

# New Zealand teachers, nurses, doctors and all workers must unite against austerity and war

Socialist Equality Group (New Zealand)

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In recent weeks more than 60,000 teachers, nurses, doctors and other healthcare workers have joined nationwide strikes in New Zealand against the attempts by the National Party-led government to drive down their wages and eviscerate public health and education services.

Some 20,000 high school teachers held a one-day strike on August 20. This was followed by two one-day strikes by 36,000 nurses this month. In addition, 5,500 senior doctors struck on September 23-24, and about 40,000 primary teachers and school staff will strike on October 23. In each case, the government has offered pay rises of between 1 and 2 percent per year—a significant pay cut relative to the soaring cost of living, with inflation currently 2.7 percent and food prices up 5 percent in the last year.

These disputes stand at a crossroads. The roughly 100,000 workers involved—more than 3 percent of the country's workforce—confront an intransigent ruling class, which is determined to use health workers and educators to set a benchmark for drastic wage reductions across the entire public sector and private industries.

Prime Minister Christopher Luxon's right-wing government is extremely unpopular and workers are being driven into significant struggles. But anger and militancy, by themselves, are not sufficient. The only force capable of defeating the government's agenda is an organised, mass movement of the working class, based on a socialist perspective.

The Socialist Equality Group also warns that as long as workers remain trapped in the strait-jacket of the pro-capitalist union bureaucracy, they will be divided, isolated and sold out.

Workers can only move forward by building new organisations—Independent rank-and-file committees—to take their struggles into their own hands, in opposition to the union bureaucracy and all the capitalist parties. Such committees must provide a forum for workers to democratically discuss and implement the political and industrial strategy necessary to defend living standards and oppose militarism and war.

New Zealand workers need to link their struggles with those in other countries, who face the same attacks. The imperialist powers, led by the United States, intend to save capitalism by lowering workers' living standards and by violently redividing the world. Millions of workers and young people in France, Britain, the US, Sri Lanka—to name just a few examples—have taken part in mass protests and strikes against soaring social inequality, dictatorship, as well as the genocide in Gaza.

economy has staggered from Zealand's crisis next. It shrank 1.1 percent in the year to June and will deteriorate further as it is hit by 15 percent tariffs from the United States and the global slowdown. The Luxon government is determined that workers will pay the price through historic attacks on public services, jobs and wages.

Already, there is a profound social crisis: unemployment stands at 5.2 percent, with new job losses announced every week; one in five children are living in poverty and one tenth of the population is reliant on foodbanks to survive.

The situation in hospitals and schools is extremely dire. More than a third of hospital shifts have been short-staffed over the past three years. Tens of thousands of patients are being forced to wait for months or even years for vital operations. Similarly, more than a third of schools have teachers working in areas for which they are not trained, because of a lack of staff.

While starving public health and education, the government has allocated \$12 billion over four years to the armed forces. Military spending is being doubled in order to integrate New Zealand into the unfolding world war of which the US-Israeli war in Gaza and the wider Middle East is one front. The imperialist powers, led by the US, seek to "solve" the crisis of capitalism by violently redividing the world's markets and resources.

As a minor imperialist power, NZ is already involved: NZ soldiers are in Britain training Ukrainian conscripts for the US-NATO war against Russia, and in the Middle East to assist in the US bombing of Yemen. Now the government, supported by Labour and the unions, is preparing to join the accelerating US-led drive to war against China.

The working class must respond with its own, socialist strategy to oppose war and austerity. This requires a political struggle against all the capitalist parties—including the Labour Party, the Greens and Te Pati Maori—as well as the trade union bureaucracy, which share responsibility for the crisis in public hospitals and schools.

The 2017-2023 Labour Party-led coalition, which included the Greens, refused to adequately fund health and education, and sought to freeze wages, provoking repeated nationwide strikes by nurses and teachers in 2018, 2019 and 2021. While telling workers there was "no money" for vital public services, Jacinda Ardern's government exploited the COVID-19 pandemic to hand out tens of billions of dollars to big business in subsidies and direct bailouts.

The New Zealand Nurses Organisation, the Post-Primary

Teachers' Association and the NZEI (the primary teachers' union) played the central role in enforcing these policies and preventing a sustained and unified movement against the Ardern government. They limited industrial action to tokenistic one-day or two-day actions, while negotiating in secret with the government for months on end, with the aim of persuading workers that they had no alternative to accepting sellout agreements.

Middle class, pseudo-left organisations like the International Socialist Organisation, played their part in seeking to disarm workers by glorifying Labour and its allies, while vehemently opposing any independent action by workers that challenges the authority of the union bureaucracy.

The unions ceased to be genuine workers' organisations decades ago. They are led by upper middle class officials who are organically hostile to the class struggle and tied by a thousand threads to capitalism.

The Socialist Equality Group calls on healthcare workers and school staff to take control of their struggles by building rank-and-file workplace committees, democratically controlled by workers themselves.

Such committees should be established in every workplace. They must fight to overcome the divisions imposed by the unions and to coordinate the struggles of healthcare and school staff with workers in transportation, meat processing, forestry, manufacturing and across the public sector.

The International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), an initiative of the Trotskyist movement, provides the means for workers to organise across borders against the capitalist oligarchy. Teachers and healthcare workers in New Zealand should work with the Australian Committee for Public Education and the Health Workers' Rank-and-File Committee, which were established by the Socialist Equality Party.

The Socialist Equality Group pledges to give every political assistance to workers in New Zealand who want to establish rank-and-file committees, independent of the trade unions and capitalist parties. We propose the following demands:

### **Expropriate the super-rich!**

Workers must reject the lie that there is no money for social programs and jobs. The tens of billions of dollars controlled by the corporate and financial elite must be expropriated to fund the vast expansion of schools, hospitals, housing and other vital infrastructure, and eliminate poverty and inequality.

### **No money for war! End the genocide in Gaza!**

The money being squandered on military spending must be redirected to meet the urgent needs of working people. Workers must mobilise to stop the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza, including

through strikes at ports and other actions to shut down supplies and funding for Israel. Workers should demand an end to the alliance with US imperialism, oppose the anti-China war propaganda being churned out by the media and the capitalist parties, and take action to halt the mad preparations to join what would inevitably become a nuclear war against China.

### **Defend immigrants!**

Rank-and-file committees must defend immigrant workers, who are being viciously scapegoated for social inequality and unemployment, by the government and opposition parties and the unions. Immigrants and refugees must be allowed to live, study and work in New Zealand with full citizenship rights.

The NZNO has agitated against migrants and sought to stoke racial divisions based on slanderous claims that non-M?ori healthcare workers are racist or uncaring. These positions mirror the anti-immigrant poison promoted by far-right parties like NZ First, and must be rejected by healthcare workers along with every form of nationalism, racism and xenophobia.

### **For world socialism: Build the Socialist Equality Group**

Governments throughout the world are engaged in a social counter-revolution: they are plunging the world into barbarism and war, and destroying all the gains workers have made over more than a century of struggle.

The parties, unions and pseudo-left groups who claim that the capitalist system can be reformed in the interests of workers are lying. It must be abolished and society reorganised along socialist lines. The wealth and resources created by the working class must be taken out of the billionaires' hands and placed in public ownership, under workers' democratic control, so they can be used to meet human needs.

The immediate task facing workers is to build the necessary revolutionary leadership, in every country, to fight for the unification of the international working class based on a socialist program.

We urge everyone who agrees with this statement to share it widely, and to contact the Socialist Equality Group, which is fighting to build the New Zealand section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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