

# Workers speak on social crisis and war ahead of NZ election

Our reporter  
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In the lead-up to New Zealand's election on Saturday, reporters for the *World Socialist Web Site* distributed the Socialist Equality Group's statement to workers in Wellington and nearby Lower Hutt. We spoke with several people about the urgent issues facing the working class in New Zealand and internationally, including war.

Many expressed anger and disillusionment with the Labour Party government. Some said they did not intend to vote for anyone. The election resulted in an historic defeat for Labour after six years in which it oversaw growing social inequality, unleashed COVID-19 on the population, and strengthened New Zealand's alliance with US imperialism. The new right-wing government led by the National Party, which will likely include both the far-right ACT and NZ First parties, has promised sweeping cuts to public services and more spending on the military, police and prisons.

**Dominic**, a part time mental health worker, spoke to the WSWS about the worsening social crisis. "I know people who have never gone to food banks before, who are now going every week. These are families with a husband and wife both working." The main pressures people faced were rising rent, food and school fees. "Everything is going up. If you've got three kids you've got to provide school uniforms, lunches, it's a lot of money."

He said that "a lot of people I know are seeking work overseas because of better benefits, better pay." This led to fewer staff, placing more pressure on workers in the healthcare system, which was in a "shocking" state.

He had voted Labour in the past, but said this time "I have no idea, I wish I did. A few years ago I jumped on board the Jacinda train, which of course has put our country in a worse position." He added that the National Party "don't know what they're doing

either." The party's leader Christopher Luxon was "a businessman, he hasn't been a politician. Exactly like his buddy [former prime minister] John Key."

Dominic was concerned about crime, but said it was related to poverty and the National Party's plans to crack down were "not realistic" and too expensive. "They're obviously going to have to build bigger prisons. You know what it will turn into? Privatisation. People will be paid big money to run prisons." Under the previous National government, a privately-run prison in Auckland became notorious for its inhumane conditions.

Asked what he thought of Labour and National supporting Israel's military bombardment of Palestine on the pretext of "self-defence," Dominic said: "I think it's shocking." He described the war as "inhuman" and believed New Zealand politicians refused to criticise Israel because they wanted to "appease the Americans."

**Lenna**, an unemployed mother, told the WSWS she was living in a hotel that has been converted into emergency housing under a government scheme. Thousands of families have been forced into such conditions due to soaring rents.

Lenna said she knew of some people who were being "kicked out of emergency housing. There are three people I'm really close with in my motel and they've all got four or more kids. Where are they and their four kids going to go? If they had somewhere to go, they wouldn't be in emergency housing!"

Describing the soaring cost of living, she said: "For me, my son, my daughter and my partner, I'm paying at least \$300 plus for groceries on a benefit," she said. "That's most of your benefit gone right there, without the stuff for school."

Lenna opposed the fact that social welfare has shrunk

under successive governments, Labour and National alike. She said Labour only has mild policy differences which make them appear more socially progressive.

The WSWS reporter explained that the New Zealand political establishment is joining in US-led preparations for war against China, including the military-intelligence network called the Five Eyes.

“That’s stupid,” Lenna said. “It’s not in our interests. One of those bombs will blow our country to smithereens. And then what? Is America going to come and save us? No. They’re putting our country at risk just so they [the New Zealand ruling elite] can dominate other smaller Pacific countries.”

When asked where she thinks the money to fund increasing militarism will come from, Lenna said: “Our pockets. Higher taxes. But the rich won’t get taxed, just us hard-working little men.”

**Manu**, who volunteers for a charity delivering food parcels, particularly to elderly people, said he had never voted and would not do so this time, despite pressure from family members. He explained, “I haven’t found the right party to vote for. If they want me to vote they have to make things a bit easier for older people.” He said watching politicians on the news “makes me angry” and he blamed the Labour government for rising costs for “power, rent, food. For people who are not working, they’re finding it harder to live,” while the rich were “getting richer and richer.”

Asked what he thought of statements by the government and opposition supporting Israel’s war crimes, he said, “I hate anything to do with war or fighting, I’m really against it.”

**A rail worker** who spoke to the WSWS said he has been aware of the situation in Gaza since he was a child.

“There’s never been a solution,” he said. “There’s only ever been escalation of the violence and oppression of the Palestinians for long periods of time.” Asked why he thought the New Zealand political establishment supports Israel’s occupation of Palestine, he said: “I think it’s all to do with diplomacy and our military alliances. It all comes down to the world of money.”

He said the working class’s main concerns are around “inflation, cost of housing, cost of living and safety in the world.”

“I don’t think there’s much choice at all in this

election,” he said. “I just think about ordinary people... and try to go for the most progressive choice. How are we going to make sure there isn’t more taxation? But it looks like that’s going to happen anyway. It’s not like we have a choice.”



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