

Protests continue in New Zealand as government maintains support for US-Israel genocide in Gaza

Tom Peters
8 April 2024

Thousands of people protested across New Zealand last week to oppose the genocide against the people of Gaza, which has lasted six months.

More than 2,000 people marched to parliament in Wellington on Sunday, following protests earlier in the week in Auckland, Christchurch, Dunedin and other centres. Nationwide demonstrations by school students last Friday, focusing on the government's refusal to address the climate crisis, also featured demands for an end to the Gaza genocide and a free Palestine.

Israel's bombing and blockade of the Gaza Strip have killed more than 33,000 people. Once the missing are added, the true toll is likely over 44,000. A further 75,815 people have been wounded, and 1.9 million people have been displaced. Hundreds of thousands face imminent starvation and dozens of children have already died due to lack of food.

On April 8, New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters delivered a hypocritical statement to the United Nations General Assembly, saying that New Zealand had supported the UN resolution calling for "an immediate ceasefire for the month of Ramadan, leading to a lasting sustainable ceasefire."

Since that resolution was passed, Israel has only intensified its war crimes, including with the decimation of Al-Shifa Hospital and the murder of World Central Kitchen aid workers. The major powers have not deviated from their support for the Zionist regime.

Peters called on Israel not to invade Rafah, where most of Gaza's population is now concentrated, and stated: "Palestinian civilians continue to bear the brunt of Israel's military actions, humanitarian and medical workers are being killed, and health facilities and vital

infrastructure have been destroyed."

Protesters, however, denounced the National Party-led coalition government for its complicity in the genocide. Along with the opposition Labour Party, the government supports Israel's assault on Gaza under the pretext of "self-defence."

Speaking to the *Platform* media outlet on Thursday, far-right ACT Party leader and government minister David Seymour repeated the lie that Israel had "made every effort to make sure that they only target the terrorists, but the terrorists keep hiding behind the people."

New Zealand troops have been sent to the Middle East to assist in the US-led bombing of Yemen, in retaliation against Yemeni forces' attempts to disrupt the supply of weapons going to Israel. The government has also rejected calls by charities and NGOs for humanitarian visas to be granted to hundreds of Palestinians trapped in Gaza who have family in New Zealand.

At the Wellington protest on Sunday, a woman from Egypt, who asked not to be named, told the *World Socialist Web Site* that "all the governments are shameful" in their response to Gaza. "It's just disgraceful what's happening and no one's doing anything about it."

She condemned the Egyptian government and others in the Middle East for "allowing the aid for Israel's occupying army to pass through their lands." Only Yemen had opposed this, while richer and more powerful states were "turning their back" on the Palestinians. Across the world, she said, the protests had shown "there is a gap between the leaders and the people that they should be representing."

Commenting on the murder of aid workers by Israel, she said: “This is a genocide. They are killing anyone who is helping. They are bombing everything. They destroyed Al Shifa hospital, put it out of service.”

She noted that the Israeli regime was not hiding its intentions. “They’re saying: ‘we’re going to take the whole of Gaza, it’s ours.’ They’re preparing to build settlements.”

She supported the call by the Palestinian trade unions for strikes and other actions to block military supplies going to Israel, pointing out that if the supply of petrol from the Arab world was stopped, “that would definitely help.”

Amy, a schoolteacher, told the WSWS that she has joined other friends to raise funds to help a man trapped in Gaza, named Yahya, who is desperately seeking to cross the Rafah border. Egyptian authorities are charging individuals 7,000 Euros (more than \$NZ12,500) to cross the border. “They’re being extorted, because it’s usually about \$300 to cross, and so there’s thousands and thousands of campaigns online for people to get them out of Gaza,” she explained.

Speaking about the New Zealand government’s refusal to grant visas, Amy said: “I don’t feel like I’ve got any words for it. It’s as if they have no humanity and no interest in these people’s lives. I feel as though they look at people in Gaza as sub-human.”

She said Immigration Minister Erica Stanford “posts her school visits and all this fluffy stuff on the internet, while kids are dying and we’ve got Palestinian families here who can’t get their family to safety.”

Meanwhile, the killing of aid workers showed that Israel was seeking to “totally debilitate” Palestinians and remove “anyone who can provide anything for them.”

Tina, also a teacher, said Israel was carrying out colonisation: “the erasure and displacement of people, so that they disconnect themselves from their communities, their identity, their culture and their language.” She compared it to the violent colonisation of New Zealand and the treatment of indigenous Māori.

She added that the United States was supporting the genocide because it wanted “control over the resources of the Middle East, and wealth, and power and money.” Tina agreed that the struggle against the war was connected with the struggle against capitalism.

The ongoing protests by millions of people worldwide point to deeply-ingrained opposition to war and genocide. But the fact that they have been ignored by the US and its allies, which continue to back Israel, shows the urgent need for a new political perspective.

The organisers of the Wellington protest called on those in attendance to write letters to parliament to demand that the government stop supporting the Israeli war machine. At previous rallies, the platform has been given to politicians from the Labour Party, who have been booed because of the party’s well-known support for Israel. The past six months have shown that the political establishment is completely impervious to the will of the majority.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in New Zealand is holding a webinar on April 16, at 6:00 p.m., to discuss the way forward, in opposition to the pseudo-left organisations that are limiting the anti-war movement to making appeals to capitalist politicians, and the union bureaucracy, which is preventing strike actions to stop the supply of weapons for Israel and the US.

The IYSSE is calling for the mobilisation of the international working class to stop this genocide, and the developing third world war, on the basis of a socialist program. We call on workers and students to register to attend and to help publicise this important online meeting.



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