

New Zealand Labour PM defends Israel's genocidal bombing, smears pro-Palestine protests

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At a press conference on Tuesday, New Zealand Labour Party leader and caretaker Prime Minister Chris Hipkins doubled down on his support for Israel's genocidal bombing of the Gaza Strip, which has so far killed more than 11,000 civilians including 5,000 children.

Asked whether Israel "may have breached international human rights law in their bombardments of Gaza," Hipkins replied: "I don't want to comment on hypotheticals, but what I would say is we don't want to see innocent civilians being affected by this conflict." He blandly called on "all sides" to respect international law.

In response to further questions, the prime minister declared that he could not say whether Israel had committed war crimes because "obviously, I'm not there." An incredulous reporter then asked: "Have you seen what's happening over there? They're bombing refugee camps, hospitals, ambulances." Hipkins stated that he was "not going to make a judgement" about whether this breached international law.

Asked whether the government would call for a ceasefire, Hipkins replied, "We've called for a pause in hostilities, by any other name, that's a ceasefire." This is completely false. A "pause" might enable the delivery of some token, completely inadequate humanitarian aid to Gaza, before Israel's carpet bombing resumes. The United States government, Israel's main imperialist backer and supplier of weapons, has also called for a "pause" of unspecified duration, while fully supporting Israel's massacre of civilians.

New Zealand is a minor imperialist power allied to the US. The Labour-Greens government, backed by

every party in parliament, has sent troops to Britain to help train Ukrainian conscripts for the US-NATO proxy war against Russia. It also supports the US militarisation of the Asia-Pacific region in preparation for war against China.

These developments, along with Israel's destruction of Gaza and the US threats against Iran, are the opening stages of a Third World War. The US and all the imperialist powers are seeking to bolster their economic position by using military force to redivide the world and its resources. By supporting the mass murder of Palestinians, they are sending a clear message that they will not be deterred from war regardless of the human cost.

Among ordinary people in New Zealand, as is the case internationally, there is widespread support for the Gazan population and outrage over Israel's war. Hipkins' statements have been widely denounced on social media.

Wajiha said on X (Twitter): "I regret wasting my vote on [Labour] in 2023. Never again I am going to vote them. What a disappointment." Martin wrote: "When did we become so gutless? Clearly the issue is staying in line with our 'allies' like good little partners."

Another person commented: "4103 children dead in 30 days in Gaza. At a time when the usually conservative [UN Secretary-General] says that Gaza is a graveyard for children, our spineless PM has nothing to say. No empathy, no soul, totally disconnected."

Labour's endorsement of Israel's criminal war, under the fraudulent pretext of "self-defence," undoubtedly contributed to the party's devastating defeat in the October 14 election. Labour received just 26.9 percent—almost half the 50 percent it received in

2020—in an election marked by low turnout particularly in working class areas.

The depth of anger towards Labour has been evident at nationwide anti-war demonstrations.

Last Saturday, Labour MP Phil Twyford was booed off the stage at an Auckland rally, with shouts of “Shame on Labour!” as he tried to defend the government’s position.

In response, Hipkins has joined the corporate media in smearing the protests as antisemitic. Asked whether it was “appropriate for MPs to use the phrase ‘from the river to the sea’ when talking about the Israel-Palestine conflict,” Hipkins said it “can be interpreted” as support for Hamas and he did not expect Labour MPs to use it.

The protest chant, “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free”—a call for freedom and equality for Palestinians—has been demonised by the media and governments around the world as part of their efforts to shut down protests.

In the UK, Labour Party leader Keir Starmer removed party whip Andy McDonald for using the phrase. In Germany, police have used the slogan as a pretext to ban protests.

The New Zealand media, which has largely avoided reporting on the global anti-war protests, seized on Green Party MP Chlöe Swarbrick’s use of the chant at the Auckland rally. Swarbrick told Radio NZ that the words were a call for freedom “widely used by Palestinian and by Jewish peace activists across the world.”

The Green Party has called for a ceasefire and described Israel’s actions as genocide. It is seeking to contain the widespread anti-war sentiment within the parliamentary system. The Greens are part of the outgoing Labour-led coalition government and would have re-joined the government had Labour got enough votes.

The *New Zealand Herald* cited calls from supporters of Israel for Swarbrick to resign. *Newshub* reported on Tuesday that Swarbrick had “refused to apologise” for the words “despite a Jewish person telling *Newshub* it felt like a death threat and it made them feel unsafe.” It quoted Juliet Moses, from the Zionist Jewish Council, who said: “It is widely understood to be a call for the annihilation of Israel and quite possibly the Jewish

people.”

David Seymour, leader of the far-right ACT Party, which is part of the incoming National Party-led government, declared that the slogan had “a dark meaning” and its use in protests was “totally unacceptable.”

These ludicrous smears are not simply or primarily aimed against the Greens but at the entire movement against war—which includes many Jewish people who are horrified by Israel’s bombardment of Gaza. The media-fuelled hysteria reflects growing alarm in the ruling class and its political parties about the mass opposition to war, which has emerged largely spontaneously and outside of their control. Large numbers of young people and workers are seeing through the lies and propaganda that is being spouted in defence of ethnic cleansing and the destruction of tens of thousands of lives.

The mass movement against imperialism must be armed with a socialist perspective to mobilise the power of the international working class—including through political strikes to deprive the Israeli military of resources and to cut all military ties with Washington. This is inseparable from a revolutionary struggle against the capitalist system, which produces war.

We urge readers to attend the public meeting called by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality and the Socialist Equality Group, at Victoria University of Wellington, on Monday November 13 at 6 p.m. to discuss these burning issues.



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