

New Zealand to host signing of Trans-Pacific Partnership

Tom Peters
4 February 2016

Representatives of 12 countries will meet in New Zealand today for the formal signing of the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement. The TPP, negotiated in secret over 10 years, will create a US-dominated economic bloc that will dictate terms of investment and trade throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

The deal is the economic front of Washington's "pivot to Asia" strategy, which aims to isolate China, roll back its economic influence and reduce it to semi-colonial status. In his belligerent January 12 State of the Union address, President Barack Obama declared: "With the TPP, China does not set the rules in that region; we do."

TPP negotiations have proceeded alongside preparations for war against China, which are now far advanced. The US has systematically built-up its military assets in Asia, strengthened alliances with Japan, Australia and other countries, and staged a series of reckless provocations against China in the South China Sea.

The selection of New Zealand to host the signing is a reflection of how deeply it has been integrated into the Obama administration's dangerous anti-China "pivot."

The National Party government has lined up with Washington despite New Zealand's strong economic ties with China, its second largest trading partner after Australia. In an interview with Radio NZ on February 1, Trade Minister Todd McClay said it would be "disastrous" for New Zealand to not join the TPP, which he pointedly declared was better than the free trade agreement signed with China in 2008.

The *New Zealand Herald's* business columnist Brian Fallow wrote on January 29 that the TPP was "not an exercise in free trade" but "a preferential trade agreement encompassing more than a third of global

GDP, 40 percent of New Zealand's goods exports and 47 percent of its services exports."

Fallow pointed to the dilemma faced by New Zealand capitalists: "[I]f the brutal reality is that we live in a world where the big boys call the shots, which big boy do we want to set the rules for international commerce in the Asia-Pacific—the United States or China? Those are the terms in which President Barack Obama has framed the issue."

The entire political establishment has committed to New Zealand's integration into Washington's war plans as a means to secure support for its own imperialist interests in the Pacific.

The TPP has attracted widespread public opposition because it will hand more power to multinational corporations. It will strengthen patent protections for drug companies, driving up prices, and allow investors and global corporations to sue governments if they pass laws that cut into profits.

Workers correctly fear that the TPP will lead to more attacks on jobs, wages and living standards in the name of global competitiveness. Thousands have attended protest rallies against the deal throughout the country.

There are divisions over the TPP in New Zealand's political establishment. In late January the main opposition Labour Party joined the Greens, the right-wing populist New Zealand First, the Council of Trade Unions and the Maori nationalist Mana and Maori Parties, in announcing that it opposed the TPP.

There is nothing progressive, however, in the position of Labour and its allies, which have organised anti-TPP protests under the nationalist slogan "It's Our Future." They represent layers of big business and the upper middle class that would struggle to compete against increased foreign investment and favour protectionist policies.

Sections of the corporate media agree that the TPP lacks sufficient benefits for New Zealand exporters, including the dairy industry. A *Dominion Post* editorial on February 1 noted that the TPP “leaves in place large protections for our most significant competitors” and “doesn’t match the government’s fervent talk.”

The same opposition parties fully support New Zealand’s alliance with US imperialism and have remained completely silent on the role of the TPP in the US “pivot” and war preparations against China. Successive governments, Labour and National, have strengthened military and intelligence ties with the US. New Zealand now takes part in regular military exercises with American forces and spies on China on behalf of the US National Security Agency.

NZ First, Labour and Mana have sought to whip up hostility toward Chinese investors and immigrants, blaming them for the soaring cost of housing and other aspects of the social crisis. One of Labour’s main objections to the TPP is that it would prevent a future government from banning foreigners from buying houses.

This chauvinist, anti-Chinese campaign—which dovetails with Washington’s false accusations of Chinese “expansionism” in Asia and the Pacific—aims to create the political climate for US war plans.

In a statement on January 29 outlining Labour’s objections to the TPP, leader Andrew Little said it “undermines our democracy and our sovereignty. It prevents future governments passing laws in the best interests of New Zealanders, under the threat of being sued by overseas corporations.”

In reality, Labour represents the interests of the rich and seeks to renegotiate the TPP to secure a better deal for them. The party supports the National government’s austerity measures—including an increase in consumption tax, corporate tax cuts, and attacks on social services—which have forced the working class to shoulder the burden of the economic crisis and dramatically increased social inequality.

Both Labour and National have attacked democratic rights, including by joining the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and strengthening New Zealand’s spy agencies, in defiance of mass opposition. In December, Labour indicated it supports sending elite SAS troops to Obama’s renewed war in Iraq and Syria.

The “It’s Our Future” campaign promotes the lie that

New Zealand capitalists are essentially benign and their interests identical with those of the working class. NZ First MP Fletcher Tabuteau told a public meeting in Auckland on January 26 that the TPP would “undermine New Zealand business,” including “some of our larger New Zealand firms,” leading to job cuts.

In fact, local businesses are just as ruthless as their foreign counterparts. Dairy giant Fonterra, fishing company Sealord, telecommunications provider Spark, New Zealand Post and mining company Solid Energy—to name just a few—have sacked thousands of workers in recent years, with the assistance of the trade union bureaucracy.

Maori Party co-leader Marama Fox absurdly told the meeting she supported those at “the bottom of [the] ladder” who would be affected by the TPP. Her party is a partner in the National-led government and supports its attacks on the working class, Maori and non-Maori alike. The Maori Party speaks for tribal-based businesses that control \$40 billion in assets and fear that the TPP will cut across their close relationship with the government.

The working class can only oppose the drive to war and the unrelenting attacks on its living standards in a struggle against the entire political establishment. It must reject all forms of nationalism and anti-immigrant chauvinism, which serves to divide workers and strengthen the ruling class.

Workers and youth must build a unified movement throughout Asia and internationally to abolish the capitalist system, with its irrational division of the world into competing nation states, which is the source of war and exploitation. This historically outmoded system must be replaced with a planned socialist world economy, to meet the pressing needs of the overwhelming majority of humanity, not feed the profits of a wealthy few.



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