

10,000 public servants to strike against pay cuts in New Zealand

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About 10,000 public servants will join a nationwide strike across New Zealand on Wednesday. It will be the country's largest industrial action since the October 23, 2025 strike by more than 100,000 teachers and healthcare workers.

Pickets or rallies have been announced in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and 13 other cities and towns.

Those participating include workers from the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA), the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), the Ministry for Ethnic Communities (MEC), the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE), and the Ministry of Social Development (MSD).

In each of these departments, workers have been offered a pay rise below the annual rate of inflation, which stood at 4.1 percent for the 12 months to June. Petrol prices increased 27.5 percent, driven up by the criminal US war against Iran, while electricity prices rose by 12 percent.

In the same period wages increased by only 2 percent, and in the public sector 1.7 percent, which follows several years of plummeting real wages.

Prime Minister Christopher Luxon lashed out at the strike on September 1, dismissing it as "politically motivated." The Public Service Association (PSA), which called the strike, is supporting the opposition Labour Party's campaign for the November 7 election.

The National Party-led government is imposing a brutal austerity agenda, which has included cutting wages for teachers and healthcare workers, slashing welfare and public housing entitlements and refusing to properly fund hospitals. Firefighters are holding regular strikes against planned pay cuts and equipment that constantly breaks down.

The government's May budget announced plans for 8,700 more job cuts to reduce the core public sector

workforce by 14 percent. Public Service Commissioner Sir Brian Roche has also recommended that the government take steps to reduce the number of departments and agencies from 42 to 15-20 over the next three to five years.

There is seething anger in the working class over the deepening social crisis and the gutting of public services. The union bureaucracy, however, has played the key role in preventing any organised resistance by workers.

On September 2, the PSA's Duane Leo told Radio NZ (RNZ) that workers were striking to demand "a fair pay deal" and said, "this government is a clear and present danger to PSA members and working New Zealanders." He noted that the DIA had offered "less than 1 percent for the majority of staff" and MSD's offer to its workforce was only slightly higher.

When the interviewer stated that most workers in NZ are not getting a 4 percent pay increase to match inflation, Leo replied: "We're not asking for 4 percent... what we're asking [for] is more than 1 percent." In other words, the PSA leadership is not even demanding a real wage rise, just a slightly less severe cut!

The PSA has sought to limit the impact of the September 9 strike as much as possible: it will go for about 5 hours for most workers and only 2 hours for MSD staff.

The union will then return to negotiations with the government to devise a series of sellout agreements for each agency.

That is what happened following the October 2025 "mega strike." The unions refused to organise any further joint strikes and pressured the teachers, nurses and other healthcare workers to accept real wage cuts. In February, the PSA pushed through a pay increase for 12,300 allied health workers of just 2.5 percent in the

first 12 months and 2 percent in the second year—well below the increase in the cost of living.

The PSA is promoting the illusion that a change of government will improve conditions for workers. Speaking at a PSA event on September 2, Hipkins declared that under Labour “there will be no restructure or cost cutting unless we understand the consequences of every decision” and agreed with the PSA that there should be a “national interest test” for any cuts. Such statements do not commit Labour to anything.

The Labour Party intends to keep core government spending below 33 percent of GDP, which is almost identical to the present level of 32.6 percent.

At the same time, Labour agrees with National that military spending should roughly double from 1 to 2 percent of GDP, as the ruling class seeks to integrate New Zealand into US-led imperialist wars in the Middle East, against Russia and war plans against China.

PSA leader Fleur Fitzsimons also supports the military spend-up. She declared last year that New Zealand must “build a modern, combat-ready defence force,” and singled out China as a threat.

In short, a Labour government backed by the unions in New Zealand will pursue similar policies to Labour in Britain and Labor in Australia: attacks on public services and more money for war.

The last Labour government lost the 2023 election in a landslide as living costs soared. Nurses and teachers held nationwide strikes but the unions imposed below-inflation wage agreements. As the election approached, Hipkins announced plans to cut a further \$4 billion from public services (about 2 percent) in addition to previous cuts of around \$4 billion.

In an August 29, 2023, interview with RNZ, the PSA’s Duane Leo said the economic situation was “tough” and Labour’s proposal was “a reasonable, prudent move to tighten the belt.” He said the union would work with the Labour government to “find these efficiencies.”

To carry out a real struggle against austerity and militarism, workers must oppose all the capitalist parties, including Labour and its allies, the Greens and Te P?ti M?ori. Workers must also rebel against the union apparatus, which does not function as a workers’ organisation but as an enforcement agency for the state. It seeks to isolate and divide workers and extract

concessions from them, while promoting the imperialist agenda of the ruling class.

The Socialist Equality Group calls on workers to build rank-and-file committees that they control democratically, independent of the PSA and other union officials. These committees will provide a means for workers to discuss and formulate their own demands and to organise the broadest possible industrial campaign. They must break the isolation imposed by the union bureaucracy and fight to unite all public and private sector workers, who confront historic attacks on their wages and living standards.

Workers’ committees in New Zealand should also forge links with workers in Australia and other countries by building the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. This will strengthen the position of working people against the nationalism and xenophobia that is being stoked by the ruling elite to divide workers and prepare for war.

Most importantly, workers must adopt a socialist perspective. Capitalism is destroying jobs, public services and living standards and plunging the world into barbarism. The system of private profit must be abolished and society reorganised on a rational, planned basis in order to meet human needs.



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