

## *Protest outside New Zealand's Parliament assails sweeping new Covid mandates.*



By Natasha Frost

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About 3,000 people marched through Wellington, New Zealand's capital, on Tuesday to protest vaccination requirements and coronavirus restrictions, forcing a lockdown of Parliament and closure of local streets.

New Zealand's government has in recent weeks announced sweeping vaccine mandates for about 40 percent of the country's workers, as well as requirements for vaccination certificates to gain access to most nonessential services, including restaurants, gyms and public events. Thousands of people working in health care are expected to lose their jobs on Monday when some of these vaccine mandates go into effect.

The protest, organized by a group that calls itself the Freedom and Rights Coalition, blocked streets in the central city. While many people carried either the New Zealand or the Tino Rangatiratanga flag, which is widely used by Maori advocacy groups, a handful of protesters flew banners in support of former President Donald J. Trump, whose base of supporters in the United States has rallied against vaccine and mask mandates.

At least one person covered their face with a picture of Mr. Trump's face, an apparent shorthand for the resistance to the kind of health restrictions imposed by government officials like New Zealand's prime minister, Jacinda Ardern.

No arrests were made, a police spokesman said.

Before the protests, the New Zealand government had increased security, closing off most access points. Parliament had not locked down this heavily in response to a protest in many decades, a government official told the local news media.

Other demonstrations were held around the country. In Northland, New Zealand's northernmost region, about 50 protesters blocked a police checkpoint for more than an hour, according to a statement from the New Zealand police. One protester bit an officer as the police tried to move protesters off the road, a spokeswoman for the police said.

Covid-related disinformation in New Zealand has increased since August, when the country went into lockdown in response to an outbreak of the Delta variant, according to a working paper published this week by the University of Auckland.

“Covid-19 and vaccination are being used as a kind of Trojan Horse for norm-setting and norm-entrenchment of far-right ideologies,” the paper said.

Ms. Ardern assailed the protests.

“What we saw today was not representative of the vast bulk of New Zealanders,” Ms. Ardern, the country’s prime minister, said.

New Zealanders have been broadly supportive of vaccination efforts, with nearly 90 percent of people aged 12 and up having received at least one dose of a vaccine as of Tuesday.