

# 10,000 New Zealand public servants hold nationwide strike

Tom Peters  
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About 10,000 public servants in New Zealand took part in a half-day strike on September 9 against the National Party-led government's moves to drive down wages. The government also intends to cut about 8,700 jobs across government departments—14 percent of the core public sector workforce.

Demonstrations were held in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and many other towns and cities. It was the biggest strike since last October's "mega strike" by over 100,000 teachers and healthcare workers.

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

The combined action was a significant expression of rising anger over the government's austerity measures. The ruling elite is starving essential public services in order to funnel more money to the rich and to boost the military budget in preparation for war.

All public servants have received pay offers well below the 4.1 percent rate of inflation. DIA staff have been offered just 0.8 percent, and the Public Service Association (PSA) says offers to the other departments are little better. MBIE workers received a zero percent pay increase in 2025. Overall, public sector wages increased by only 1.7 percent in the 12 months to June.

About 5,000 of those who walked out on Wednesday were MSD staff, who administer what remains of the country's social welfare system. They were striking for the first time in about 30 years. The PSA, however, limited the strike to just two hours for MSD employees, while other departments struck for about five hours.

The union leadership is preparing to sell these workers out. Its position is two-faced. PSA national

secretary Fleur Fitzsimons told a strike rally in Wellington: "We need bargaining-table offers that keep pace with the cost of living increases facing public servants."

Later in the day she contradicted herself, telling Radio NZ (RNZ) that if the government made "the same offer that health and education workers got of 2.5 percent [in the first year] and 2 percent [in the second year] and lump sum payments and clear commitments to work constructively with the union, I think that would cut it."

In other words, the PSA will pressure public servants to accept the real wage cuts that the unions imposed following last October's strike. The PSA pushed through a below-inflation deal for 12,300 allied health workers in February.

The PSA turned the Wellington strike rally near parliament, attended by about 1,000 people, into an election rally for the opposition Labour Party and the Greens.

Labour leader Chris Hipkins said if he leads the government after the November 7 election, "We will not be making the cuts to the public service that this National government has committed New Zealand to"—a carefully worded statement that leaves the door open for different cuts. He told public servants, "You deserve better," but made no actual pledge to lift wages.

Green Party MP Julie Anne Genter said "this government has deliberately assaulted and attacked public service workers." She added that welfare recipients, migrants and Māori were being scapegoated "for the higher cost of living, when in fact it is the super-rich and highly concentrated corporate power that is dismantling our democracy."

These statements are cynical and duplicitous. The last

Labour-Greens government, in office from 2017 to 2023, effectively froze wages across the public sector, with the assistance of the unions, which sold out strikes by teachers and nurses. Child poverty and homelessness increased while the rich got richer.

During the 2023 election campaign, Hipkins promised to cut more than 2 percent of spending across government departments, which the PSA agreed to facilitate. The Labour Party lost that election by a landslide.

A worker at MBIE in Wellington told the *World Socialist Web Site* that his department was already understaffed and any more cuts would have “tangible effects on regulation. We are set up in order to regulate and maintain standards in things like housing. If our performance suffers, we’ll just end up with housing problems.”

He continued: “If one wants to be cynical, one could say that if the government reduces performance in the department, they will turn around and say: this department is somehow inefficient, nothing to do with us, perhaps we should just drop the regulation altogether.”

He rejected claims by the government that AI technology could replace the functions of many workers, calling this a “reckless” gamble. “The intent is already there to make the cuts, this is just an excuse.”

Asked whether he thought a Labour government would be any different, the worker said “there’s always hope, but they get into power and they just don’t deliver.” He doubted that Labour would take steps that would make life more affordable, such as introducing rent controls.

The WSWS warns that Labour and its allies, including the Greens, have no genuine differences with the National Party-led government’s program of austerity and militarism. A real struggle against wage cuts and to defend jobs can only be undertaken in opposition to all the capitalist parties.

Labour has agreed to keep overall government spending roughly the same. It agrees with National on pouring billions of dollars into the military to strengthen New Zealand’s integration into US imperialist wars and war plans against Russia and China.

The PSA’s Fitzsimons last year demanded increased military spending and singled out China as a threat. The

money for war will come at the expense of hospitals, welfare programs, education, and workers’ wages.

The Greens are calling for a 2.5 percent wealth tax on the very rich and a modest tax increase on very large corporations. Labour has ruled out such policies, but even if they were implemented they would not raise enough revenue to address the crisis in schools, hospitals and other services. The Green Party also has no objection to increasing the military budget, which it supported during the last government.

The struggle against austerity cannot proceed within the straitjacket of the PSA. The critical lesson from the repeated sellouts and betrayals by the union apparatus, year after year, is that workers must build new organisations: rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled by workers themselves, and independent of the union bureaucracy and the capitalist parties.

Such committees must strive to link public sector workers with workers in every industry, as well as those in Australia, across the Pacific and internationally, who confront the same attacks.

Workers must adopt a socialist perspective that consciously connects the fight against job and wage cuts with the fight against imperialist war, and strives to abolish the capitalist system which is the root cause of both. We urge workers to contact the Socialist Equality Group to discuss these urgent issues.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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