

Nationwide protests in New Zealand against expanding Middle East war

Our reporters
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Last weekend, protests in 23 centres around New Zealand were held against the far-right National Party-led government's refusal to call for an end to Israel's slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza and its decision to join the US-led war on Yemen. Similar events have occurred on a weekly basis for more than three months.

Earlier last week, Prime Minister Christopher Luxon announced that NZ Defence Force personnel will be sent to the Middle East to assist the illegal US-led bombing campaign against Yemen, saying: "Our personnel will support coalition forces in carrying out precision attacks on identified military targets."

Demonstrations were held across the country, from Rawene and Kerikeri in the far north, to Invercargill at the bottom of the South Island. The major cities, Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin were all involved along with most regional centres and many small towns. Thousands participated.

Protests targeted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade office in Auckland, as well as seaports which service ZIM Shipping, the company taking arms and ammunition into Israel. On Monday, dozens of people also marched to Devonport Navy Base in Auckland chanting "Hands off Yemen!"

In the capital, Wellington, about 1,000 people rallied outside parliament on Saturday carrying Palestinian flags and banners and chanting "Free, free Palestine!" "Infidata, revolution!" as well as chants in Arabic.

Rick Sahar, originally from Detroit but now resident in Wellington, was one of several speakers outside parliament. He introduced himself as Jewish, with grandparents who were murdered during the Holocaust, and a member of the Holocaust Centre of NZ, "which works to educate young people to counter the lies of the Holocaust deniers."

Sahar declared: "I am here today to take a stand today

against the genocide that is happening in Gaza. I condemn the intentional murdering and maiming of innocent people by Israel in Gaza and in the West Bank. Collective punishment was used by the Nazis and was condemned after the Holocaust amid cries of 'never again,' and yet it is happening again." Rick concluded: "Home invasions, forced massed displacements, loss of lives and destruction of an unprecedented speed and scale are inflicted by this modern army. Israel's war is futile and must end now."

Christie, regional chair of the NZ College of Midwives also spoke, saying: "Every woman deserves to birth in safety. In Gaza they deserve to welcome their babies into a world that is not actively trying to kill them."

Mohamad, an immigrant from Lebanon, said the Palestinian cause "is for anyone who fights oppression. We in Lebanon are the same people, separated by artificial borders at the end of WWI.

"I personally lived through three wars and occupation which was ended by armed resistance in the year 2000. During the 2006 war an Israeli rocket hit a school less than 50 metres away from our house. My family were almost all killed. We were displaced twice. That was nothing in comparison with what we see coming from the open air prison of Gaza."

Mohamad noted that the intentions of the Israeli government had been clear since its mass expulsions and atrocities in 1948. He quoted statements by Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, who stated: "We must do everything to make sure the Palestinians do not return. The old will die, the young will forget." Mohamad concluded: "Neither the old nor the young are forgetting and we will keep fighting."

Supporters of the Socialist Equality Group (NZ) distributed the WSWs article "New Zealand personnel

to assist in US-led bombing of Yemen,” which explained that the country’s ruling class is intervening in support of both the US-led warmongering in the Middle East and Israel’s genocide.

The weekend’s protests took place immediately following the release of the interim ruling of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the case taken by South Africa accusing Israel of genocide.

The ICJ refused to call for a ceasefire in Gaza, underscoring its character as an imperialist institution. However, its ruling is still a damning indictment for the Israeli government and US-NATO imperialism, which has financed and defended the genocide there.

Foreign Minister Winston Peters issued a pro-forma statement endorsing the ICJ findings, while declaring: “New Zealand renews its call for all parties to the present conflict to comply with international law, facilitate unimpeded access for humanitarian responders and work towards a lasting political resolution.”

This is completely hypocritical. Peters, who leads the right-wing populist NZ First Party in the ruling coalition, is seeking to strengthen Wellington’s alliance with the US. The government refused to support South Africa’s case in the ICJ, has joined the war in the Middle East and is maintaining a NZ troop deployment in Britain to train Ukrainian conscripts to fight Russia.

This underscores the futility of appeals by Palestine Solidarity Network Aotearoa (PSNA), the main protest organisers, for the government to call for a ceasefire. PSNA’s spokesman, John Minto, has urged the government to “close the Israeli embassy till Israel is in full compliance with the ICJ decision” and ceases to oppress and kill Palestinians.

The PSNA has also appealed to port companies “to deny port facilities to ZIM shipping vessels” or those contracted to ZIM—something none of these businesses has any intention of doing. The organisation did not mention the role of the Maritime Union bureaucracy, which refuses to hold any strikes or other actions to stop the servicing of Israeli vessels.

The union issued a statement on January 24 criticising the deployment of troops to the Middle East and calling for “an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and negotiation of a political solution for Palestine.” It stated that “the response of the Labour Party and Green Party opposing involvement was the correct one.”

In fact, the Labour Party fully supported Israel’s war on Gaza while it was still the government until late November, under the pretext of “self-defence.” Labour and its allies, including the Greens and the union bureaucracy, are committed to the alliance with US imperialism and the integration of New Zealand into US wars against Russia and war plans against China.

Middle class pseudo-left groups, such as the International Socialist Organisation and Socialist Aotearoa, which have close ties with the unions, are seeking to cover up this reality and prevent workers and young people who are protesting against genocide from establishing their political independence from these capitalist, pro-war parties and organisations.

The only way to stop the genocide in Gaza and the Third World War targeting Iran, Russia and China, is through the mobilisation of the working class on the basis of an explicitly socialist program, to put an end to capitalism, which is the source of war. Strikes and other actions by workers must be organised internationally, including in New Zealand, to stop the shipment of supplies to Israel’s war machine, but to do this workers must establish rank-and-file committees, independent of the corporatist trade unions and controlled by workers themselves.



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