

New Zealand protests continue against genocide in Gaza as government calls for “steps towards” ceasefire

Tom Peters
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On Tuesday, more than 1,000 people rallied outside the New Zealand parliament in Wellington opposing Israel’s escalating genocide against the people of Gaza, which has now been underway for more than nine weeks with the backing of the United States and its imperialist allies.

The demonstration followed a mealy-mouthed motion in parliament on December 7 by Foreign Minister Winston Peters—leader of the deeply unpopular, far-right NZ First Party—calling on “all parties involved in the conflict, as well as countries with influence in the region, to take urgent steps towards establishing a ceasefire.”

The motion passed unanimously after amendments proposed by the opposition Labour and Green Parties calling for an “immediate and permanent ceasefire” and for the government to recognise Palestine as a state were rejected. The text contained no specific condemnation of Israel’s indiscriminate bombing—which has now killed more than 23,000 people, including more than 9,000 children. It condemned the October 7 attack by Hamas and repeated the false claim that Israel has a “right” to defend itself, which is the pretext for its criminal bombardment and siege of the Gaza Strip.

Similarly, a joint statement on December 13 by New Zealand’s National Party Prime Minister Christopher Luxon and the prime ministers of Canada and Australia called for “urgent international efforts towards a sustainable ceasefire.” The three leaders supported Israel’s “right to defend itself” and demanded that Hamas surrender and “lay down its arms,” echoing the positions of the Netanyahu regime.

There is growing anxiety, and even hysteria, in

sections of the corporate media, about the ongoing anti-genocide protests, which are not being quelled by the government’s hypocritical statements.

The day before the Wellington protest, Sean Plunket, who runs the far-right media outlet the *Platform*, lashed out at the *Post* newspaper for its decision to print an advertisement from the organising group Palestine Solidarity Network Aotearoa (PSNA).

In an unhinged tirade, he accused PSNA’s main spokesperson John Minto of advocating “world revolution” and being “a disloyal, traitorous Marxist.” Plunket also made the unsubstantiated and baseless claim that the group was “stirring up hate” against Jewish people. In fact, Jewish people have played a significant role in the protests against Israel’s genocide.

There is nothing socialist, let alone Marxist, about the PSNA or Minto, a former member of the Māori nationalist Mana Party. The real targets of Plunket’s fascistic outbursts are the young people and workers who are outraged by the atrocities committed by the imperialist-backed Netanyahu regime and are increasingly sympathetic to socialism.

The protest organisers are, in fact, seeking to bring the movement under the wing of the parliamentary opposition Labour Party and its allies, the Greens and Te Pati Māori (TPM). Members of all three parties addressed Tuesday’s rally, including Labour MPs Damien O’Connor and Phil Twyford.

On November 2, when Twyford tried to speak at an Auckland rally, protesters booed him off the stage with chants of “Shame on Labour!” A few days earlier, Labour leader Chris Hipkins had stated that a ceasefire was not “realistic.”

Attempts are underway to revamp Labour’s image,

after the party suffered a devastating defeat in the October 14 election. Introducing O'Connor and Twyford, a protest organiser called for them to be given a "warm welcome," saying it was "never too late to be on the right side of history." TPM co-leader Debbie Ngarewa-Packer asked protesters to "forgive" Labour for its previous statements.

O'Connor called for "pressure" to be placed on New Zealand's far-right government to call for an immediate ceasefire. Twyford said visas should be issued to the family members of New Zealand-based Palestinians who are trapped in Gaza. Neither of the MPs explained why Labour had openly supported Israel's carpet-bombing prior to the election and for several weeks afterwards, or why it had strengthened New Zealand's alliance with US imperialism during the six years it was in office.

Laila Farah, who was born in the Gaza Strip, also addressed the rally in a moving speech. She said she had hoped to return to Gaza one day, "but now there is nothing to go back to... Our house, like many others, is now reduced to rubble."

On October 19, Farah's cousin was killed in Israel's bombing of the Greek Orthodox Saint Porphyrius Church. On November 14, her great aunt "was murdered in cold blood by Israeli soldiers. Elham Farah was the very first music teacher in Gaza." The 84-year-old woman was shot by a sniper and left to bleed to death over the course of two days.

"I cannot believe that today is day 67 since the war began, with no action from the international community or the United Nations and no sight of a ceasefire in the near future," she said. "It is evident that Palestinian lives are not valued." She denounced the US for vetoing a call for a ceasefire at the UN Security Council.

She said it was clear that Israel's objective "is not to get rid of Hamas but rather to ethnically cleanse all Palestinians out of their homes, whether in Gaza or the West Bank."

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with some of those attending the rally and distributed the perspective, "Vetoing Gaza ceasefire resolution, Biden administration upholds genocide as state policy."

Liz travelled about 300 kilometres from Hastings to attend the protest. Her daughter, Paula Whetu Jones, is a filmmaker who travelled to Palestine to produce a

2017 television documentary series about Palestinian art called "He Ao Kotahi - One World Project."

Liz said the Biden administration's backing for Israel was "disgusting," and also criticised the New Zealand government, explaining that its position was to say it will "call for a ceasefire once there's a ceasefire. That doesn't even make sense, but that's what [foreign minister Winston Peters] said." She added: "I don't care what country it is, it's babies, children and innocent people [being killed]. Everybody should be standing up and saying it's not right."

She described how she was confronted by someone in Wellington who accused her and her friends of antisemitism because they had Palestinian flags. "I said, no, we're not. We're anti-Zionist. People mix it up. It's the Zionists that are the problem." She pointed out that many Jewish people supported the Palestinians.

Emmanuelle, a student, said what is taking place in Gaza "leaves you speechless, it's disgusting, awful. I feel like I can't sleep, I can't eat, and things like that, when there's people suffering so much over there." She explained that her family was from South Africa and her mother had experienced apartheid, and she viewed the current protests against the oppression of Palestinians as a similar struggle.

Emmanuelle denounced the US government's unlimited support for Israel's war machine. "The United States, I think, will always be power-hungry. They were built on stolen land and by killing people. There's blood all over their hands, and they're not afraid to get some more on them." She called for countries to give up their weapons, saying the world had to "grow up and stop fighting over power" and resources, and for people to recognise their common humanity.



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