New Zealand parliament unanimously backs US in Ukraine crisis

Tom Peters
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New Zealand's parliament voted unanimously on Tuesday for a motion by Foreign Minister Murray McCully to condemn Russia's military intervention in Crimea. McCully declared that Moscow's dispatch of troops was "completely and totally unacceptable" and violated "important principles of international law."

McCully said that by condemning Russia the government had "joined with those countries that share our values and principles," namely its allies in the US and European Union. The government also withdrew Trade Minister Tim Groser from trade talks in Moscow. On Monday McCully instructed his ministry to call in the Russian ambassador to register "alarm" at the military intervention.

The government's statements were accompanied by a torrent of anti-Russian commentary in the corporate media, echoing the demonisation of President Vladimir Putin in the US and Europe. All of it was laden with hypocrisy. While denouncing "Russian aggression," politicians and commentators alike passed over US involvement in the fascist-led putsch that ousted the elected Ukrainian government, not to speak of the numerous US-led wars of aggression and intervention over the past decade.

The *Dominion Post* yesterday described Putin as a "thug" and a "despot." It declared that the "invasion" of Crimea was "an insult to international law and order" that "must lead to retaliation." In the same editorial, the newspaper, which supports the illegal US war in Afghanistan, denounced Putin for opposing a US military attack on Syria.

While there is nothing progressive in the Putin government's actions and its stirring up of Russian nationalism, the chief responsibility for the present crisis, which threatens to plunge the world into war, rests with the US imperialism and its allies.

Tuesday's vote in parliament expressed the entire political establishment's craven support for the provocative intervention by the US and EU into Ukraine. The Labour Party's foreign affairs spokesman David Shearer gave a speech defending the "interim" Ukrainian government, stating: "The way forward is for all countries to support its move to democratic elections."

Speaking to TV3 on Monday, Shearer dismissed any suggestion that "Ukraine has been taken over by a Western-inspired plot." In fact, before the February 22 coup, US and EU leaders were colluding with opposition leaders and parties for months, including those of openly fascist organisations, such as the Svoboda party.

Shearer, along with every other MP and virtually the entire media, did not mention that the new "democratic" regime in Kiev was installed in a putsch by extreme right-wing forces, which ousted the elected pro-Russian government of Victor Yanukovich.

The media, regurgitating Washington's propaganda, has downplayed or ignored the role played by fascist groups in Ukraine's new government.

Liberal commentator Josie Pagani, a former press secretary for the "left wing" Alliance party, wrote in a blog post: "Ukraine is nascent democracy. New Zealand is a small one. There is only one side we can be on in a confrontation between a big bully and a small country struggling to make itself free."

In reality, Svoboda, which celebrates the Nazi massacre of Ukrainian Jews during World War II, controls six ministries in the new government. Its leader, Oleh Tyahnybok, promoted as a democrat by Washington, has spoken of his determination to crush the "Russkie-Yid mafia that controls Ukraine."

Greens MP Kennedy Graham also denounced Russia.

Without mentioning the pro-US coup, he told parliament that "no country has the right to unilaterally intervene in the domestic affairs of another." As a fig leaf, he added that this "applies equally to all countries when they too contemplate aggression, such as the illegal attack on Iraq" by the US and its allies.

The 1999–2008 Labour government dispatched troops to both Iraq and Afghanistan and fully restored the military alliance with Washington. While the Greens criticised the Iraq deployment, the party propped up Labour as a coalition partner and supported the army's decade-long deployment in Afghanistan.

Along with the National government, Labour and the Greens have repeatedly attacked Russia for vetoing a UN Security Council resolution that would have paved the way for direct US military intervention in Syria.

The Maori nationalist Mana Party's support for the anti-Russian resolution is particularly revealing. The party includes New Zealand's three pseudo-left groups—the International Socialist Organisation, Socialist Aotearoa and Fightback—which all promote the organisation as "left wing" and will campaign for it in this year's election.

In fact, Mana represents the interests of Maori capitalists and supports the New Zealand alliance with US imperialism. It is currently positioning itself to join a future Labour-led coalition government. Along with Labour, the Greens and the anti-immigrant New Zealand First Party, Mana has played a key role over the past two years in promoting opposition to Chinese investment, as part of efforts to align New Zealand with Washington's military and diplomatic encirclement of China.

Like Australia and other US allies in the Asia-Pacific region, New Zealand has been drawn into the Obama administration's "pivot" or "rebalance" to Asia. This has involved a dramatic military build-up by the US aimed at asserting its hegemony against China and preparing for war.

The National government has repeatedly stated that it does not need to take sides between the US and China, which is New Zealand's number one trading partner. At the same time, it has supported US imperialism in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and now Ukraine, and has continued to strengthen military and intelligence ties with the US. Last November, NZ hosted its biggest-ever international military exercise, involving the US, Australia and other countries, in order to practice for future joint combat operations.

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