

Thousands protest across New Zealand against Israel's genocide in Gaza

Tom Peters

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Over the past fortnight thousands of people in New Zealand have joined the global protests against the Israeli government's genocidal bombing of Gaza.

More than 5,700 people, including 2,360 children, have been killed and tens of thousands injured since the Zionist regime began its bombardment and cut off virtually all water, food and fuel supplies to the 2.3 million people trapped in the city.

New Zealand's caretaker Labour Party government, which suffered a crushing defeat in the October 14 election, and the incoming National Party government have refused to condemn these war crimes. Both parties have echoed the United States and other imperialist powers in supporting Israel's "right to defend itself," a fraudulent pretext for mass slaughter and ethnic cleansing.

There is growing outrage among ordinary workers and young people. Palestinian solidarity groups have organised protests in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, Hamilton, Whanganui, New Plymouth, Nelson and other towns. More are planned this weekend. These events have received very limited coverage in the corporate media and some have not been reported at all.

The largest protest took place in Auckland on October 21, with around 5,000 people rallying in Aotea Square and marching to the US Consulate. Many waved Palestinian flags and placards with slogans such as "Genocide is not self defence" and "Stop the occupation."

Zaena, a young worker who attended the Auckland protest and an earlier vigil for victims of Israel's bombing of the Al Ahli Arab Hospital, spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site*. She said her father, who is from Jordan, had often spoken to her about the occupation of Palestine, and she had recently researched it herself. She called the New Zealand government's statement that Israel was defending itself "appalling" and "factually incorrect."

"They're being totally complacent about war crimes, and I think that's why a lot of us young people are really angry about it." What was taking place in Gaza was "genocide," she said. "We're seeing it live on our phones. If you want to

see it, you can see it."

Zaena described the New Zealand media coverage as "very biased. I understand that unfortunately there has been Israeli loss of life, and that's horrible. But they are not painting the full picture for Kiwis. That's why a lot of people unfortunately think that this is a fair war, or a two-sided war, or that this is a terrorist attack from the Palestinian side.

"I think there are Zionists that are really, really pushing for this ethnic cleansing, and New Zealand's media, whether on purpose or not, they are feeding into it and it's really disturbing." She added that the actions of the Israeli military would "lead to more civilian casualties on both sides."

Zaena agreed with the call by the WSWs for ordinary people in Israel to stand against the war and mentioned that "there's protests from Jews in Israel that are fighting for the same thing we're fighting for." She also praised the organisation Jewish Voice for Peace and said the international media's depiction of pro-Palestine protests as antisemitic "just feels like a lot of propaganda, to be honest. Being anti apartheid and anti Zionism does not equal antisemitism."

Saed, who is from Palestine and moved to New Zealand seven years ago, attended the protest in Nelson last Saturday. He told the WSWs he grew up in Aida refugee camp, north of Bethlehem, and was worried about his family there "because the situation is very scary now." He said "Israel plans to kick everyone out from Gaza to Egypt and from West Bank to Jordan, after they finish bombing Gaza.

"The western media is talking more about Israel. They forget to talk about Palestinian people: they have lived under occupation at least 75 years now. And the media didn't see before October 7 what happened every day in the West Bank, in Jerusalem, everywhere in Palestine, how the system is and how Israel is stealing land with settlements and killing."

Saed said the attacks in Gaza "are killing only civilians." Israel was declaring that "everything" they destroy is a Hamas target, including hospitals and mosques. Meanwhile

civilians ordered by Israel to relocate to the south of Gaza are still being bombed. “We can’t be silent when we see what is happening there. We can’t keep our eyes closed to the occupation and what they are doing.”

Saed denounced Israel’s lies that a Palestinian militant group was responsible for the bombing of Al Ahli Hospital, where as many as 500 people died. “Today on Al Jazeera there was an interview with an Israeli military man. They asked him: Okay, you say Hamas did it, are you happy to send people from overseas to check, to find what happened at the hospital? They said no.” Saed said Israel “don’t care about anything because they have cover from America, England, Italy, France, Germany.”

In the occupied West Bank, Saed explained, Israeli forces “come any time without telling you what they are doing. We live similarly to Gaza. You have a big wall around you, like in a prison. It is hard for people to go from Bethlehem to Ramallah or different cities because they lock all the exits.”

Zionist settlers “go into villages around the West Bank, they start shooting people, then the trees, then the house. They have support from the Israeli government and they have support from the military. They can do anything.”

During the past two weeks, Saed explained, Israeli forces have arrested around 150 Palestinians a day in the West Bank, and 95 people have been killed. Before moving to New Zealand, Saed had been imprisoned for 18 months “because I was protesting against Israel and for freedom during the war in 2011 against Gaza.”

He urged the New Zealand government to call for an end to the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, to “say the right thing, not to be supporting Israel or America. Use your humanity.”

Sarah, a registered nurse who attended a protest in Hamilton on October 21, told the WSW: “The protest was amazing. There was a lot of support out there and I was really pleased to see it.”

She said the way the conflict had been “misrepresented infuriates me to my very core” and blamed the media for “the misrepresentation, the bias, the lack of context that people have” about the history of Israel’s colonisation of Palestine. “If you can’t stand against genocide and oppression, whatever can you stand for?”

She said the New Zealand media was “spending a majority of the time on the people with the least amount of victims, and the ones that are causing the harm.” Noting that Washington had refused to call for a ceasefire, Sarah said: “There’s no humanity behind that, that is all just greed.”

She added that “unfortunately, our government is tied up on the US side, which means if we are ever going to go to war over this, we’re on the wrong side, unless we stand up and say something.” She supported calls for a ceasefire, but

added, “it’s not enough. We need to kick out the Israeli embassy. We need to say that crimes against humanity should never be accepted.”

Suzanne, from Rangiora, attended two protests in Christchurch on October 14 and 21, which received negligible media coverage. At the first there were around 200 people. The second drew a crowd of 1,000 or more.

Suzanne denounced the Labour and National Party leaders as “cowards” for remaining silent on Israel’s war crimes. Both parties were “scared to stand up and say what they know to be the truth, because of their political relations and economic relations with the United States, primarily,” she said.

“For decades and decades this has been going on, this quiet, slow, hidden incremental ethnic cleansing and genocide. The building of a Zionist apartheid state, with actual pass laws just like they had in South Africa, and with daily and nightly terror going on, and people being killed and children being dragged through the street and thrown in the back of an IDF vehicle and sent to prison for the slightest thing.

“And yet when there is an attack by Hamas, the mass media put out this propaganda about how it was an ‘unprovoked attack,’ and the sycophantic government leaders all jump on the ‘Israel has the right to self-defence’ bandwagon. It’s just shameful. History didn’t just start on October the 7th and it wasn’t an unprovoked attack.”

Suzanne added that “the sheer scale of the protests around the world is giving me hope at the moment.” She said people were “horrified by the level of atrocities and war crimes that Israel is now perpetrating,” and were increasingly able to see through government propaganda and lies thanks to independent reporting.



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