

New Zealand Greens celebrate US warship visit

Tom Peters
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Last week's announcement by US Vice President Joe Biden that a US warship will visit New Zealand in November to celebrate the NZ Navy's 75th anniversary marks a significant milestone in the strengthening of military ties between the two countries.

Three decades ago, the Labour government effectively banned US naval visits when it adopted an anti-nuclear stance. The US military does not reveal, as a matter of policy, whether its ships are nuclear-armed or not. In 1985 a US destroyer was barred from docking in New Zealand.

Now, the anti-nuclear policy, while still officially upheld by the current National Party government, has been brushed aside to facilitate New Zealand's integration into the Obama administration's military build-up in the Asia Pacific and preparations for war against China.

Biden underscored this drive in belligerent speeches during his visits this month to Australia and New Zealand, where he made thinly-veiled attacks on China for supposedly blocking "freedom of navigation" in the South China Sea. The US navy has already carried out several provocative exercises in the territorial waters of islets claimed by China.

In this context, the celebration of the planned US naval visit by New Zealand's political establishment must be taken as a stark warning. Every party in parliament supports the country's alliance with US imperialism and is prepared to take the population into a disastrous war involving nuclear-armed powers.

The opposition Labour and Green parties have ludicrously tried to portray the US ship visit as signalling Washington's "acceptance" of New Zealand's anti-nuclear legislation. Greenpeace executive director Russel Norman, a former Greens co-leader, hailed the announcement as a "victory for

people power."

In fact, the US has not changed its position. The *Navy Times* on 22 July quoted a US Navy official saying the port visit would be conducted on a "don't ask, don't tell" basis. Wellington had not asked for any details about the status of the ship that will be sent, which military officials said would likely be a destroyer.

The support for the US naval visit by the Greens and Greenpeace points to a further shift to the right by a whole layer of upper middle class ex-protest leaders, who have embraced imperialism and imperialist war.

Greenpeace played a major role in demonstrations against US ship visits during the 1970s and 1980s. It also carried out protests against French nuclear testing in the South Pacific. Writing on the liberal web site *The Spinoff*, Norman tried to cloak his organisation's about-face in pacifist phrases. Referring to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, he wrote: "The US military remains for many a symbol of excessive might, too often exerted unjustly and with devastating consequences." But he then claimed the US warship visit was "an amazing victory for the goal of a nuclear weapons-free world."

Former Greens MP Keith Locke wrote a similarly dishonest article for the trade union-funded *Daily Blog*. He declared: "I am not, as a peace campaigner, enthused by any American warship visit." At the same time he insisted, without irony, that the resumption of US naval visits was "a victory worth celebrating" for anti-nuclear activists.

Far from being "peace campaigners," the Greens have always been a capitalist party that agrees with New Zealand's alliance with the US. It supported the 1999–2008 Labour government of Prime Minister Helen Clark, which sent troops to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

While formally opposing involvement in Iraq, the Greens supported the war in Afghanistan. In August 2010, Locke told parliament he was “proud of the good peace-keeping and reconstruction work that our Provincial Reconstruction Team has done in Bamiyan province.” In reality, the New Zealand team of about 140 soldiers was an integral part of the US occupation and its camp in Bamiyan doubled as a CIA base.

Clark’s Labour government, with the Greens’ backing, also contributed to the Australian-led military-police interventions in East Timor and Solomon Islands.

On Tuesday, Labour Party leader Andrew Little pointed to the purpose of the US naval visit in a speech to the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs. He said it was “strongly in New Zealand’s interests that we have deep, friendly military co-operation with the US.” The ruling elites of New Zealand and Australia rely on Washington’s backing to maintain their own neo-colonial spheres of influence in the Pacific. They view China’s and Russia’s increased involvement in the region as a threat to their interests.

Little also praised New Zealand’s role in the US-led Five Eyes intelligence alliance, which he described as “vital in confronting ongoing security challenges, including from barbaric groups like Al Qaeda and ISIS.” In fact, the New Zealand spy agency, the Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB), has played a significant role in spying on Chinese officials and passing the information to the US National Security Agency.

The Greens have embraced not only Labour but also the right-wing anti-immigrant NZ First Party. All three parties contested the 2014 election in a de facto alliance. Labour and NZ First have sought to whip up anti-Chinese xenophobia, scapegoating Chinese people for the country’s housing crisis and unemployment. This campaign dovetails with efforts to integrate New Zealand into Washington’s moves against China.

Labour’s anti-nuclear stance during the 1970s and 1980s was largely bound up with New Zealand’s inter-imperialist rivalry with France in the South Pacific. In the early 1970s, the Labour government sent a frigate to oppose French nuclear testing in the region. In 1985 the French secret service bombed the Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior* in Auckland harbour in retaliation for anti-nuclear protests, killing one crew member.

The anti-nuclear policy only led to a partial and temporary rift with the US. The policy was part of attempts by the Labour government to give itself “progressive” credentials while it launched a far-reaching assault on the working class. It privatised government departments, deregulated the banking industry and oversaw the destruction of manufacturing industries.

Behind the scenes, Labour strengthened intelligence ties with the US. In 1987 it began construction of the GCSB’s powerful Waihopai spy base to strengthen the Five Eyes alliance. In his autobiography, Lange stated: “I thought we should build the base because it seemed unwise at the time to further upset the Americans, who were the chief beneficiaries of the information it provided.”

The groups that led the anti-nuclear protests consciously sought to subordinate them to the Labour government and prevent any independent struggle of the working class against Labour’s attacks on living standards and its continued support for imperialism.

Labour campaigned heavily on its anti-nuclear policy during its 1987 re-election campaign, assisted by groups such as Campaign Against Nuclear Warships (Canwar) and Greenpeace. Canwar’s main organiser Nicky Hager, now a journalist, wrote an article in the *New Zealand Herald* last month, entitled “Let the US send a warship,” which advanced similar positions as those of Locke and Norman. Even in 1985, Hager declared he would support a US warship visit if it were definitely non-nuclear, something the Labour government tried in vain to arrange.

The immense regional tensions and instability provoked by the US drive toward war against China have again exposed the hollowness of the pacifism and phony “leftism” of the Green Party and its supporters. If a Labour-Greens government is elected next year it will support the further integration of New Zealand into US war plans and ongoing attacks on the working class at home.



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