the truth at any cost. We’ve already lost so much. Our newspapers won’t publish anything, that’s why most people in New Zealand don’t know what’s going on in these wars.

“It’s good to see [the campaign for Assange]. It needs to be much, much more. They’re torturing him psychologically, they’ve kept him in solitary confinement for months and months, and the outlook if he goes to America is horrifying.”

Speaking about the New Zealand government’s stance, Scott said: “I feel that Jacinda Ardern is going along with Trump, because they know the repercussions if they don’t.” She added that US governments “bully everyone. They’re like a global mafia. If people don’t hand over what they want, they just bomb them.”



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