

Protests continue in New Zealand against Gaza genocide, Labour MP booed outside parliament

Tom Peters
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On Tuesday, hundreds of people rallied outside the New Zealand parliament and the US embassy in Wellington, following demonstrations over the weekend in Auckland, Christchurch and other towns and cities across the country.

For 18 consecutive weeks, thousands of people have joined the global protest movement against Israel's genocide against the Palestinian people in Gaza. The events have taken on a more pronounced anti-government character, following the decision by New Zealand's National Party-led coalition to stop funding for the UNRWA aid agency, and to join the US-led bombing of Yemen in supposed retaliation for the Yemeni Houthis' attacks on Israeli shipping in the Red Sea.

The Israel Defense Forces have massacred more than 30,000 people since October. Following the destruction of much of the Gaza Strip and the displacement of 85 percent of its 2.3 million people, more than 1.4 million are now crowded into the southern city of Rafah. Israeli forces are bombing this densely populated area and preparing a ground invasion, while blocking supplies of food and water to inflict mass starvation.

In a thoroughly hypocritical statement on Wednesday, New Zealand's Foreign Minister Winston Peters, who leads the right-wing nationalist NZ First Party, said the government was "extremely concerned by indications that Israel is planning a ground offensive into Rafah." He urged Israel not to do so, and to abide by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling that Israel must take steps "to comply with its obligations under the Genocide Convention."

At the Wellington rally, a Palestinian speaker pointed out that despite the ICJ's finding that the charge of

genocide against Israel is plausible, "most of the Western countries' leaders, including New Zealand, what have they done? They cut funding from UNRWA, which is the main source of [aid] for Palestinians in Gaza, and they sent troops to fight Yemen."

The speaker recalled that Israel justified its assault on Al-Shifa hospital and other medical facilities with lies that these were being used as bases by Hamas militants. "Then they targeted more and more hospitals, schools, mosques, churches, even the people walking in the road. No one stopped them. It is very clear, as per the ICJ, they are committing genocide."

Green Party co-leader Marama Davidson and Te Pahi Mōri's Debbie Ngarewa-Packer spoke outside parliament, calling for the closure of the Israeli embassy and sanctions against Israel, and for the government to demand a permanent ceasefire.

Both parties, however, are allied with the Labour Party and were prepared to enter a coalition with Labour had it received enough votes in last October's election. Labour is now cynically calling for a ceasefire and for the government to back the ICJ case against Israel. However, Labour remained the caretaker government until late November, during which time it studiously avoided condemnation of Israel.

Over the past six years, the Labour government strengthened New Zealand's military and intelligence alliance with US imperialism, the main backer of the Zionist state. It also sent troops to Europe to assist in training Ukrainian conscripts for NATO's proxy war against Russia; and maintained New Zealand's troop presence in Bahrain, embedded with US forces.

Labour's foreign affairs spokesman David Parker attempted to address Tuesday's rally. After feigning

sympathy with the protests and the Palestinian people, he was drowned out by boos when he declared Israel had the “right to defend itself.” Labour MP Phil Twyford was similarly shouted down at an Auckland rally in November, with chants of “shame on Labour!”

Dania, who is Palestinian, told the *World Socialist Web Site* that Parker “needs to re-read international law.” Israel had no right to protect itself from people it is occupying, “that it shouldn’t be occupying in the first place. It’s there in black and white.”

She said the protests “are good because they show that the government doesn’t represent us. They only care about money, trade. Whoever lobbies them and pays them enough money, they’ll do what they say. And I feel that it is important for my daughter, for example, to show her what standing up for justice and those who don’t have a voice looks like.”

Dania believed that the National government was concerned not to “lose trade deals with the US” and was “afraid to offend the Israeli embassy. I don’t understand why it’s here in the first place. So I am quite disappointed.

“I’ve got family in Gaza. We’ve unfortunately lost a few of them.” Dania had been in touch with some family members who had escaped to Rafah. “Now they don’t have any communication, it’s very hard. I cannot comprehend how people can see children starving and justify this. It’s atrocious.”

Dania denounced the hypocrisy of the media criticising the use of the phrase “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free,” but refusing to criticise Zionists who want to drive out all Palestinians from their homes. “What we mean is: we just want to be free from the Mediterranean to the Jordan Sea without checkpoints, without manipulation, our children strip-searched. What kind of country does that?”

The New Zealand political establishment is clearly shaken by the ongoing protests, and the media is seeking to delegitimise them. On February 11, TVNZ interviewer Jack Tame tried to smear Green MP Chloe Swarbrick as antisemitic for joining in the chant, “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.”

Tame declared that “many Jewish people consider that to be a hateful and inflammatory phrase.” In fact, large numbers of Jewish people, throughout the world, have joined the anti-genocide protests, in many cases playing a leading role.

Meanwhile, the police presence at protests across New Zealand is becoming larger. Last week, police officers violently attacked a small protest outside the Port of Lyttelton near Christchurch against ZIM, the Israeli shipping company that has pledged to use all its resources to support the Israeli military.

The protest organisers, Palestine Solidarity Network Aotearoa, lodged a complaint over the incident. It said in a statement that “police arrested 7 people and pepper-sprayed many, including senior citizens participating peacefully in solidarity with the people of Palestine.” A video of the attack has been widely shared on social media.



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