

PEACE ACTIVISM IN AOTEAROA, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Joseph Bray

Joseph is a young intersectional activist whose work concerns direct action and the disruption of profit and capital. Their particular focus is against militarisation in the aerospace sector, as well as anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism within Ōtautahi Christchurch - for which their Police file is ever growing.

Kia ora koutou, I'm Joseph Bray and I'm an organiser with Peace Action Ōtautahi and Students for Justice in Palestine at the University of Canterbury. Though the concepts of peace activism and the title of peace activist can sometimes be difficult to comprehend when I describe my views on resistance and protest, which often fall outside of what some might consider the "peaceful" realm.

But, as I believe it, peace is not simply the absence of war nor is it the immediate laying down of arms. This is because the systems of oppression imposed by capitalism around the globe are inherently violent themselves, regardless of whether armed violence is used to maintain them. Peace can only truly be achieved when those systems cease to exist, and the understanding that peace is the ultimate goal, not necessarily the means to an end, is critical to my ideology around "peace activism".

Direct Action

An understanding of direct action inspires and drives a lot of young people towards protest, and it's certainly the area where my activism has focused. While not unique to any age group, I would observe that for my generation there's a general disillusionment with the ability of just voicing opposition and more mild forms of protest to enact any legitimate change. For instance, the current attacks on Te Tiriri, the Regulatory Standards Bill, the reopening of offshore oil and gas exploration, and the inability to take meaningful action against Israel are all wildly unpopular positions of this Government.

But the language of these decisions isn't empathy, it's not truth or transparency, it's not public interest, and it's not democracy. The language of decisions like these from any person in a position of power will always be money. And that can be where appeals to empathy or democracy etc. might fall short, because the driving force is capital. It is necessary then to translate our outrage into a language they understand - if profit is the motivator, then direct action seeks to disrupt the flow of money and make these institutions of oppression unsustainable. But that doesn't mean that legal or vocal protest isn't helpful or necessary by any means, but rather it emphasises the need for utilising both of these avenues to achieve our goals.

The immense success of groups like Palestine Action in the UK have been greatly influential in highlighting the need for direct action, and movements like the Ploughshares and many others have cemented the validity and success of these techniques, which we are more than ready to adopt in the New Zealand context. Largely

missing, perhaps, from our progressive and peace movements domestically are the mass of students and young people. And before we seek to undertake successful large-scale disruptive campaigns, the work of mobilisation and engagement is paramount.

One of the things hammered into us is the notion that New Zealand is an isolated country, and the actions we take here can't and won't affect anything larger around the world. But this couldn't be further from the truth. The ideology of faux isolationism presented especially to young Kiwis only seeks to drive complacency and an acceptance of the status quo, and it's been incredibly effective in subduing a large portion of the younger population from taking action against the systems they observe as oppressive.

And this is part of the reason why with Peace Action Ōtautahi, one critical thing we've been attempting to highlight with our actions is the genuine complicity of our country and companies in violence around the globe. Take for instance the international weapons company NIOA which, among other atrocities, supplies sniper rifles to the Israeli Defence Force (IDF). The opening of their NZ headquarters in Rolleston in late 2024 went largely under the radar. When myself and another activist broke into the facility and chained ourselves to the roof in March 2025, our goal was to bring attention to this company and to dispel the notion of national inculpability-via-isolation.

Targeting Aerospace Industry

Likewise, one of Peace Action Ōtautahi's main focuses at the moment is our national aerospace industry, and the packaging up of military development under the guise of "space exploration". New Zealand is the fourth largest launcher of vertical rockets worldwide, owing entirely to Rocket Lab's launchpads at Mahia Peninsula. Of note, Rocket Lab is launching a network of imaging satellites for BlackSky from Mahia, and that imaging is being used by the IDF to locate civilian targets in Gaza and bomb them.

In October 2025 it was revealed through the Official Information Act that the NZ government was warned that the satellites would be used by Israel to inform attacks in Gaza, and they signed off on them anyway. The complicity of New Zealand in the Palestinian genocide is overt, yet near-constantly failing to reach the mainstream. At the National Aerospace Summit in October 2025, 36 people were arrested as we attempted to blockade the Summit, whose attendees included Defence and Space Minister Judith Collins and Rocket Lab's Peter Beck.

The blockade was phenomenal in bringing these concerns to the mainstream in a way that is unavoidable for the media to report on. Because, again, one of the largest challenges we face in peace activism currently is convincing the general public of the ways in which our country and industries are actively complicit in genocide and systems of oppression around the globe.

It was extremely inspiring to see the growth between the protests at the Summit in 2024 and 2025, and the number of people willing to take direct action and face arrest for opposing genocide and war profiteering. I have such incredible faith that the numbers of people willing to take significant, disruptive, and meaningful action will continue increasing dramatically and hold these systems to account. At the moment, I see organisations like Peace Action as a way to engage those who are looking to enter the sphere of protest and direct action, and as a way to force these national issues to mainstream attention and understanding.

Prioritise Community Over Individualism

The neoliberal corrosion of empathy and focus on individualism certainly manifests itself in the younger generations as a general apathy. And many young men disillusioned with the state of the world are being welcomed into Right-wing extremist circles, told that their problems arise not from the conditions imposed by capitalism or its manifests, but rather from the movements to secure equal rights for women, LGBTQ+, migrants, and other minority groups whose safety and freedom allegedly threatens that of men. But there is a significant portion of the population, and especially of the younger population, who understand these issues and are willing to take action against them, but just haven't had the opportunity to engage or don't know where to begin.

And this only goes to highlight the need to create and maintain community within progressive and activism spheres. Moving through the next decades, these end-stages of capitalism will impose new restrictive and oppressive conditions that will only necessitate solidarity and togetherness. And, of course, while my focus is largely on direct action, not everybody needs to be or should be chaining themselves to the roof of a weapons company, or locked on outside the aerospace summit. The creation and maintenance of genuine community undoubtedly facilitate the contributions of those with skills beyond the direct. Community and community-scale organisation allow for multiple avenues of attack, pressure, communication, recruitment, and any action furthering the cause.

This is the link to make donations for the legal defence of those arrested at the October 2025 Aerospace Summit protest in Christchurch <https://chuffed.org/project/aerospace-blockade>