

The Australian Greens and “human rights” imperialism

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In the course of the events surrounding this month’s G20 summit in Australia, the Australian Greens signalled their support for the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia” against Beijing by confronting Chinese President Xi Jinping after his address to the Australian parliament on November 17.

Greens’ leader Senator Christine Milne handed Xi a letter, which was released at the same time to the media, venting the Greens’ concerns about “human rights in China.” It specifically cited “the ongoing persecution of minorities in China, including the Tibetan and Uighur communities, people of the Falun Gong faith and those advocating democracy.” It called on Xi to “promote freedom of speech and association,” “condemn human rights abuses” and release political prisoners from detention and house arrest.

Milne also expressed her “hope” that Xi would “respect the calls of the peaceful protesters in Hong Kong who call for free and fair elections, and enable them to independently exercise their right [to] vote for candidates of their choice.”

The Chinese Stalinist regime headed by Xi is certainly oppressive, including towards the country’s national minorities. But “human rights” is exploited selectively and cynically by imperialist powers, especially the United States, as the pretext for intrigues, provocations and military interventions to pursue their economic and strategic interests around the world.

That is certainly the case with the US “pivot”—an aggressive strategy aimed at undermining China diplomatically and economically and preparing for war through a military build-up throughout the region. Washington has longstanding connections with right-wing exile Tibetan and Uighur leaderships, among others, that can be exploited to destabilise China.

Like the US, the Greens are highly selective in

making their “human rights” protests. Milne did not deliver a letter to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, for example, who addressed the Australian parliament the following day. Modi, a right-wing Hindu supremacist, is notorious for his anti-Muslim chauvinism and as chief minister of the state of Gujarat played a central role in the anti-Muslim pogroms that resulted in hundreds of deaths. Discrimination against caste minorities and women, not to speak of police state repression in Kashmir and rebellious rural areas, are just some of the more glaring “human rights issues” in India.

Just days before, on November 14, British Prime Minister David Cameron addressed the Australian parliament with no protest from the Greens. Britain has been a close ally of the United States in all of its imperialist interventions, including the latest war of aggression in Iraq and Syria aimed at consolidating US domination, and its confrontation with Russia over Ukraine. Significantly, the only other G20 leader targetted by the Greens was Russian President Vladimir Putin; the Greens were in the forefront of the campaign to prevent him attending the G20.

The selective character of the Greens’ attitude towards “human rights” was most clearly expressed in their response toward US President Barack Obama, who delivered a speech in Brisbane aggressively reasserting his administration’s commitment to the “pivot to Asia” and posturing as a proponent of democratic rights in Asia. All that Christine Milne had to say about the US leader was: “I welcome President Obama putting \$3 billion on the table for the Green Climate Fund.”

The US government operates with utter illegality, spying on the world’s population and waging wars and directing proxy wars which have cost hundreds of

thousands of lives. Barack Obama personally selects the targets for illegal drone strikes and dismisses the killing of civilians as “collateral damage.” Communications and satellite bases located in Australia play critical roles in facilitating this criminality. In the US itself, human rights abuses include the death penalty, wide-scale police violence as demonstrated in the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, a huge prison population and the persecution of whistleblowers Bradley Manning and Edward Snowden.

The Greens also welcomed Obama when he used the Australian parliament to formally announce his “pivot to Asia” on November 17, 2011. There was no repeat of the theatrics in 2003, amid mass protests against the Iraq invasion, when Greens leader Bob Brown interjected while George W. Bush was addressing the parliament. Instead, the Greens joined in the uncritical adulation of Obama as he announced the “pivot” and detailed plans to use Australia as one of the main staging bases for the military encirclement of China.

In country after country, Washington and its allies sponsor right-wing leaders, parties and organisations that exploit democratic and social grievances to destabilise regimes considered an obstacle or threat to imperialist interests. Where so-called “colour revolutions” have taken place, the beneficiaries have invariably been the imperialist powers and a venal section of the local elite. Nothing has been done to improve the conditions of the working class and oppressed.

In an ominous anticipation of a war on China, Obama asserted in his speech in Brisbane that the United States had “invested our blood and treasure” for democracy in the Asia-Pacific and, by implication, would do so again. “American leadership” of the region, he said, would be maintained by “every element of American power.”

As the parliamentary party that falsely is presented in the media as “anti-war” and even “left-wing”, the Greens already play a criminal role in helping to suppress public debate on the tremendous dangers of war that are developing due to the military encirclement of China by the US, Australia and Japan.

With Milne’s letter, the Greens have signalled to both the US and the major parties in Australia that they are willing to do more. They can be called upon to assist

dress up war preparations as a campaign for “human rights.” All of the “concerns” about human rights in China, which Milne expressed to Xi Jinping, could be used as the pretext for diplomatic intrigues, economic sanctions or military intervention by the US and its allies.



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