Protests in New Zealand oppose Israel's attack on Gaza

Tom Peters
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About 200 people rallied outside New Zealand's parliament in Wellington on Wednesday to demand that the Labour Party-Greens government oppose Israel's war crimes against the population of Gaza, and its attacks on Palestinians across the occupied territories.

One week of airstrikes and missile bombardments has killed more than 200 Palestinians, including more than 60 children, and injured over 1,500. Israel's military has bombarded civilian areas, including a building housing media organisations, and Gaza's only COVID-19 testing centre. Tens of thousands of people have been forced to flee their homes to escape the bombing in the crowded enclave.

Far-right thugs and soldiers have also unleashed violence against Palestinians protesting settlements in occupied areas of Jerusalem and the West Bank, with 21 people killed by Israeli forces in the last week. On Tuesday, Palestinians and Arab Israelis held a general strike across Israel, the West Bank and Gaza in protest against the Netanyahu government's brutal attacks.

The protest at New Zealand's parliament followed nationwide rallies on May 15, involving thousands of people in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and other towns. The events attracted many students and young people, as well as workers, and people from the Palestinian and other immigrant communities. They were part of global demonstrations in solidarity with the Palestinian people, including across Europe, Turkey and Australia .

Several politicians from the ruling NZ Labour Party, its coalition partner the Green Party, and the Maori Party attended yesterday's rally. Following the event, the Labour Party, backed by the opposition National Party and ACT Party, refused to debate a motion, put to parliament by the Greens, to support "the right of Palestine to self-determination and statehood."

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern told TVNZ on May 17 that her government was calling for a "cease-fire," but absurdly blamed the slaughter on "both sides," declaring: "We condemn both the indiscriminate rocket fire we have seen from Hamas and what looks to be a response that has gone well beyond self-defence on both sides." Primitive rockets fired by Hamas, the nationalist organisation that rules Gaza, have killed 10 people in Israel.

Green MP Golriz Ghahraman addressed the Wellington rally, denouncing "ethnic cleansing" by Israel in Sheikh Jarrah, and the bombardment of civilians in Gaza. She said the Greens' parliamentary motion was about securing "a lasting, sustainable peace for Palestinians and for Israelis."

In fact, the "two-state solution" is a bankrupt perspective. It would ensure that Gaza and the West Bank remain impoverished ghettos oppressed by the Zionist state. The vital task is to fight for the unification of the working class in Palestine and Israel, and throughout the Middle East, to overcome national and racial divides, through the fight for international socialism. This is the only way to put an end to all wars, including the increasing Israeli and US threats of war against Iran.

The hypocrisy of the statements of the Labour-Greens government, calling for peace, is underscored by New Zealand's alliance with Washington, the chief imperialist sponsor of the Israeli regime, and the major source of war and global instability. The Ardern government supports the US militarisation of the Indo-Pacific region and is integrating New Zealand into US and Australian preparations for war against China. The Greens recently joined the far-right ACT Party in urging New Zealand's parliament to declare that China is carrying out "genocide" in Xinjiang, a fraudulent

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claim pushed by the Trump and Biden administrations in the US, aimed at preparing public opinion for war.

Members of the Socialist Equality Group (NZ) spoke with several people attending the protest and distributed the *World Socialist Web Site* statement, " Stop Israel's war on Gaza, ethnic cleansing in Jerusalem."

Anna, who works in the NZ Correspondence School, told the *World Socialist Web Site*: "I'm here today because of the increase in aggression from Israel toward Gaza and Palestine. More generally, to recognise that this is a struggle that's been going on a long time for the Palestinian people." She said the response of the New Zealand government and others around the world was "definitely not strong enough, in terms of requiring Israel to cease fire, as a first thing that they could do. There isn't enough condemnation or engagement from governments."

The war was a "continuing project of colonisation that's been going on for years," Anna continued. Responding to claims by US President Joseph Biden that Israel had a "right to defend itself," Anna said, "that kind of rhetoric belies the asymmetrical nature of the warfare that's going on. Israel has a very advanced, indoctrinated military that has the firepower and weaponry that Gaza and Hamas don't. To say that Israel has the right to defend itself, elides the fact that when Israel 'defends itself,' it is so damaging, so aggressive towards civilians."

Ruth said that the protest was about defending people who lived in prison-like conditions and had been oppressed for decades. She denounced the "rhetoric that we're all being fed" that "both sides" are to blame for what is happening in Gaza. "It's hard to comprehend that the world can watch for seven decades, with innocent people with no place to escape when the bombs are coming."

Ben, who had moved to New Zealand from the UK, said Israel was a "nuclear state" and noted that since 2010 the US had "given $3.93 billion a year" in weapons. "That's not a proportional response for people who just want their land back." Ben and Ruth both criticised the New Zealand government for sitting "on the fence."

Ben pointed out that the right-wing New Zealand First Party, which was in a coalition with Labour and the Greens from 2017 to 2020, was "quite a hardened supporter" of Israel. He added that there were no politicians from the National Party at the protest, which "speaks volumes."

Ben said, "I think, at the least, the prime minister could come out and say: 'Stop bombing children.' I don't think it's hard to do, regardless of what your political stance is." He added that it was heartening to see the turnout at the protest. "New Zealanders actually do want to actively help, they always rise against injustice," as had happened in the UK, France and elsewhere.

Nureddin, originally from Ethiopia, said: "This is about humanity, about justice, about equality. What's happening there is absolutely wrong: bombing children, bombing buildings. Israel might have a problem with Hamas; they can fight them. But bombing children, bombing women, bombing houses is a crime against humanity."

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