

New Zealand pseudo-left group whitewashes unions' complicity in Gaza genocide

Tom Peters

12 December 2023

The New Zealand-based International Socialist Organisation, a middle class pseudo-left group, published an article on December 6, titled "Union Response to the War on Gaza," which whitewashes the unions' complicity in Israel's genocidal bombing of the Gaza Strip.

The article by Rudi Karmakar begins by quoting the appeal published in October by the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions, which called for urgent action to stop the genocide. The open letter called on workers

1. To refuse to build weapons destined for Israel.
2. To refuse to transport weapons to Israel.
3. To pass motions in their trade union to this effect.
4. To take action against complicit companies involved in implementing Israel's brutal and illegal siege, especially if they have contracts with your institution.
5. Pressure governments to stop all military trade with Israel, and in the case of the US, funding to it.

The overwhelming response to this appeal by the trade union bureaucracy in every country has been to remain silent and do nothing. Their inaction stands in stark contrast to the millions of people who have joined mass protests, week after week, against Israel's bombardment of the Gaza Strip, which has killed more than 20,000 people, including at least 7,000 children.

Karmakar, however, states entirely uncritically that unions "have responded differently, from urging a ceasefire to blocking shipments at unionised ports."

In a ridiculous attempt to show that the New Zealand

unions have taken a strong stand, the ISO cites a Council of Trade Unions (CTU) statement issued in 2009, nearly 15 years ago, towards the conclusion of Operation Cast Lead, in which Israel killed more than 1,400 people in Gaza and destroyed thousands of homes. At that time, the CTU called on the government to revoke the credentials of the Israeli ambassador, end military contacts with Israel and stop any trade that could support Israel's occupation of Palestine. The unions never organised any industrial action around these demands at the time or in the intervening period.

The ISO does not inform its readers of the CTU's most recent position. In a resolution published on November 16, the CTU issued a toothless call for a ceasefire and condemned both the October 7 attack by Hamas and Israel's siege and bombardment of Gaza. It presented Israel's genocidal assault as a two-sided "conflict" and called for an investigation into alleged war crimes by both sides. The statement did not call for an end to diplomatic, military or commercial arrangements with Israel.

The New Zealand Nurses Organisation, Unite and FIRST Union have all issued statements calling for a ceasefire and promoting demonstrations. The union bureaucracy, however, has refused to mobilise workers in political strikes against the government's support for Israel and its military-intelligence alliance with the United States. Nor have they organised any action to block shipments that directly or indirectly support Israel's war machine.

The Maritime Union of New Zealand, which is affiliated to the CTU and the Labour Party, issued a statement on November 21 saying that it "supports the right of the community to take part in peaceful protests at ports and elsewhere," however, MUNZ has not organised any industrial action to prevent the servicing of Israeli ships.

The arrival of vessels operated by Israeli company ZIM

Integrated Shipping has triggered protests at Ports of Auckland. On November 23, police arrested six protesters at the port. ZIM has offered to place its global shipping operations at the service of the Israeli Defence Force.

Karmakar does not mention any of this, covering up the role of MUNZ, even though he refers to protests against ZIM ships in neighbouring Australia. According to the ISO, the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) “helped protest” the shipping line’s activities. In fact, as the WSWS has pointed out, the MUA, including its Stalinist-run Sydney branch, is enforcing business as usual at the ports, with workers made to load and unload the very ships that hundreds of people have protested and attempted to block.

Similarly, the ISO’s article refers to mealy-mouthed statements by the United Auto Workers (UAW) and other unions in the US calling for a ceasefire. But Karmakar doesn’t mention the UAW bureaucracy’s role in blocking strikes and ramming through contracts at major defence companies such as General Dynamics and at Allison Transmission, the latter of which produces transmissions for tanks. This ensures the continuous flow of weapons to both US imperialism and the Israeli apartheid regime.

The ISO lists a number of actions by groups of workers internationally, including port workers in Barcelona, Spain, who last month refused to ship weapons to Israel and the call by Belgian airport unions for workers not to handle weapons. It also refers to the protests against weapons manufacturer Elbit Systems in Britain.

The most obvious point to make about such actions is that they are the exception. The workers involved have been isolated by the union bureaucracy as a whole, which has prevented any real campaign of political and industrial strikes capable of stopping Israel’s genocide.

According to the ISO, the “statements and strikes by unions since the recent assault on Gaza are just the beginning. It will take long term solidarity and union action to halt the Israeli war machine completely.” This false statement is aimed at lulling workers into complacency and blinding them to the political conclusions they need to draw and urgent tasks that they face.

Workers cannot wait for the unions to act. Any genuine fight against genocide and war will require mobilising the working class in opposition to the union bureaucracy, which acts as a police force on behalf of imperialism. This in turn requires a political struggle in opposition to the unions’ pseudo-left cheerleaders. Like the unions themselves, the ISO and similar organisations

internationally speak for a layer of the upper middle class, which is actively hostile to the mobilisation of workers against capitalism, which is the source of war.

The pseudo-left has lurched sharply to the right in recent years, embracing imperialism and aligning more and more closely with capitalist parties. In the October election, the ISO advocated support for the Labour Party and its allies, the Greens and Te P?ti M?ori, even after Labour, in the final days of the campaign, supported Israel’s bombing of Gaza.

In 2022, the ISO joined other pseudo-left groups internationally in endorsing the US-NATO proxy war against Russia over Ukraine, which marked the opening stages of a Third World War. In the United States, the Democratic Socialists of America, which the ISO supports, has also backed the war against Russia and its representatives in Congress support the arming of Israel.

The Socialist Equality Group in New Zealand supports the fight by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) for workers to build rank-and-file committees in the factories, ports and other workplaces, independent of the pro-capitalist trade unions. The genocide in Gaza only underscores the urgency of building such organisations, which are controlled by workers themselves, to coordinate action internationally to stop it.

Millions of workers and young people are horrified by the genocide and will fight to end it. This requires not only new workers’ organisations but, above all, a political perspective and party based on socialism and internationalism. Only the fight for world socialist revolution can put an end to the oppression and ethnic cleansing of the people of Palestine, stop the war in Ukraine and stop the mad dash by the imperialist powers into a catastrophic world war. We urge readers who agree with this perspective to contact the Socialist Equality Group and join its fight to build a section of the ICFI in New Zealand.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact