Sixth week of mass protests in New Zealand against Gaza genocide

Tom Peters
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Thousands of people again gathered in major centres across New Zealand last weekend to denounce the escalating genocidal bombing of the Gaza Strip by Israel.

On Sunday, up to 7,000 people marched in Auckland from Aotea Square to the US Consulate, where photos of children killed by Israel's bombs were posted on doors. In Wellington, about 3,000 people marched from Civic Square to parliament, demanding a ceasefire.

Protests in Christchurch, Dunedin, Hamilton, Whangarei, Nelson, Whanganui, New Plymouth, Palmerston North, Hastings, Queenstown and Timaru were ignored by the corporate media.

A petition by Palestinian Youth Aotearoa for the government to demand a ceasefire has more than 39,000 signatures. Hundreds of New Zealand healthcare workers have signed an open letter making the same demand and highlighting Israel's destruction of hospitals in Gaza and the killing of hundreds of healthcare workers, among other war crimes.

A survey of 1,040 people by Talbot Mills, published November 16, found that 60 percent wanted the government to call for an immediate ceasefire and only 12 percent disagreed. The rest were unsure or "neutral."

More than five weeks after the October 14 election, the National Party is still in talks with the far-right ACT and NZ First parties to form a coalition government. National leader Christopher Luxon has repeatedly declared that Israel is engaged in self-defence against Hamas—the same lie used by the US and other imperialist powers to justify the mass slaughter and ethnic cleansing of Gaza.

Since October 7, the Netanyahu regime has killed more than 13,000 people in Gaza, including 5,500 children, and thousands more are trapped beneath the rubble. More than 70 percent of Gazans have been displaced.

On Sunday, as protesters gathered outside parliament, Labour Party leader and caretaker prime minister Chris Hipkins issued a statement saying, "it has become untenable for me and it runs against Labour Party values to stand by and watch the horrific scenes we're witnessing without calling for a ceasefire."

Hipkins stressed that he was making this call as Labour Party leader, not as prime minister, because he had failed to secure agreement with the incoming government. He did not condemn Israel, saying "we recognise the right to self-defence," but expressed concern that its military actions were "disproportionate and indiscriminate."

In fact, as a matter of international law, Israel has no "right to self-defence" against a territory that it is illegally occupying. The Palestinian people have the right to resist the occupation.

Hipkins' mealy-mouthed statement is an attempt to stem the party's plummeting support, driven by the social crisis as well as the Labour government's alignment with the US and Israel. On November 7, Hipkins declared he was "not going to make a judgement" about whether Israel had committed war crimes; this followed Labour MP Phil Twyford being met with shouts of "shame on Labour!" during an anti-war rally in Auckland.

On November 13, former Labour prime minister Jacinda Ardern broke her silence on the war during a discussion hosted by Harvard University, where she avoided any criticism let alone condemnation of Israel. In an almost meaningless statement, Ardern appealed to "everyone to remember our shared common humanity, adding, "the only way to find long-term peaceful resolution to difficult and complex conflicts is if you

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find a way to end the violence and grief in order to give yourself the space to then have those conversations."

The Socialist Equality Group (SEG) held a public meeting on November 13 which discussed the socialist and internationalist strategy to stop the genocide and the developing Third World War. It explained that an anti-war movement can only be built in opposition to all capitalist parties, including Labour and its ally the Green Party—which is playing a prominent role at protests and issued pacifist statements calling for a ceasefire. The Greens were part of the Ardern-Hipkins government and would have rejoined it had Labour received enough votes.

SEG members spoke with people attending the Wellington rally and distributed the recent WSWS perspectives, "Israel's war on hospitals and the normalization of war crimes" and "The forced evacuation of southern Gaza: The next stage in the ethnic cleansing of Palestine."

Finn, a physicist, said "it's really, really tragic to watch" what is taking place in Gaza, as well as the media propaganda whitewashing Israel's war crimes. "I'm American on my mother's side, and so it's hard to watch people over there only seeing that side of the story when there's so much tragedy going on."

He said it was "shameful that it's taken [Hipkins] this long to say anything at all." Finn criticised the media, saying "the last protest I was at was even bigger than this and I didn't see a single media person anywhere. They are ignoring us and trying to make it all go away."

Finn said it was "heartening, in such a sad and horrific time, to see so many different people from so many different walks of life, different generations, coming together to support Palestine. And I think there are so many more people like this, and it's the media and the government that aren't being representative of us." He added that New Zealand's own history of colonisation by British imperialism was connected with the major parties' refusal to criticise Israel.

Ash, who works at a university residential hall, said "one of my best friends is Palestinian and he told me his family's story. The Israeli government is targeting his family, he can't go back home, he owns property in Gaza but can't access it."

He summed up the situation in Gaza as an occupation and a genocide. "It's like if someone came into your house and expected you to leave, and when you said no, they killed you. If you watch some of the local Israeli news channels, it's horrendous what they're saying about the Palestinian people. There was one story that I saw where the news reporter was [advocating] genocide for all Muslim nations."

The New Zealand government's response was "pretty weak," he said, adding that Hipkins was disconnected from the population.

He described the corporate media's coverage as "the same propaganda machine that was behind the war in Iraq and Syria and everywhere else." He urged people to follow Instagram pages such as Eye on Palestine, which were reporting from within Gaza. "The Israeli government have asked TikTok, Instagram and other social media platforms to delete people's accounts that are reporting on this stuff, so independent journalism is so important, otherwise we wouldn't know what's going on."

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