

Protests in New Zealand denounce government's complicity in genocide in Gaza

Tom Peters
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As Israel's genocide in Gaza enters its sixth month, protests are continuing in New Zealand, as part of the ongoing worldwide demonstrations involving millions of people. Weekly rallies are being held, not only in the major cities—Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin—but in more than a dozen centres across the country.

Hundreds of people assembled outside parliament in Wellington on Wednesday, banging empty pots to represent the starvation that is being inflicted on hundreds of thousands of people in the Gaza Strip. More than 30,700 people have been killed and 71,000 wounded by Israel's bombardment, mostly women and children.

The death toll is expected to rise significantly as hunger and disease spread, and as Israel prepares a murderous assault on the city of Rafah, where more than a million displaced and homeless people are gathered. The latest wave of protests followed last week's "flour massacre," in which Israeli troops opened fire on hundreds of people seeking food aid in northern Gaza, killing more than a hundred.

The National Party-led coalition government in New Zealand, notwithstanding its hypocritical calls for a ceasefire, is actively supporting the mass murder and ethnic cleansing being carried out by the Netanyahu regime.

New Zealand has joined the United States and its allies in suspending funding for UNRWA, the agency on which people in Gaza rely for food. Prime Minister Christopher Luxon's government has also sent military personnel to the Middle East to assist in selecting targets for the US-led bombing of Yemen, in retaliation against Yemeni efforts to disrupt supplies for Israel's military.

On February 29, the same day as the flour massacre,

Luxon and Foreign Minister Winston Peters issued a statement designating the political wing of Hamas as a terrorist entity. Previously, successive governments had only labelled the military wing of Hamas as such. Peters declared that the October 7 operation by Hamas meant this distinction could no longer be made.

The statement was intended to bolster the Zionist regime's propaganda that its war against civilians is aimed at eliminating "terrorists." The Luxon government has refused to condemn the atrocities being committed every day by the Israel Defence Forces against the people of Gaza and the West Bank.

Otago University international relations professor Robert Patman noted on Radio NZ that the statement represented "a tilt towards the Biden-Netanyahu position, that Hamas is a central problem, and ignores the context of Israel's occupation and blockade of Palestinian territories."

The opposition Labour Party and the Greens made no criticism of the statement. In fact, the process to designate the whole of Hamas as a terrorist group was begun by the previous Labour government, which sought official advice on the matter while it was still in office, before the October 14 election.

People attending the protest outside parliament denounced the government's blatant hypocrisy.

Fred, a gardener and landscaper, told the WSWs that the government's position was "weak and wishy-washy. They say they're calling for a ceasefire but they're not doing much." The suspension of funding for UNRWA was "reprehensible," he added.

While making clear he did not support Hamas, Fred said the government was "on the side of the oppressor and the one committing genocide... a state that is carpet bombing civilians, blowing up hospitals." The taking of hostages by Hamas was "reprehensible," but "to

murder so many children from the sky, and through starvation, is disgusting.” He pointed out that the blockade of Gaza had been going on for decades.

Asked why New Zealand troops had been sent to support the bombing of Yemen, Fred said this was to remain “chummy with the US and all the other superpowers, because we don’t want to not sell lamb and milk powder, and things like that.” He added: “It’s embarrassing, it’s shameful, but it’s not surprising, given the history of New Zealand.” He did not think the position would be substantially different if Labour was still in power.

Successive Labour and National governments have joined the US-led imperialist wars against Afghanistan and Iraq.

Amanda said that the government had seized on the Gaza genocide to get closer to the US, “to further their goals of joining AUKUS and become part of this global struggle. It seems like we’re being sucked into not just one, but several conflicts at the moment.” New Zealand is considering joining the AUKUS (Australia-UK-US) military agreement, which is aimed at militarising the region in preparation for war against China.

She did not see “a huge amount of difference” between Labour and National, pointing out that it took “several weeks” for Labour leader Chris Hipkins to call for a ceasefire—which only happened after Labour had lost the election.

Alister said it was “incongruous” to label Hamas a terrorist organisation at a time when the International Court of Justice had said there was a plausible case that Israel was carrying out genocide in Gaza. The claim of terrorism was being made to justify “not supporting the Palestinians properly, in full sincerity, with the refugee crisis and everything like that.” He added that Luxon was “trying to smear the peace movement” as supporters of terrorism.

Alister noted that there was very little assistance for Palestinian refugees from countries in the Middle East and more broadly. “Why isn’t the West being more active to help? France, Germany, Denmark, New Zealand, Australia—they should all be helping.”

Asked what he thought of the NZ Labour Party’s support for Israel, Alister said he did not follow local politics closely, but pointed to the recent by-election victory of George Galloway in Britain, who ran against Labour and the Conservatives with a campaign

denouncing the major parties’ support for Israel. He said this sent a message to the “political duopoly,” which was refusing to listen to the mass protests against the genocide.



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