

# Thousands join climate change protests in New Zealand

Tom Peters  
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Thousands of people joined protests across New Zealand yesterday for this year's first Global Climate Strike, demanding action to cut greenhouse gas emissions and stop catastrophic global warming.

The event follows New Zealand's worst flooding in recent memory in January and February across much of Auckland, the biggest city, Hawke's Bay, Gisborne, Northland and Coromandel. Fifteen people were killed in the floods and about 10,500 were displaced, with many unable to return to their destroyed homes.

Auckland received 280 percent of its usual January rainfall in less than six hours during the January 27 flooding. Cyclone Gabrielle, which hit the North Island on February 13, inundated huge areas of farmland, villages and suburbs, and destroyed roads, bridges and vital infrastructure. Napier, one of the worst-hit areas, received over 600 percent of its normal February rainfall.

Such extreme weather events are becoming more frequent due to more water vapour in the atmosphere, caused by warmer temperatures. Severe storms are causing similar destruction throughout the world, including recently in California and Australia.

Despite the ever-increasing urgency of the climate crisis, turnout at this week's events was lower than previous years. In 2019, more than 170,000 people participated. Unlike in the past, the organisers School Strike 4 Climate (SS4C) did not call on young people to walk out of school for the entire day; most rallies were held at 2 p.m. or 3 p.m. The group appealed for university students and workers to take part as well.

About 1,000 people protested in Auckland, with similar numbers taking part in Wellington and Christchurch. Rallies were also held in at least 10 other centres including Dunedin, Napier, New Plymouth, Palmerston North and Tauranga.

Members of the Socialist Equality Group (SEG) attended the Wellington protest, which marched through the city centre to parliament, spoke with some of those in attendance and distributed the statement, "New Zealand's flooding disaster and the case for socialism."

Miriam, a student at Victoria University of Wellington, said it was not possible to deny the effects of climate change any more. "You just have to look at what's just happened in Auckland and Gisborne and Hawke's Bay. There's been evidence to say that this is going to happen for years and years, and it is happening, and it's having an effect on everyone. So someone has to do something about it."

Governments around the world, including in New Zealand, had not acted on the scientific evidence because "that's just not where the money is, that's not where the incentive is," she said, adding, "I don't really know how you change that."

A 14-year-old student, Will McKenzie, said he was attending out of solidarity with people affected by the flooding in Auckland, Hawke's Bay, and other parts of the country. "It's horrible because thousands of people have lost their homes and on the news you've seen that people have lost their businesses, kumara [sweet potato] farms, all because some major world powers and countries decide not to do anything about [climate change]."

Asked what needed to be done, he said governments should "stop funding oil companies. I feel like they should break the contracts and start funding more wind farms."

A group of school students from Samoa and the Cook Islands agreed with the SEG's demand for people in Pacific island countries whose homes are threatened by climate change to be offered help to relocate and to get

residence in New Zealand.

“Our people deserve better, and I think people have to start taking initiatives,” said Leana. “The water’s rising and it’s getting hotter, and it’s costing them a lot of money [to adapt] that they don’t really have.”

Susana added: “I think the events happening here in New Zealand should make us more aware about the things that are happening everywhere. It’s a worldwide issue.” Across the Pacific, “people are dying, our people are really hurting, families are struggling, and things need to change now.”

Aimee, a recent tertiary student, said “the world’s going in the wrong direction and we either fight or we die.” She said the corporations polluting the atmosphere were “not moral entities; they are machines with one purpose, which is to make as much profit as possible.” She called for more regulations on big business, and for fossil fuel companies to be taxed to pay for environmental disasters like the recent flooding.

A number of people spoken to said they hoped the Labour government could be pressured by the protests, and by the Greens, to take stronger action on the climate.

This reflects the politics of the organisers. SS4C presented five modest demands to the government: No new fossil fuel mining or exploration; lower the voting age to 16; support farmers to shift to regenerative farming; expand marine reserves; and introduce rebates for people to buy e-bikes.

In an article published by *Stuff* ahead of the protests, Christchurch SS4C spokesperson Aurora Garner-Randolph wrote that after five years, the government had not taken the necessary steps to address the climate crisis. “It’s clear that for politicians, the best interests of the people come second to short-term petty election politics and big corporate donors,” she said. But she offered no way forward except more “protest and direct action.”

Speaking at the Auckland rally, Joe Carolan, from the Unite union and the pseudo-left group Socialist Aotearoa, called on protesters to “vote Labour, vote Greens, vote for the parties that have the best policy.” He suggested that this, combined with more strikes and protests, would lead to a “revolution.”

At the Wellington rally, Green Party co-leader James Shaw gave a speech saying the floods were “a wake-up call” and that “the government should be acting faster

on climate change.”

He declared that the problem was the Greens were “outnumbered” in parliament, “and we need more Green MPs and we need more Green ministers sitting around the Cabinet table after this election, because that is how political change happens.”

This is a lie. Shaw has been the minister for climate change in the Labour-Greens government for the past five years, during which time carbon emissions have continued to increase. The Greens, like Labour, oppose any action that would harm the profits of New Zealand’s corporate elite.

In opposition to the capitalist parties promoted during yesterday’s rallies, the SEG’s statement insisted: “Stopping emissions to prevent a catastrophic temperature rise demands a globally coordinated effort, incompatible with the division of the planet into rival capitalist countries. What is required is nothing less than restructuring the global economy along socialist lines. The world’s resources and major industries must be placed in public ownership and under the democratic control of the working class, so they can be used in a rational and scientific manner to address urgent social needs, not to enrich a handful of billionaires.”

We call on workers and students who agree with this perspective to share our statement and to contact us.



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