

WSWS speaks with workers in New Zealand's “mega strike”

Tom Peters

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The *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed several people attending Thursday's rally in Auckland as part of the so-called “mega strike” involving more than 100,000 public sector workers—New Zealand's largest strike in more than 40 years.

More than 15,000 people—including teachers, firefighters, nurses, doctors, social workers and other healthcare workers—protested in Auckland's Aotea Square and marched down Queen Street. They were joined by many young people, students and retired workers supporting the strike.

The workers are opposing the National Party-led government's attempt to impose historic cuts to their real wages, amid soaring costs for food, housing, electricity and other essential needs. They spoke with WSWS reporters and members of the Socialist Equality Group about rundown and understaffed schools and hospitals, and the broader social crisis that workers confront, including increased homelessness, and the vast inequality created by capitalism.

Many also denounced the New Zealand government's support for the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza and its alliance with the US, as well as the diversion of billions of dollars to the military to prepare for war, at the expense of public services.

A healthcare worker said: “At the top level, they have all the money in the world. Why don't they just stop taking money from low-income people? Take it somehow from the rich people.” She said Prime Minister Christopher Luxon was “another Trump at this end of the world. Squashing the middle class, squashing the lower income [workers]” in favour of the rich.

She pointed out that the cost of dairy products had soared, including butter which is now \$11 or \$12 a block, “yet the CEO of Fonterra [the dairy producer

and one of NZ's biggest companies] is paid \$6 million. How can you justify that?”

She said those on strike, teachers and healthcare workers, “are the heart of any nation: we're the labourers, we're the ones who do all the hard work.”

Commenting on the government's decision to double the military budget, while saying there was no money for public services, she said: “Where's the justice in that? And all these wars and everything are killing innocent people.”

Danielle, who is training to be a teacher, said “we need teacher aides in every classroom because we have so many kids that need support and it's not fair on the teachers to run that whole classroom.”

Asked to respond to claims by Public Service Minister Judith Collins that teachers are privileged, Danielle said, “Until you're actually in the classroom, you will never understand.”

Laura, a learning assistant with 11 years' experience, said more support was needed because “working in the system I sometimes do the job of many.” She said the strike was “not just about the money, it's about the system and it's about our kids missing out on their needs and learning,” including the lack of support for mental health.

Peter, a retired worker supporting the strike, denounced the government for spending money on the military while “letting children starve in the streets. It's a bloody disgrace to chuck money away like that. They've got it all wrong.”

The Socialist Equality Group distributed hundreds of copies of its statement, “Workers need a socialist perspective to fight pay cuts, austerity and war,” which warns that the trade union bureaucracy is preparing a sellout, explains the need for workers to build new organisations in the form of rank-and-file workplace

committees, and calls on workers to adopt a socialist program in opposition to the entire political establishment, including the opposition Labour Party and its allies.

We urge workers to attend a public webinar at 4:00pm on November 9, to discuss these urgent issues and the way forward in the fight against pay cuts, austerity and war. Register here to attend.



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