

New Zealand: The US warship visit and the fraud of Peace Action

Tom Peters

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Prime Minister John Key confirmed on October 18 that the United States navy guided missile destroyer USS Sampson will take part in the New Zealand navy's 75th anniversary celebrations in Auckland in mid-November, along with vessels from 32 other countries including France, Britain, Australia, Russia and China. Naval exercises will be held off the Auckland coast, while a parade and other festivities surrounding the anniversary will glorify militarism and promote recruitment into the navy.

The first visit by a US warship in more than three decades is intended to cement New Zealand's alliance with the US. It follows the announcement in June of \$20 billion in military spending to upgrade navy vessels and warplanes and improve the "interoperability" of New Zealand's armed forces with its allies. This is needed to prepare NZ troops to join bloody US-led interventions in the Middle East and potentially all-out war against Russia and China.

The anniversary celebrations have served to expose the reactionary and pro-war positions of a whole layer of middle class ex-protesters, who have shifted sharply to the right. The US navy visit has been warmly welcomed by the Green Party along with prominent ex-Green MP Keith Locke and Greenpeace leader Russel Norman; Nicky Hager, a former organiser of the Campaign Against Nuclear Warships (Canwar); and Rob Green and Kate Dewes from the Foundation for Peace Studies (FPS).

Greenpeace, Canwar and the FPS organised numerous protests against US warship visits and nuclear weapons testing during the 1970s and 1980s. Since then, in line with similar groups internationally, their leaders have become integrated into the political establishment, academia, the media and the state and now openly defend New Zealand's military alliance with the US. The Greens offer the spurious justification that Washington should be allowed to send a warship because it has accepted New Zealand's ban on nuclear-powered or nuclear-armed vessels. In fact, US officials have repeatedly said, in line with longstanding policy, that the nuclear status of the USS Sampson will not be publicly revealed.

One group that has received considerable media attention, which purports to oppose the NZ-US military alliance, is the pacifist organisation Peace Action Wellington (PAW) and its recently-formed offshoot Auckland Peace Action (APA). These outfits have criticised the US warship visit and a weapons manufacturers conference, sponsored by Lockheed Martin, taking place at the same time. The groups' main spokesperson Valerie Morse wrote an article for the *New Zealand Herald* on June 14 opposing Hager's endorsement of the event.

PAW and APA, however, are hostile to the development of a genuinely anti-war movement, based on a socialist program to unite the working class internationally against the capitalist system, the root cause of war. Under conditions where the old protest organisations have discredited themselves, Peace Action is seeking to steer workers and youth who are becoming radicalised by the drive to war into channels that pose no real threat to militarism and the capitalist order.

PAW was founded in the lead-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. It is a loose alliance of politically heterogeneous forces, united by their hostility to the fight for revolutionary socialist leadership and the political independence of the working class from all capitalist parties and organisations. It includes anarchists such as Morse, trade union officials, academics, and it collaborates with the pseudo-left groups, the International Socialist Organisation, Fightback and Redline.

Like the Greens and the entire political establishment, PAW and APA are silent on the US encirclement and increasingly reckless threats of war against Russia and China, over the war in Syria and disputes in the South China Sea. Morse's *Herald* article and an online petition by the APA criticise the NZ government's "planning for war" and glorification of the navy. But they do not mention the two nuclear-armed countries which are the main targets of US war plans.

The reason for this silence is that Peace Action has no intention of carrying out a political fight against the Greens

and its allies, the Labour Party, the Maori nationalist Mana Party, the anti-immigrant New Zealand First and the trade union bureaucracy. All these organisations have assisted New Zealand's integration into the US build-up to war against China by whipping up anti-Chinese xenophobia, blaming Asian immigrants generally for the housing shortage and lack of jobs.

Peace Action's entire perspective is summed up in its petition against the warship visit, which aims to "bring pressure on the government" to cut the Defence Force budget, fund social programs and "support a strong stand for peace." It promotes the absurd notion that the government can be pressed to cut military ties with its main ally and adopt a peaceful national-isolationist policy.

New Zealand's alliance with US militarism, however, is not a misguided policy; it is bound up with New Zealand's status as a minor imperialist power, whose ruling class profits from exploiting resources and labour in countries such as Samoa, Tonga, Nauru and the Solomon Islands. To secure support for its predatory neo-colonial interests, the NZ ruling elite has maintained alliances, first with Britain and, after World War II, with the United States.

In her *Herald* article, Morse glorified and distorted the history of the anti-nuclear movement of the 1970s and 1980s, writing that it "demanded a different kind of world ... one in which New Zealand set an example as a neutral, non-aligned, peacemaking country."

She did not mention that organisations such as Canwar and Greenpeace limited their campaign to placing demands on the Labour Party, which was in office from 1984–1990. Labour exploited the anti-nuclear campaign to posture as pacifist to provide a "progressive" mask for its ruthless drive to privatise state assets and drive down workers' living conditions. Labour's anti-nuclear policy of 1985 caused a partial rift with Washington, but at the same time Prime Minister David Lange appeased the US by constructing the Waihopai spy base in the South Island, to boost New Zealand's contribution to the US-led Five Eyes spy alliance. At no point did Labour pursue a "neutral" or "non-aligned" policy.

The Labour governments of the 1970s and 1980s were not concerned about "peacemaking." Their opposition to nuclear weapons tests in the Pacific was bound up with the determination of Australia and New Zealand to maintain hegemony in the region, particularly in opposition to France, which was conducting nuclear tests in the South Pacific, and other competing imperialist powers.

The fraud of Peace Action's opposition to war is revealed most clearly in its embrace of the Greens. PAW worked closely with the Greens during the 2003 protests against the invasion of Iraq, helping it to pose as an anti-war party. The

Greens opposed the Labour government's deployment of NZ troops to Iraq and Afghanistan. By 2010, however, the Greens had embraced the occupation of Afghanistan, describing the war as a "peacekeeping" operation. The party also supported New Zealand's participation in the Australian-led interventions in the Solomon Islands and East Timor.

The Greens' ever more blatant support for imperialism—including the US warship visit and the National Party government's massive military spending—has not deterred PAW and APA from supporting the party. Green MP Marama Davidson has been invited to speak at APA's Peace Conference on November 5 about her recent attempt to enter Gaza by boat to protest against Israel's blockade of the Palestinian enclave.

The expedition, which ended with Davidson and 12 other protesters being briefly detained by Israeli forces, was heavily publicised in the media and by APA in order to paint the Greens in progressive colours. The aim of such aid flotillas is to bring "pressure" to bear on bourgeois governments to "isolate" Israel—a bankrupt perspective based on acceptance of the legitimacy of the Zionist state and calls for a "two-state solution" which would maintain the oppression of the Palestinian people by imperialism.

A genuine anti-war movement must be built in a political struggle against Peace Action and its allies in the political establishment. Such a movement can only succeed if it is explicitly anti-capitalist, socialist and based on the unification of the international working class, and independent of and hostile to every party and organisation of the capitalist class. We urge readers who are seeking a genuine program to prevent a catastrophic world war to study the International Committee of the Fourth International's statement "Socialism and the Fight Against War" and make plans to attend the Socialist Equality Group's public meeting in Auckland on November 27.



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