

Thousands protest in New Zealand against Gaza genocide, as Labour lies about its record

Tom Peters
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More than 1,000 people marched in Wellington on Thursday to protest the escalating genocide in the Gaza Strip and the New Zealand government's continued support for Israel and US imperialism. The rally, like many others held across the country since the genocide began last October, was almost completely blacked out by the corporate media.

Well over 37,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, most of them women and children, and tens of thousands more are missing. Entire cities have been bombed into rubble, along with refugee camps, schools and almost all hospitals. Israeli forces have killed hundreds of healthcare and aid workers, and a blockade is leading to mass starvation.

Despite more than eight months of global protests, involving millions of people in every part of the world, Washington and its allies continue to arm Israel and defend its mass slaughter of Palestinians. Now, the Netanyahu regime is preparing to expand the war into Lebanon, with the Biden administration's backing.

New Zealand's National Party-led government has issued hypocritical calls for a ceasefire, while sending troops to the Middle East to assist in the US-led bombing of Yemen to protect supply lines for the Israeli military. At the same time, the government is strengthening NZ's alliance with the US in what is developing as a global war. New Zealand troops are being stationed in Japan and South Korea, as part of preparations for war with China, while in Britain NZ forces continue to train Ukrainian conscripts for the US-NATO proxy war against Russia.

The June 27 "All Out for Gaza" rally, organised by several Palestinian solidarity groups, demanded that the government condemn Israel and call for an end to the genocide; impose sanctions on Israel; recognise Palestinian statehood; increase funding for UNRWA,

and grant visas to people in Gaza with family members in New Zealand.

These demands were presented outside parliament to MPs from the opposition Labour Party and its ally the Green Party, which used the opportunity to posture as opponents of genocide and war.

Labour MP Phil Twyford denounced Netanyahu as a "war criminal" and stated that Labour had been calling for a ceasefire "for the last eight months." This is a lie. For more than a month, while Labour was still leading the government, it supported the genocide as an act of "self-defence." During a November 4 protest in Auckland, Twyford himself was booed off the platform amid shouts of "Shame on Labour!"

Twyford also vaguely stated that "the international community must hold the United States accountable for funding Israel's genocidal war." This is entirely cynical. The Labour-led government, which included the Greens, strengthened the alliance with US imperialism against China, and sent troops to Britain in support of the US-NATO proxy war against Russia.

The Socialist Equality Group spoke with several people attending the Wellington march, some of whom noted Twyford's attempt to rewrite history.

Theresa, who had travelled from Whangarei, north of Auckland, said she was "incensed by the way the western world has been complicit in this barbaric atrocity that Israel is conducting on the Palestinian people. The more I learn, the more incensed I become. We are allowing Israel and the United States, the UK, Germany, Australia, to be complicit in this genocide, to fund weapons to pulverise people who are imprisoned."

She said the Labour Party's statements were "just talk," adding: "The Labour Party were actually in power at the time when the Al-Aqsa Flood [the Hamas operation on October 7] happened, but they've also

been in power watching for [much of] the last 75 years as the settler movement occupied Palestinian land. So it's very clear that it's very weak verbal rhetoric."

Theresa explained that Israel had objectives, including "the gasfield off the coast of Gaza" and the planned Ben Gurion Canal as an alternative to the Suez Canal, so that Israel could profit from shipping. "Gaza is in the way of that, according to them."

She said, "the media is complicit by maintaining the narrative that Israel is the victim. It's just insane." She pointed out that New Zealanders had made clear their opposition to the genocide and only "a small minority support the Zionist cause."

The fact that governments around the world were ignoring popular sentiments "tells you that democracy is no longer in existence," she added.

Julie, from Masterton, said the government's response to the genocide and the expanding war in the Middle East was "really scary. I have four sons that are old enough to go to war, and I think that our government is not doing enough to prevent us going into World War III. If Palestinians aren't free, none of us are free."

She agreed with the banners demanding that New Zealand pull out of the US-led RIMPAC military exercise, which began this week. The biennial exercise in Hawaii includes tens of thousands of military personnel from 29 countries, including Israel.

Leanne, from Carterton, said she had been following the coverage of the genocide through Al Jazeera, adding that the Western media was biased and "very right-wing." She decided to protest after "I just got sick to my stomach of seeing broken bodies and innocents killed, and the viciousness that was put upon them by the IDF."

She said the government had tried to ignore the genocide from the beginning, adding, "I don't think they realised that there was such a groundswell of support for Palestine."

In addition to funding UNRWA and recognising the state of Palestine, Leanne said the government should take New Zealand soldiers out of the Middle East and not serve as "pawns in America's game."

Jess, from Whanganui, said she was "in contact with somebody in Khan Younis, and I'm helping to fundraise money for his family to evacuate. He's got his wife and three children, and his parents as well.

He's just moved his tent last week for the eighth time because their safe zones are just getting bombed every day." It can cost \$US5,000 to arrange for just one person to cross the border.



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