

New Zealand: “Week of Peace” promotes the Greens and Labour

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Over the past week, warships from several countries including the United States, Britain, Australia, Japan, Indonesia, Chile and China, have been visiting New Zealand for the 75th anniversary of the New Zealand Navy.

The November 15 earthquake that affected large parts of the country was seized upon by the government to send military convoys and navy vessels, including the guided missile destroyer USS Samson, originally destined for Auckland for the celebrations, to evacuate the stricken coastal township of Kaikoura. Billed as a “humanitarian” mission, it has all the hallmarks of an international military exercise.

The purpose of the naval anniversary is to glorify the military and further New Zealand’s integration into the Obama administration’s preparations for war against China. The visit by a US destroyer for the first time in 33 years sets a precedent for a much stronger military alliance between the US and New Zealand.

Workers and youth are overwhelmingly hostile to war and there is deep suspicion about the US navy visit. There is also widespread concern and shock over the election of Donald Trump, who will lead an extreme right-wing, militarist and authoritarian administration. During his campaign Trump repeatedly blamed China for America’s economic decline and threatened to wage trade war against it, heightening the danger of conflict between nuclear-armed powers.

New Zealand Prime Minister John Key and opposition Labour Party leader Andrew Little, who previously said Trump was “unfit for public office,” both congratulated Trump on his victory and declared they are willing to work with him.

In Auckland, a number of organisations led by Auckland Peace Action (APA) and the New Zealand Peace Foundation (NZPF) have organised protests and public meetings ostensibly to oppose the naval visit and a

weapons manufacturers’ conference coinciding with it. The political purpose of the so-called “Week of Peace,” which has received considerable media attention, is to subordinate the growing anti-war and anti-capitalist sentiment among workers and youth to the political establishment via the Labour Party and the Green Party.

The ex-Maoists, liberals, anarchists and pseudo-lefts involved with APA and NZPF represent a layer of the middle class who are hostile to the development of a socialist and internationalist movement against war. (See: “The US warship visit and the fraud of Peace Action”)

The main political force promoted by the “Week of Peace” organisers was the Green Party, a pro-imperialist party, which hopes to become part of a Labour-led government after next year’s elections.

On November 15, Greens co-leader Metiria Turei introduced a public lecture by Australian nuclear disarmament campaigner Dr Helen Caldicott, hosted by APA and the NZPF. Turei claimed the Greens were “a party that honours non-violence as a central pillar of our charter.” The next day several Green Party members attended APA’s blockade of the weapons conference. On November 19, Greens MP Barry Coates addressed a rally of around 200 people in central Auckland, saying: “we need to make sure that instead of military security we have human security that is based on justice.”

The Socialist Equality Group, which is campaigning in Auckland for a public meeting on the implications of Trump’s election and the danger of war, distributed articles at the “Week of Peace” events and spoke with some in attendance, explaining the fraud of the Greens’ claim to oppose war.

At the blockade a member of the Young Greens, Stacy Rose, admitted to SEG members that the Greens leadership had endorsed the US warship visit, a fact neither Coates nor Turei mentioned in their speeches.

Rose justified the Greens' position by saying the party was “focusing on what we can do to get rid of the [National Party] government next year. Under the coalition we've got, Labour would probably endorse this and so would the Greens.”

Greens co-leader James Shaw told Newstalk ZB on July 22 that he approved of the visit because the warship would supposedly comply with New Zealand's anti-nuclear legislation. In fact, the US has refused to confirm or deny whether the destroyer is nuclear-armed. Shaw has also endorsed the government's decision to spend \$NZ20 billion on new navy ships and other military hardware, which will be integrated into America's war plans.

The Green Party has a long record of support for US and New Zealand imperialism. It backed the 1999-2008 Labour Party government, which sent troops to Afghanistan and Iraq. While nominally opposing these brutal wars, by 2010 the Greens had changed their position on Afghanistan, fraudulently describing New Zealand's deployment there as a “peacekeeping” operation. The party also supported the NZ and Australian military-police interventions in East Timor and the Solomon Islands.

The “Week of Peace” promoted illusions in the Labour Party by glorifying and falsifying its record. In her lecture, Dr Caldicott summarised the international crisis caused by the US-backed coup in Ukraine, the wars in Iraq and Syria, and the military build-up against Russia and China. She warned that the world is “closer to nuclear war now than we were at the height of the Cold War.”

Yet she offered no solution other than futile appeals to pro-imperialist politicians. She praised former Labour Prime Minister David Lange, whose 1980s government banned nuclear-armed ships from docking in New Zealand. She said current Prime Minister John Key would “cause Lange to turn in his grave.”

In a revealing statement, Caldicott called for the US military to get out of the Pacific because “the Pacific is ours, not theirs.” This nationalist sentiment was applauded by the middle class audience of Peace Foundation, Peace Action and Green Party members. The record of Australian and New Zealand imperialism in the Pacific is, however, one of brutal exploitation of the region for resources and cheap labour for more than a century. The New Zealand ruling elite has relied, since World War II, on an alliance with the US to advance its predatory interests in the Pacific region and beyond.

Peace Foundation member Laurie Ross gave a similarly nationalistic speech at the blockade of the weapons

conference, where she said “Lange had the guts to stay strong although he was under pressure from our friends and allies, the United States.”

In reality, Labour's ban on nuclear warships did not end the alliance. Lange strengthened intelligence ties with Washington by building the Waihopai spy base in the South Island and expanding the Government Communications Security Bureau, which is part of the US-led Five Eyes spy alliance. It has played a major role in spying on China and other countries on behalf of the US.

The Lange Labour government used the cosmetic anti-nuclear ban to rope in the support of numerous middle class activists, in Greenpeace and similar organisations, even as it intensified a sweeping assault on the working class. It privatised a swathe of the public sector, slashed taxes for the wealthy and introduced the regressive Goods and Services Tax, ushering in a far-reaching social reversal.

The Labour Party supports the National government's participation in the present war in Iraq. The Helen Clark-led Labour government (1999-2008), abetted by the Greens and the now-defunct Alliance, was responsible for restoring military ties with Washington. Labour, the Greens and the right-wing populist New Zealand First have all sought to scapegoat immigration, particularly from China, for the social crisis, as part of preparing the country to join the US war drive against Beijing.

The working class must be warned: If the Labour-Greens coalition, which Auckland Peace Action is supporting, wins the next election it will maintain and expand New Zealand's military ties with the US and drag the country into future wars. The only way to fight against war, as well as the danger of fascism and dictatorship, is through a socialist movement that unites workers internationally against the source of war, capitalism, and all its political defenders.

Attend the Socialist Equality Group's public meeting in Auckland on Sunday, November 27, 2:30pm:

The political causes and international implications of Trump's election: A Marxist assessment

Grey Lynn Library Hall, 474 Great North Road
Tickets: \$5, \$3 concession



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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