

Protests continue in New Zealand against genocide in Gaza, Labour MP booed off platform

Tom Peters
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Thousands of people protested across New Zealand, for the fourth consecutive weekend, against Israel's genocidal bombardment of the population of Gaza. Worldwide, millions rallied and marched—including across Europe, the US, Asia and Australia—to demand an end to the one-sided war, which has killed some 11,000 Palestinians, including over 5,000 children.

As of Friday, Israel had dropped the equivalent of two nuclear bombs on the Gaza Strip, flattening entire neighbourhoods. The Netanyahu regime's war crimes include bombing hospitals, ambulances, mosques and churches, schools and refugee camps, and cutting off food, communications, fuel and water to the enclave of more than two million people. Dozens of aid workers, journalists and their families are among those massacred by Israel.

The New Zealand protests were held in every major city, with hardly any coverage in the corporate media. On Saturday, thousands gathered in Auckland and about 4,200 in Christchurch. On Sunday more than 1,000 demonstrated at Civic Square in Wellington. Rallies were also held in Dunedin, Hamilton, Palmerston North, Whanganui, Whangarei, New Plymouth, Nelson, Tauranga and Hastings.

Speakers denounced the outgoing Labour Party-led government and the incoming National Party-led government, which have both repeated the false propaganda that Israel is “defending itself.”

New Zealand was among 140 countries that voted in the United Nations last week for a “humanitarian truce,” which was dismissed by Israel and the United States. On October 31, however, Labour's Prime Minister Chris Hipkins echoed the Biden administration, telling One News: “at this point, I don't

think [a ceasefire] is a realistic prospect; what we have asked for is a pause to hostilities.”

At the Auckland rally on Saturday, Labour Party MP Phil Twyford attempted to defend the response of the government and “the international community,” meaning the imperialist powers. He declared that the UN resolution “lays out a roadmap to end the suffering” and proceeded to condemn “the violence against civilians by Hamas” and by the Israeli Defence Force. Twyford had to cut his speech short as demonstrators began chanting: “Shame on Labour!”

Other speakers included Palestinian New Zealander Tameem Shaltoni, who described the 1948 Nakba (catastrophe), when Israel was created through the dispossession and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people. Tens of thousands of people were killed and 700,000 forced to leave their homes.

Shaltoni's grandparents and their children were expelled from the town of al-Lydd, where Zionist forces killed 426 people in a single day, including 176 who were sheltering inside a mosque. Another 350 people died of thirst and exhaustion after being expelled.

“The reason this story is relevant to what's happening in Gaza is because we are seeing it happening again,” Shaltoni said. He denounced New Zealand politicians for telling Israel, “You can defend yourself by wiping out Gaza.”

Avigail Allan, from the Jewish organisation Dayenu, denounced the Netanyahu regime's references to the Holocaust, saying: “How dare Israel use our pain, our trauma, our stories of struggle to try and justify this monstrosity upon Gaza and Palestine!” She pointed out that “what happened on October 7 did not come out of

nowhere” but was a consequence of 75 years of oppression of the Palestinians.

In Wellington, members of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality spoke with several people attending the demonstration and distributed leaflets promoting the November 13 public meeting at Victoria University of Wellington, “Stop Israel’s genocide against Gaza.”

There was widespread agreement with the call by the Palestinian trade unions, supported by the IYSSE and the WSWs, for workers around the world to take strike action to stop weapons and other resources being sent to the Israeli war machine.

Wira, a worker originally from Indonesia, said the Palestinians were engaged in a struggle against colonialism, just like Indonesia’s struggle in the 1940s against Dutch rule. “Palestinians, at that time, gave their support to us. Now we have to give back support to them to claim back their own land that’s being occupied by others.”

Eri, also from Indonesia, rejected the claims that Israel is engaged in self-defence. “Bombing civilians is not right. We need to have a ceasefire now and talk. We are human beings, we are all the same.”

Wira added that the war could only be ended with “justice” for the dispossessed Palestinians. “The people who try to claim back their land are called terrorists. In Indonesia, when we tried to strive for freedom of our land, the media in Holland and Europe, they called Indonesians terrorists. So history is repeating again,” he said.

Afnaan, a school student, said she was protesting because she felt too many people throughout the world viewed “the wrong side as the heroes.” She was adamant that a genocide is underway against the people of Gaza.

Her mother, **Asmaa**, who moved from Egypt to New Zealand 17 years ago, said it was “disgusting” and “double standards” for the US and New Zealand governments to describe Israel’s actions as self-defence.

“We haven’t even sent a complaint to the embassy of Israel. We haven’t even said there needs to be action to defend civilians or anything. We see bloodshed and we stand still. And I’m saying ‘we,’ because this is my country, New Zealand, and I have the right to say what should be said.”

Asmaa added that “we don’t even have freedom of speech,” pointing to censorship carried out by Facebook and YouTube against people supporting the Palestinians.

The government was ignoring the people, she said. “How many marches, how many rallies? And no action has been taken. I hope the authorities will hear and do something. We didn’t elect the government to be our killer. I’m sorry to say it, but that seems to me the reality. Our government stands still until everyone is dead, or at least the ones that they don’t want to exist, and I don’t think any human being has the right to say who exists and who shouldn’t.”

Asmaa said the killing of children in Gaza, who “did not ask for war,” demonstrated that Middle Eastern children’s lives were being devalued. “Why is Israel killing civilians? It’s a genocide, it’s not about Hamas. It’s about: ‘I want the land, even if that land belongs to someone, I want it, no matter what it takes.’”

Josh, who works in a bookstore, said the mass protests in solidarity with Palestine demonstrated that “many in the media and in government are out of step with the real world.” He described the New Zealand government’s response as “pathetic, like a lot of governments in the western world. It’s remarkable how easy some of these people find it to speak in such guarded language about Israel, when Israeli officials themselves are openly calling for genocide and actively doing it.”

He said Israel was “systematically destroying large swathes of an open-air prison. It is blatantly obvious what they are doing. It’s straight up lying when politicians use the defence argument.”

Asked why Washington was so determined to support Israel’s actions, Josh noted that “a clip recently resurfaced of Joe Biden in the 1980s saying that if there weren’t an Israel then America would need to create one for its own interests.” He said Israel served as a “proxy” for the US and its allies in the Middle East.



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