

New Zealand: Anti-TPP protest organisers silent on war preparations against China

Our reporters

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Thousands of people protested throughout New Zealand on Saturday demanding that the National Party government “walk away” from the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement. More than 1,000 people marched in Auckland and hundreds more rallied in Wellington, Christchurch and about a dozen smaller towns.

The nationwide “day of action,” organised by the umbrella group It’s Our Future, followed the release of the TPP text by the government earlier this month, after years of secret negotiations. The US-led agreement includes Japan, Australia, Brunei, Chile, Malaysia, Peru, Singapore, Vietnam, Mexico, Canada and New Zealand.

The Socialist Equality Group distributed a statement in Auckland and Wellington, explaining that the TPP “is the economic spearhead of a US strategy that aims at nothing less than the complete subordination of China to American economic and strategic interests. It goes hand-in-hand with the US military build-up throughout the region, its strengthening of alliances and accelerating preparations for war against China.” The statement called for a socialist strategy to unite workers throughout Asia and internationally to fight austerity and the drive to war.

As in previous rallies, speakers from the Green Party, Mana Party and New Zealand First, as well as academics and trade union officials, who addressed Saturday’s events were silent about the role of the TPP in Washington’s war preparations. This is because the entire political establishment supports New Zealand’s alliance with US imperialism and its integration in the Obama administration’s anti-China “pivot to Asia” strategy.

The only speaker to mention war was Valerie Morse, from the pacifist group Peace Action Wellington, who

said the TPP “will increasingly tie New Zealand to the insanity of US foreign policy and war-aking.” Morse denounced New Zealand’s involvement in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan but was silent on the drive to war against China.

Speakers sought to divert opposition to the TPP into nationalist, pro-capitalist channels. Auckland University law professor Jane Kelsey, the main spokesperson for It’s Our Future, told the Auckland crowd the deal was “not good for all New Zealanders and indeed it’s not even good for the corporates that [the government] are acting on behalf of.” It’s Our Future has criticised the government for failing to secure better terms for New Zealand exporters, especially dairy producers.

Expressing similar pro-business sentiments, Ariana Paretutanganui-Tamati from the Maori nationalist Mana Party told the Wellington rally: “Underpinning the TPP is a system of capitalism, of neoliberalism, and what we need to do is ensure that we have a system that concentrates on looking after the interests of local businesses, not large corporations.”

The TPP has attracted opposition from ordinary working people because of provisions handing more power to big business. The deal will allow corporations to sue governments if regulations cut into their profits. Doctor Pat Neuwelt, who has been analysing the text of the TPP, told the Auckland protest “there is little doubt” that stronger patent protections will increase the cost of medicines.

The parties and unions opposing the deal, however, do not represent the interests of working people. They speak for less competitive sections of New Zealand capital, including Maori tribal-based and “green” businesses, which fear increased foreign investment under the TPP and favour protectionist policies. They

promote the lie that New Zealand corporations, which have implemented savage job cuts and pro-business restructuring over the past three decades, are somehow less exploitative than their overseas counterparts.

The rallies once again exposed Mana's bourgeois nationalist politics. The party is falsely promoted as left wing and even "anti-capitalist" by the middle class pseudo-left groups Fightback, Socialist Aotearoa and the International Socialist Organisation (ISO).

Mana has increasingly aligned itself with New Zealand First, which viciously opposes Asian immigration. Paretutanganui-Tamati criticised the main opposition Labour Party for endorsing the TPP and praised "Mana, New Zealand First [and the] Green Party" for "standing up strongly because we understand what this is about."

A NZ First member spoke briefly to the Auckland rally, absurdly presenting her party—which has been a coalition partner in both Labour- and National-led governments—as an opponent of corporate greed. She was warmly received by the protest organisers.

Mana has supported NZ First and Labour's xenophobic campaign against Chinese immigration and investment over the past three years. In July it joined in efforts to scapegoat Chinese people for the country's housing crisis. This campaign dovetails with Washington's anti-Chinese propaganda and efforts to further integrate New Zealand into US war plans.

The ISO published an article on Saturday in an attempt to distance itself from the "toxic nationalism" at the anti-TPP rallies. It criticised the involvement of NZ First, a "party of openly anti-Asian racism." The ISO still described the It's Our Future organisers, who collaborated with NZ First, as progressive and "anti-racist."

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The article said nothing about Mana's pro-business statements or its embrace of NZ First. The ISO was affiliated to Mana and campaigned for it in the 2014 election, hoping that Mana would become a partner in a Labour-NZ First-Greens coalition government. The ISO exited Mana after its humiliating election defeat, but the pseudo-left group continues to support the party and cover up its reactionary politics.

The Socialist Equality Group spoke to some of the participants in the Auckland rally.

Rob, who owns a small retail business, said "the TPP is multi-national corporates taking ultimate control of 12 countries, led by Barack Obama, and we're losing our democracy big time."

He agreed that the TPP was part of US war preparations, saying: "Absolutely it is. America is on the brink of collapse. They're panicking, they don't know what to do. I don't think China should be setting up its own man-made islands. However, that is their seas, it is their area. The US is trying to rark them up [provoke them], to start a war with China, and if they do, that will be the beginning of World War III."

Lee, an unemployed builder, was alarmed to hear about the growing danger of war. "It's scary. I hadn't heard about that, but from what you say that's obviously [the aim of the TPP], with China's exclusion from it. There's got to be a reason for that."

He was deeply concerned about Auckland's soaring social inequality and housing crisis. "I have a seven-year-old son and I can't stop thinking, what is there going to be for my son 20 years from now? It's going to be horrible. I feel bad for the world I'm going to leave behind for him. The current model isn't working, so the question is what are we going to replace it with."

Asked if he thought Mana offered any alternative, he replied: "They are saying no to [the TPP], which is good, but they're still part of the same system. For a while it seemed like they were serious, but then it fell apart." He criticised the party's opportunist electoral alliance with the pro-capitalist Internet Party, saying, "It was a joke. I don't know what to call it, but it was laughable."

Lee explained that he had given up voting because "people are voted in with promises and big smiles and rallies and they don't do anything that they said they would do."



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