

The Greens: Adjuncts of US and Australian militarism

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The address by US President Barack Obama to the joint sitting of the Australian parliament on November 17 was part of a turning point in international geopolitical relations. Obama outlined a sweeping US militarist agenda in the Asia-Pacific region aimed at threatening China with war if the Beijing regime does not capitulate to Washington's demands to curb its strategic and economic ambitions. He defined Australia as a critical staging base for US Air Force, Navy and Marine operations.

Prime Minister Julia Gillard had made clear in advance of Obama's speech that the Australian government was unconditionally aligned with US imperialism. In other words, the Obama administration and the Labor government—without any public debate, and behind the backs of the Australian population—have placed Australia on the frontline of a potential confrontation between nuclear-armed states.

Given the immensity of what is underway, there are two indelible images from Obama's parliamentary address. The first was a smiling and awe-struck Greens' member Adam Bandt being the first person to shake the US president's hand as Obama entered the chamber. The second was the no less fawning Greens' leader, Senator Bob Brown, eagerly greeting Obama following his speech and politely asking him to nominate Antarctica for World Heritage status.

These images will endure because they encapsulate the real standpoint of the Greens toward imperialism, the Obama administration, the Labor government they help keep in power, and the perspective of military confrontation with China.

In October 2003, Bob Brown and Greens senator Kerry Nettle portrayed themselves as opponents of US and Australian militarism by interjecting during US President George W. Bush's address to the parliament. In November 2011, nine Green senators and lower house member Bandt sat respectfully through Obama's speech. There was no need to protest, Brown had told journalists, because "circumstances had changed." Brown said of Obama: "We've got a president now who knows a lot more about equality and respect than his predecessor."

Brown made no attempt to justify this claim, because it is unjustifiable. The only significant difference between Bush and

Obama is the big business party to which they belong—Republican or Democrat. In terms of the class interests their administrations serve, they are cut from the same cloth.

The Obama administration dramatically escalated the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan while keeping the Guantánamo Bay prison camp open and launching a global campaign of assassinations and murders. This year, the US has waged a ruthless war against Libya and now unveiled an aggressive and reckless military stance against China. Within the US, it has handed over trillions of dollars to shore-up Wall Street and the banks, while police violence is unleashed against young Occupy protesters demanding social equality. The day before Obama spoke in Canberra, a police-state operation was conducted in New York's Zuccotti Park to break up the first Occupy Wall Street protest, which had sparked a worldwide movement.

Such issues are of no particular concern to the complacent and privileged pro-capitalist representatives of the Greens. The fact that Obama is African-American and feigns sympathy for environmental issues, climate change action and gay marriage—while actually doing nothing—is enough to win him their adulation.

The extent of the Greens' reaction to the perspective of war with China was to suggest a debate in parliament. Brown told the press: "Taking sides between the military might of the US and the growing power, including a nuclear arsenal, of China is not the only option."

The Greens have made no further comment on the issue, and for a definite reason. The Greens are on record advocating an aggressive stance toward China and a military build-up in northern Australia—with the exception of stationing a few thousand US Marines in Darwin.

The opposition of the Greens to Australian involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan—though only after troops were redeployed in 2005—was that Australian military forces should instead be used to defend what Brown called "our own arc of stability" in the South Pacific and the Indonesian archipelago. Last year, during a debate over Afghanistan, Brown specifically raised the growing Chinese influence in East Timor as a threat and a reason to bring troops

back.

To a great extent, the Greens have got what they wanted. The Australian armed forces are being reconfigured by the Labor government to focus on operations alongside the US military in Brown's "arc of stability," with a \$100 billion program of arms purchases over the next decade, including submarines, missile-guided frigates, F-35 jet fighters, long-range refueling aircraft and early detection planes.

Brown's preoccupation with blocking Chinese influence in the South Pacific demonstrates that his frequent calls for Australia to have a more "independent" foreign policy are nothing more than a cynical appeal to the putrid anti-American sentiment that exists among sections of the Green support base. Last week, for example, he declared that Gillard had given up the chance to be like "Sweden or Switzerland" by its "acquiescence" to Washington.

The reality is that Australian imperialism can only assert influence in the Asian region as the junior partner of the US. The ruling elite's entire history is based on subordinating itself to, and collaborating with, a more powerful ally—firstly Britain and, since World War II, the US. The action that Brown considers the Greens' finest hour—the launching of an Australian-led military intervention into East Timor in 1999 to install a pro-Canberra client regime—was only possible because of US political backing and considerable military logistical support.

Behind the Greens' pacifist facade, Brown is an open advocate of the "option" of military action against China to defend the strategic and economic interests of the Australian capitalist elite.

Last December, WikiLeaks published a March 2009 US diplomatic cable which revealed that former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had discussed preparing for war with China. Rudd urged Clinton to seek to "integrate" China into US-dominated "international affairs," but "all the while also preparing to deploy force if everything goes wrong."

The Liberal Party opposition foreign affairs spokesperson, Julie Bishop, criticised Rudd for contemplating war with China. Bob Brown, by contrast, leapt to the defence of Rudd's position.

On behalf of the Greens, Brown angrily told the press: "I'd ask the question of Julie Bishop, should we abandon the defence forces? Are there no circumstances in which force may be used? By that, presumably, meaning defensive force. I would think that's the logic of the defence forces. And when it comes to some forthright talking about the Dalai Lama and the need for consideration of autonomy in Tibet, in my experience, the great majority of Australians would be right behind Kevin Rudd in putting forward that option as a real one."

Brown's outburst last year explains his enthusiasm for Obama's speech to parliament. Central to Obama's propaganda against

China were the same issues as the Greens—democracy, human rights and religious freedoms. Obama's reference to "men of peace in saffron robes" defying tyranny was an allusion to Tibet as well as Burma.

The Greens' consistent stance has been to endorse every war by US and Australian imperialism whose predatory aims are cloaked in "humanitarian" garb. The Greens proudly highlight their role in agitating for the neo-colonial occupation of East Timor in 1999 and their support for subsequent Australian military incursions in the Solomon Islands in 2003 and East Timor again in 2006. Most recently, in February, Brown publicly called for military force to be used to overthrow the Gaddafi regime in Libya.

The Greens, by their downplaying and now silence on the dangers of US-Australian militarism, are playing a crucial role in helping to block any expression of the widespread nervousness and alarm among Australian workers and youth over the announcements last week.

The Greens' services have been recognised from an unexpected quarter: Peter Costello, the treasurer and deputy prime minister of the previous Liberal-National Coalition conservative government of Prime Minister John Howard, which committed Australia to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In a November 23 comment in the *Melbourne Age*, Costello noted: "Once upon a time the left railed against joint Australian-American bases. That was one of the main issues that made the left the left." He concluded: "That is why it is so useful to have the left of Australian politics now locked into traditional Coalition policies. Bipartisan support has been firmly established. And in the future if there is ever a complaint about marines based in Australia, just pull out the footage of a beaming Bob Brown grasping the hand of the president who announced it."

The Greens have been exposed as adjuncts of Australian and US imperialism. The events of the past weeks have also been a damning exposure of the pseudo-left organisations in Australia, such as Socialist Alliance, Socialist Alternative and the Socialist Party, which have spent the past decade promoting, in one way or another, the Greens as "anti-war," "progressive" or even a "left-wing" alternative to Labor.

Predictably, the *Green Left Weekly*, published by Socialist Alliance, has not raised a word of criticism of the Greens. Over the coming years, however, it will be Greens votes in parliament that will pass Labor's budgets to fund its militarist agenda, and Greens politicians who will endorse provocations against China under the fraudulent banners of "human rights" and "democracy."



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