

New Zealand: Auckland protest against Trump's anti-Muslim travel bans

Our correspondents
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Approximately 1,000 people gathered in central Auckland on Tuesday to protest against the anti-immigrant bans imposed by US President Donald Trump on seven majority-Muslim countries—Syria, Yemen, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia and Sudan. Those in attendance included many young people, immigrants and former refugees.

In the US and internationally millions of people have protested against Trump's attacks on democratic rights and his demonisation of Muslims and other migrants.

There is considerable anger in New Zealand over the government's refusal to condemn the ban. Prime Minister Bill English spoke with Trump on Monday and described the president as "warm, civil and very thoughtful."

Speakers at the rally in Aotea Square included former refugees, academics, representatives of Islamic community groups, the pacifist organisation Auckland Peace Action, the Green Party, and the pseudo-left Socialist Aotearoa. The organisers sought to channel the growing opposition to extreme-right policies behind New Zealand's political establishment and in particular the Greens.

Speakers appealed to those in attendance, and to the New Zealand government, for solidarity with those affected by Trump's travel ban. Several blamed Trump's election on racism and "white supremacy" in the US, without explaining how the same country could have elected a black president in 2008 and re-elected him 2012.

David Mayeda, a sociologist from the University of Auckland, declared that Trump ran "a campaign on the perception that dangerous outsiders were a threat to Americans' occupational fate, even though the country had a declining 4.9 percent unemployment rate."

In reality, the vast majority of the jobs created under

Obama were temporary or part-time and low-wage. Median household incomes plummeted as wages were slashed in the restructuring of auto and other industries (see: "Race, class and the election of Trump"). Meanwhile, during Obama's eight years in office the wealth of the richest 400 Americans grew from \$1.57 trillion to \$2.4 trillion as he expanded the bank bailouts begun under Bush. There is widespread hostility towards the Democrats and the Republicans, which have overseen a massive increase in social inequality since the 1980s.

The main political speaker was Green Party candidate Golriz Ghahraman, who described how her family had claimed asylum in New Zealand to escape the Iranian dictatorship and the Iran-Iraq war. She said she was dedicated to "fighting for the most vulnerable" and denounced the rise of "dangerous populism" in the US and elsewhere.

The Greens, however, are campaigning alongside the main opposition Labour Party in the hopes of forming part of a coalition government after the election in September. Labour has promised to work with Trump. The Greens supported the 1999–2008 Labour government, which sent troops to Iraq and Afghanistan. Both parties support the government's increased military spending, designed to integrate New Zealand into US war preparations against China.

Green co-leaders James Shaw and Metiria Turei have also said they would be happy to work in a coalition that included New Zealand First, a right-wing populist party that openly supports Trump's attacks on Muslims and has scapegoated Chinese immigrants for New Zealand's social crisis. While calling for a handful more refugees to be allowed into New Zealand, the Greens and Labour support NZ First's demand to cut immigrant numbers (see: "Labour, Greens sign

Memorandum of Understanding”).

A speaker from the pacifist group Auckland Peace Action, which works with the Greens and pseudo-lefts, said Trump was scapegoating Muslims “for the woes of capitalism, a failing economic system that protects the rich at the expense of the many.” She said Trump would continue “the imperialist ambitions of the US,” pointing to the attack he ordered in Yemen which killed dozens of people, including an eight-year-old girl. The speaker did not mention the Obama administration, which expanded the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and intervened in Libya, Syria and Yemen, turning millions into refugees.

Ali Akil, from the group Syrian Solidarity, gave a pro-imperialist speech attacking Obama for failing to arm “the Syrian people” with anti-aircraft missiles to shoot down aircraft from the Assad regime, Iran and Russia. He absurdly claimed that the influx of refugees from Syria was caused by the US preventing weapons from reaching the so-called “rebels,” in which Al Qaeda-linked groups play a leading role.

In fact, the US and its allies, including Saudi Arabia, have provided billions of dollars in weapons, fuelling a bloody six-year war aimed at overthrowing the Assad regime. Syrian Solidarity, supported by Socialist Aotearoa and other pseudo-left groups, has called for the US military to create a “no-fly zone” in support of the anti-Assad forces.

Members of the Socialist Equality Group spoke with people at the protest and distributed the *World Socialist Web Site* perspective, “The Trump-Bannon government: Rule by decree.”

Neal, a bar manager from Ireland who lives in New Zealand, said he usually did not attend protests “but this is a worthwhile cause. What’s happening in America worries me. I’m not a religious person but I want to retain the right for everyone to be able to practice the religion they believe in. It worries me that the United States was based on the idea of inclusion and it’s now come to a point where people are now deciding it’s freedom only for a few.”

He agreed that Americans had been disillusioned with Obama and that “the two-party system just doesn’t allow for enough diversity in government.” Neal said he wanted higher taxes on the rich to address inequality and more spending on health and education.

Eimear, a psychologist, told the WSWS: “Trump’s

made so many horrible decisions affecting people living in America and the whole world. I think it’s important for people here to stand in solidarity with those who are most affected and to push our own government to make sure they are doing everything in their power to mitigate any effects.” She criticised the New Zealand government’s response to Trump, saying, “I feel like they want to keep face instead of coming out as aggressively as they should.”

Ives, a social worker who came to New Zealand in 2005 as a refugee from Burundi, said he was “shocked” by the US election result and Trump’s executive order. “Today it’s the Muslims, tomorrow it will be others,” he said. “We can’t turn a blind eye to discrimination against religion or anything. I have friends in America who are Muslims and this plays into the hands of people who are already against Muslims. It’s dangerous.

“I don’t think this protects America or the world. It’s just for political gain. There hasn’t been anyone in the seven countries targeted who has attacked America.” He noted that Trump had not included Saudi Arabia in the ban, even though the majority of the September 11 hijackers were from that country.

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