

New Zealand joins Washington's sanctions against Russia

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New Zealand's foreign minister, Murray McCully, confirmed on Sunday that the National Party-led government would join the US-led reprisals against Moscow in the wake of the referendum that saw Crimeans vote overwhelmingly to become part of Russia.

McCully, who previously claimed that the referendum was held "under the threat of force," said New Zealand did not recognise the vote. "Applying sanctions will position New Zealand alongside other members of the international community who have condemned the breach of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity," he declared.

All this is replete with lies and hypocrisy. Responsibility for the crisis, which threatens to plunge the world into war, rests with US imperialism and its allies. The US and EU fomented the fascist-led putsch that ousted the elected Ukrainian government as part of long planned provocations against Russia and in order to impose brutal austerity measures on the Ukrainian working class.

The NZ sanctions, McCully said, would target individuals deemed responsible for "the seizure of Crimea" from Ukraine and its annexation by Russia. There would be travel bans on, as yet unnamed, Russian officials. Prime Minister John Key signalled that free trade negotiations with Russia would be postponed. Trade Minister Tim Groser was in Moscow earlier this month negotiating a free trade deal with Russia but pulled out after Russia moved into Crimea.

The sanctions align New Zealand with Washington and its EU allies, which are ratcheting up diplomatic and military measures against Russia. The EU began by imposing a travel ban against 33 individuals as well as freezing Russian assets in EU countries. The US imposed sanctions against 31 individuals and targeted

close aides of Russia President Vladimir Putin. Statements by White House and NATO officials over the weekend point to advanced preparations by the imperialist powers for a military build-up across Eastern Europe.

The New Zealand ruling elite is united in supporting the US-EU drive against Russia. Earlier this month, the parliament voted unanimously to condemn Russia's intervention in Crimea. The Labour Party's foreign affairs spokesman David Shearer defended the Ukrainian regime, which was installed with fascist support, and denounced Russia, declaring that "invading another country is contrary to international law." All the minor parties, including the Greens and the Maori nationalist Mana Party, fell into line.

The media has echoed its international counterparts in demonising Russia. A *Dominion Post* editorial on March 18 described the Crimea referendum as "a black joke," claiming it was carried out under the threat of "the Kalashnikov." The editorial asserted—without providing a shred of evidence—that the Crimean population did not want to re-join Russia.

A rare but limited note of caution from official circles was sounded by Terence O'Brien, a former top diplomat and a senior fellow at the Victoria University Centre for Strategic Studies in Wellington. In an opinion piece in the *Dominion* on March 19, headed "Russia not our fight in Cold War replay," O'Brien drew attention to the fact that New Zealand was lobbying for a seat on the UN Security Council in 2015 and it needed to fully "grasp the complexity of the evolving Ukraine crisis." New Zealand should "display our professed capacities for independent foreign policy judgment." The country's principal focus was now on East Asia and Asia Pacific. "We should keep our powder dry about joining Atlantic retribution against

Russia,” he concluded.

The New Zealand ruling elite long ago dropped its pretensions to an “independent” foreign policy and its anti-nuclear posturing. Under the 1999–2008 Helen Clark-led Labour government, military relations were fully restored with the US as a quid pro quo for Washington’s support for NZ’s Pacific operations. New Zealand committed troops to the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. In 2012, the Key government signed defence agreements with the US and NATO, establishing the formal basis for joint military interventions in both the Asia-Pacific and Middle East.

Like other regional allies of the US, New Zealand has come under pressure from Washington to join its “pivot to Asia”—the diplomatic and military arrangements designed to encircle and contain China. The rise of China as NZ’s major trading partner has created a dilemma as the ruling elite seeks to balance its commercial interests against the increasingly aggressive demands of the US. Last week, on his way to the US-led Nuclear Security Summit in The Hague, Key visited Beijing where he concluded a deal to increase trade between the two countries by 70 percent over the next six years.

New Zealand’s pseudo-left groups—Socialist Aotearoa, the International Socialist Organisation and Fightback—are backing the US-led conspiracy against Russia. These organisations are part of a political alliance with the Maori nationalist Mana Party, whose MP Hone Harawira participated in the parliamentary vote condemning Russia.

The only mention of the Ukraine crisis on pseudo-left web sites was a single paragraph in article entitled “Can the people on the streets be wrong?” published by the Fightback group on March 20. Fightback claimed that the fascist-led coup in the Ukraine was a “real mass uprising” that was taken over by neo-Nazi Svoboda and Right Sector parties, who “put themselves at the head of it by violently and physically ejecting socialists and anarchists who were against the Yanukovich administration.”

To give the Ukrainian protests any sort of “socialist” colouration is a travesty. Fightback said nothing about the role played by US and European imperialism in instigating the crisis and provoking a confrontation with Russia. Fightback and the pseudo-left are accomplices of imperialism, covering up its crimes and

the military preparations directed against Russia.



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