

New Zealand actor goes on hunger strike over government's complicity in Gaza genocide

John Braddock, Tom Peters
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Will Alexander, a teacher and former actor on the popular New Zealand TV series *Shortland Street* is over a week into a hunger strike which he has vowed to continue until the government stops supporting Israel's genocide in Gaza.

Alexander, who is part of the Palestinian Solidarity Network Aotearoa (PSNA), began the action at a rally in Christchurch on May 18 and has since been promoting it on social media and appearances around the country.

In a press statement, he explained that he had been moved by the killing of six-year-old Palestinian girl Hind who saw her family die when an Israeli tank hit their car. Hind managed to call the Red Crescent, which sent an ambulance. The Israeli forces attacked the ambulance, killing everyone inside.

The young girl was found dead two weeks later in the car surrounded by the decomposing bodies of her family members. Alexander noted that Hind was one of more than 14,000 Palestinian children killed by Israel so far, not including those still buried under the rubble.

Alexander said in his statement: "I can no longer stand by while my own government is complicit in an on-going genocide committed by Israel against the Palestinian people. Innocent children are being killed in the thousands. Israel has violated international law for decades with full impunity granted by Western governments like New Zealand."

He laid out three demands for the National Party-led government: withdraw NZ troops from the Red Sea, stop NZ-based company Rakon from supplying components for weapons used by Israel, and resume and then double humanitarian funding for UNRWA.

New Zealand troops have been deployed to the Red Sea to support its ally, the United States, in bombing Yemen for disrupting commercial shipments linked to Israel. "It doesn't matter whether our troops are cleaning latrines or pressing the button. Their presence there means that New Zealand is actively supporting the bombing of Yemen just to keep weapons flowing into Israel," Alexander said.

Rakon is a multinational company headquartered in Auckland that manufactures components used in bombs and

missiles. Alexander noted that Israel "has rained down some of the most advanced weaponry on 2.3 million captive civilians for seven long months."

Not only is New Zealand supporting Israel, but "we have also suspended humanitarian funding to UNRWA despite a famine caused by Israel's months long siege on Gaza. We shouldn't be pausing funding—we should be doubling it," he said. NZ suspended funding to UNRWA in January.

Alexander's action has generated a considerable amount of support, including at recent pro-Palestine protests in Wellington and hundreds of posts, for and against, on social media. Some right-wing pundits, led by broadcaster Sean Plunket have denounced him as engaging in "narcissistic virtue signalling."

The government, a coalition of the National Party and the far-right ACT and New Zealand First, is clearly worried about the widespread opposition to the genocide, and support for the demands raised by Alexander. Speaking to *Newshub*, Prime Minister Christopher Luxon defended the government's positions and said it was "a real shame" Alexander felt the need to go on a hunger strike.

Luxon refused to directly address Alexander's demands, stating that the government had called for a "ceasefire" and for "peace and stability in the region." The calls for a ceasefire are entirely cynical given the government's endorsement of Israel's assault on Gaza and its ongoing practical support for Israel's war machine and US imperialism. Alexander received a similarly dismissive response from Foreign Minister Winston Peters when he met with him last Thursday.

The government is fully aligned with the US-led wars in the Middle East and Ukraine and the escalating confrontation with China in the Pacific. Luxon told Radio NZ on May 21 that New Zealand "supports international law," but refused to specifically endorse the recommendation to the international Criminal Court to issue arrest warrants for Israeli leaders over their horrific war crimes.

Alexander admitted after meeting Peters and several

foreign affairs officials that he was “not convinced” it had made any difference. He told Radio NZ: “I feel as though they did a lot of nodding and smiling and writing things down, however, I don’t know whether it will have made any difference or whether the message will have got through.”

He said the discussion focused mainly on UNRWA and why NZ hadn’t funded UNRWA sooner when other countries like Japan, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland and most of the countries who withdrew their funding had reinstated it. “I was saying we need to bring that funding forward because UNRWA doesn’t need it in June, or late June, they need it now,” Alexander said. Peters has not announced a decision on whether New Zealand’s next contribution to UNRWA will go ahead on June 30.

There is no doubting Alexander’s idealism and sincerity. Clearly, along with people around the world, he has been genuinely moved by the massacre of thousands of children in Gaza and is seeking to do something “practical” to try and stop it. Should he follow through with his determination to continue the hunger strike, he is placing himself in danger of a medical emergency or even death.

The WSWS urges Alexander and those who support his protest to take a different political path: namely, to turn towards the mobilisation of the working class based on a socialist program to stop imperialist war and genocide. As Alexander’s appeals to the New Zealand government have already shown, individual protests—even in the extreme form of a hunger strike—will not change the minds of the war criminals.

Chairman of the WSWS editorial board David North elaborated on this issue in a lecture on the tragic death of Aaron Bushnell, who committed suicide on February 25 in front of the Israeli Embassy in Washington DC. Bushnell, an active-duty serviceman immolated himself having earlier declared: “I have been complicit in the violent domination of the world, and I will never get the blood off my hands.”

Addressing those who endorsed Bushnell’s suicide, including Cornel West and Chris Hedges, North said: “They are contributing to the demoralization and political disorientation of the opposition to the Gaza genocide and the broader struggle against imperialist war. They are counterposing the protest of the individual martyr to the building of a politically conscious mass movement of millions that is necessary to stop and put an end to imperialist barbarism and the capitalist system upon which it is based.”

While ongoing protests by millions of people worldwide point to deeply-felt opposition to war and genocide, they have been ignored by the US and its allies, which continue to back Israel. It is no coincidence that Alexander’s action—a sign of growing frustration and disorientation—should

emerge just as the protest activities promoted by the PSNA and various pseudo-left groups in New Zealand have reached an impasse.

Protest organisers have promoted the perspective of placing pressure on parliament, through petitions and letter-writing campaigns, and calls for boycotts and divestment from Israel. They have also invited MPs from the opposition Labour Party and its allies, the Greens and Te P?ti M?ori, to address protest rallies—even though Labour MPs have at times been booed off the platform, since the previous Labour government endorsed Israel’s genocidal assault on Gaza as “self-defence.”

Appeals are being directed to the very parties responsible for integrating New Zealand into US-led imperialist wars, including the criminal wars against Iraq and Afghanistan, and supporting the US-NATO war against Russia over Ukraine. This is a political dead end.

The anti-war movement can only move forward to the extent that the working class takes its own action, in opposition to Labour and the entire capitalist political establishment, including the trade union apparatus and the pseudo-left organisations that promote it.

The International Committee of the Fourth International, which publishes the WSWS, supports the demand of the Palestinian trade unions for strikes and other actions by workers to shut down the production and supply of weapons for Israel. In every country, including New Zealand, the trade union bureaucracy has played a key role in preventing any such actions.

The way forward is shown by the recent strike vote by 48,000 workers at the University of California in support of students protesting against the Gaza genocide. This has brought workers into direct confrontation with the Biden administration and its servants in the United Auto Workers union, which is seeking to limit the strike and render it harmless, if it cannot be shut down entirely.

This shows the urgent need for new organisations: rank-and-file committees led by workers themselves and independent of the pro-imperialist trade unions. Above all, what is needed is a political leadership, based on the socialist perspective of uniting the working class internationally in mass political strikes to cripple the capitalist war machine.



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