

New Zealand's Daily Blog seeks to legitimise anti-lockdown, anti-vaccination protests

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On November 9, about 3,000 people joined a far-right protest in Wellington, New Zealand, demanding an immediate end to all vaccination mandates, lockdowns and other public health restrictions. Outside parliament, a speaker denounced the Labour Party-led government's "unattainable elimination strategy" and labelled the associated policies "modern day apartheid," "communism," and slavery. He attacked the media as "terrorists" for reporting on the dangers of COVID-19.

Several similar events have been held in the past two months by the so-called Freedom and Rights Coalition, a front for the fundamentalist Destiny Church. Their demands dovetail with those of big business, which views lockdowns and other measures necessary to combat COVID-19 as an infringement on its "right" to extract profits from the working class.

The emergence of such protests, which mirror similar events elsewhere including in the US and Australia, has thrown a layer of petty bourgeois "lefts" into crisis. Alarmed by forces they do not comprehend, and hostile to any perspective of mobilising the working class based on a scientific and socialist program to eliminate COVID-19, they are lurching ever more sharply to the right.

A striking example is the pseudo-left, nationalist *Daily Blog*, which speaks for sections of the upper middle class who support Labour and the unions. On November 10, it published an extraordinary article by John Minto supporting the Wellington protest for raising "genuine, valid concerns [about] government policies," in particular vaccine mandates.

The blog is seeking to steer working class anger over the pandemic and social inequality in a thoroughly reactionary direction. While its editor, Martyn Bradbury, denounced the Destiny Church protest as "anti-vaxx madness," he supports the government's move to end the Auckland lockdown—one of the far-right rally's key demands. At the same time, he published Minto's piece legitimising the protest's anti-vaccination message.

The government has adopted the right-wing position that the population must "learn to live with" the deadly virus. On October 4, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced a "transition" away from the previous elimination strategy, which had kept deaths from the virus relatively low. Schools and shops in Auckland have reopened, even as a COVID-19

outbreak continues to spread out of control, with over 4,300 active cases in the community. This agenda is being enforced by the trade unions, which collaborate closely with the government and big business.

Minto's piece should dispel any illusions that the *Daily Blog* is a genuinely progressive publication. Minto is a well-known figure in middle class, ex-radical circles. He led anti-Apartheid protests in the 1980s, and more recently worked as an official in the Unite union and stood as a candidate for the Maori nationalist Mana Party. The blog is now using his prominence to lend legitimacy to an extreme right-wing event.

Minto whitewashed the political character of the rally, saying it was attended by "a mishmash of people and organisations," which he did not name. He said some protesters had "conspiracy theories about the vaccine" and some carried Trump flags, but he did not mention the main organiser Destiny Church, which is well known for its anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim and anti-LGBT positions.

The protest also attracted support from the right-wing New Conservative Party; the Outdoors & Freedom Party, led by prominent anti-vax conspiracy theorist Sue Grey; far-right blogger Cameron Slater; and the fascist Action Zealanda. There were banners glorifying NZ's military history, denouncing the government as "communists," and supporting Trump and QAnon. Several protesters waved New Zealand and Maori nationalist flags.

The event was, in short, a gathering of religious fanatics, right-wing conspiracy theorists, fascists, gang members, and some apparent Maori nationalists. Undoubtedly there were also some small business owners and disoriented members of the working class. The far-right's demagoguery exploits the hardships endured by these layers, exacerbated by grossly inadequate government support during the pandemic.

Minto said the rally's opposition to vaccine mandates "should be applauded by all of us," and described the mandates as "scientifically stupid." He said many people were "worried as to how safe" the Pfizer vaccine is, and that the government wanted "to force up vaccination rates without respect for individual decisions."

The WSWS has previously responded to the individualist and anti-scientific position that people must be "free" to remain

unvaccinated. Mass vaccination, we explained, “is an elementary requirement of public health and the self-defense of the working class. Even the presentation of the issue as one of ‘vaccine mandates’ is false to the core, since it treats the issue of vaccination as if it were some sort of infringement on ‘personal liberty.’ In fact, no individual has the ‘right’ to infect others and endanger their lives.”

The claim that vaccines are unsafe is profoundly misleading. Pfizer and other COVID-19 vaccines have been used by billions of people worldwide, with only extremely rare complications. In New Zealand, with over 7 million doses administered, one person has died from myocarditis, a rare condition linked to the vaccine. A study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that the risk of myocarditis is four times higher in unvaccinated people who contract COVID-19.

Minto states that “Pfizer is a huge multinational pharmaceutical company, all of which have well-deserved reputations as professional liars.” But the fact that pharmaceutical companies are concerned with profits, and tell lies, is not an argument to reject life-saving medicine. The COVID-19 vaccines are the product of vast quantities of research and testing involving thousands of scientists internationally.

Socialists fight to break the stranglehold of private companies over healthcare, precisely so that life-saving treatments and vaccines can be made freely available throughout the world, rather than being subordinated to capitalist interests and hoarded by the rich.

The Ardern government recently announced vaccine mandates for about 40 percent of the workforce, including teachers, healthcare workers and others. If anything, these mandates were introduced much too late and do not go far enough.

Currently about 82 percent of eligible people (aged over 12) are fully vaccinated. The government says that once 90 percent of those eligible are vaccinated, it will no longer use lockdowns. Even if this target is achieved, it would leave one in four people unvaccinated and at great risk of illness and death from the virus.

While vaccines are a vital tool, the experience of highly-vaccinated countries, including Singapore and Ireland, proves that they are not enough to stop COVID-19. Without an elimination strategy, which combines vaccination with lockdowns and other public health measures to reduce cases to zero, the virus will continue to cause significant deaths and illnesses. This is why the Ardern government’s push to reopen, in the middle of a worsening outbreak, is so reckless and dangerous.

Minto’s article supporting a far-right, anti-science mob is not an aberration, but a logical extension of the *Daily Blog*’s support for ending lockdowns. In a vile rant, the blog’s editor Martyn Bradbury said he hoped the Destiny Church protesters would all catch COVID-19, adding: “We end lockdown at the

end of this month—f*** them!” Bradbury has previously stated, falsely that “Delta will become endemic and nothing short of perpetual lockdown will end that. You can’t tell double vaccinated people they must curtail their freedom forever.”

Another *Daily Blog* contributor, inveterate Labour Party apologist Chris Trotter, wrote on November 12 that the Wellington rally displayed “a frightening combination of ignorance and anger.” Trotter argued, however, that the event expressed the sentiments of “hundreds of thousands” of “uneducated” workers, who he called “the losing class.” Trotter’s position that Destiny Church reflects the will of masses of working people is false, and reveals his own contempt for the working class.

Surveys in August and September showed that 70 to 80 percent of the population supported lockdowns and an elimination strategy to deal with the pandemic. After restrictions were lifted and the elimination strategy scrapped, a survey of 10,000 people published by *Stuff* this month found more than 43 percent now believed “authorities had done a terrible or bad job at managing the outbreak.” The Labour Party’s support dropped by about 5 percentage points in two recent polls.

Whether they are promoting the extreme right’s anti-vax campaign, blaming the working class, or gleefully looking forward to unvaccinated people becoming infected, the *Daily Blog*’s contributors aim to convince readers that they must accept the spread of COVID-19 throughout the country.

The working class, however, cannot accept this criminal agenda, which means many more people getting sick and dying to protect the profits of big business. Workers must take up a political fight for COVID-19 to be eliminated, in New Zealand and internationally, using mass vaccination, school closures and lockdowns wherever necessary. Above all, the fight against COVID-19 is inseparable from the fight for socialism, in opposition to the Labour Party, the pro-capitalist trade unions and all their apologists, including the pseudo-left *Daily Blog*.



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