

New Zealand pseudo-lefts hold protests to denounce Russia

John Braddock
1 November 2016

New Zealand's three main pseudo-left groups—Socialist Aotearoa (SA), Fightback and the International Socialist Organisation (ISO)—held protests in Auckland and Wellington last Saturday to denounce the actions of Russia in the Syrian city of Aleppo. The rallies, which included representatives from the Unite union, Amnesty International, the Green Party, Peace Action Wellington and several refugee groups, numbered about 40 people in each city.

The protests were organised in conjunction with Syrian Solidarity NZ, a group that is vociferously opposed to the Assad regime and its ally Russia, blaming them—not the United States—for the destruction and carnage in Syria. Syrian Solidarity has repeatedly demanded military intervention by the UN and the US in support of anti-Assad militias.

Syrian Solidarity alleged in a press release that “8 out of 9 civilian deaths have been caused by Russian Bombings.” It claimed that Russia is “clearly in contravention of international law” and demanded an end to Moscow's support for Assad. The group explicitly condemned a “wave of uncritical anti-Americanism,” adding that the “Syrian cause would have been much better served if the US did not create the perception that they support the popular uprising.”

In fact, the war is a direct product of US interventions in the region, utilising Al Qaeda-linked Islamist militias, first in Libya and then in Syria, as proxy forces in wars for regime change. Behind the demonisation of Russia over Aleppo, Washington is preparing a major escalation, not only of the US-led intervention in Syria, but of its reckless confrontation with Russia.

The protests were a calculated attempt by the pseudo-left outfits to whip up support for Washington's agenda. They were held just two days after NATO defence ministers finalised plans to deploy 4,000

combat troops adjacent to Russia's border in Eastern Europe, the largest such military escalation since the height of the Cold War.

The Wellington protest was held outside the Russian embassy, echoing a call made by British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson for demonstrations at the Russian embassy in London. A protest has been organised in London by the ‘Syria Solidarity Campaign’ for next weekend.

The New Zealand protests sought to downplay and deny the crimes of US imperialism. While chanting “Putin, Putin, you can't hide, we charge you with genocide!” the protests made no mention of the offensive launched a day earlier by US-backed Islamist rebels, including the indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas in government-controlled parts of Aleppo. Nor was there any condemnation of the brutal American onslaught on Mosul, in which US warplanes, rocket launchers and heavy artillery are pounding the Iraqi city of over a million inhabitants.

In Wellington, Fightback member Ian Anderson denounced the “common conspiracy theory” that anti-government rebels “are a US proxy, that CIA money got involved and generated the Syrian revolution.” He asserted “this is crap,” without offering any evidence. “It started with the Arab Spring and with the democratic uprising across the region.” According to Anderson, “the rebels had to defend themselves and then they called for any support they could get.”

The depiction of the anti-Assad forces as a popular “revolution” is entirely false. The so-called Syrian “rebels,” including the Al Qaeda-affiliated Al Nusra Front and Ahrar al-Sham, and the Free Syrian Army, have received billions of dollars in aid and weapons from the US and its allies Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) grew due

to the support it received from US allies to wage war against Assad. Washington has exploited the rise of ISIS and its conquest of large parts of Syria and Iraq as a pretext for further intervention in both countries.

The objective of the American ruling elite is to establish permanent control over the entire oil-rich region. In line with the US agenda, the pseudo-lefts are demanding an escalation of imperialist intervention. Anderson endorsed the call for a no-fly zone over Syria, a policy promoted by US presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and the most bellicose sections of Washington's foreign policy and military establishment.

Central to this right-wing perspective is the depiction of Russia as "imperialist." A speaker from the ISO claimed that Assad's "unrelenting crackdown," backed by "Russian imperialist forces," had killed 400,000 people—which is in fact the total killed by all sides in the war. According to the ISO, the blame lies with "Assad, Iran, and Russia."

In Auckland, Socialist Aotearoa leader Joe Carolan denounced the "Stalinist Left," declaring: "How dare you talk about bombs being dropped in Mosul, if you don't come here in solidarity with the Syrian people ... You're not socialists, you're not left-wing, you're f...ng Russian imperialists!" The speaker claimed: "I stand with the people in Aleppo just as we did stand with the people of Budapest 60 years ago against Russian tanks."

The statement is false on all counts. Socialist Aotearoa, which Carolan heads, does not stand with the people of Aleppo but with the proxy forces of US imperialism and its allies. It is also worth noting that the organisations that gave rise to Socialist Aotearoa include the Stalinist Communist Party of NZ (CPNZ), which defended all the crimes of the Soviet regime, including the brutal suppression of the 1956 working class uprising in Hungary.

While declaring they are in favour of "neither Washington nor Moscow," the pseudo-lefts identify "rising Russian imperialism" as the primary aggressor in Syria. In 2011, SA similarly denounced China as "imperialist" and called for workers to form a bloc with US imperialism against Beijing. This arbitrary and ahistorical designation of Russia and China as "imperialist" serves to cover up US aggression and to facilitate the integration of the pseudo-lefts into its war

plans.

While opposing Washington's war in the Middle East, the WSWS in no way supports the Moscow regime, which has intervened in Syria to try to shore up the Middle Eastern interests of the ultra-rich oligarchs that it represents. Russia's actions only heighten the danger of war between nuclear armed powers.

The pseudo-left organisations, which speak for affluent sections of the upper middle-class, are meanwhile aligning themselves with their own government in the escalating drive to war. The *Guardian* newspaper reported last week that New Zealand SAS troops are active in a combat role in Iraq, a war that the National government and "opposition" Labour Party justify on the basis of combating "terrorism." None of the pseudo-lefts has opposed this military intervention.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact