

US ambassador intervenes in New Zealand's political crisis

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Since the inconclusive New Zealand election result on September 23, US ambassador Scott Brown has given three extraordinary media interviews. He defended President Donald Trump's threats to wage war on North Korea and sought to pressure the next New Zealand government to more openly align and integrate with Washington.

A government has yet to be formed. The incumbent National Party and opposition Labour Party, which both failed to gain a majority, have held secretive coalition negotiations with New Zealand First, which received just 7.2 percent of the votes. NZ First, a right-wing nationalist and anti-Chinese party, says it will decide by the end of the week which party it will support.

The reckless actions of the US, under Barack Obama and Trump, have brought the world to the brink of war. Days before New Zealand's election, in a fascist speech to the United Nations, Trump threatened to "totally destroy" North Korea. The American ruling elite is attempting to reverse its economic decline by using its overwhelming military strength to dominate the Asia-Pacific region, above all at the expense of China. Washington is demanding the support of all its allies, including Australia, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand.

New Zealand's ruling class faces a fraught dilemma. It has significant economic links with Australia and the US, and relies on the US alliance to protect its own neo-colonial interests in the Pacific region, including in Samoa, Niue, Kiribati and Tonga. The National Party government, like the 1999-2008 Labour government, strengthened military and intelligence ties with the US and sent troops to Iraq and Afghanistan.

However, National also cultivated close business ties with China, New Zealand's second largest trading

partner. It has been reluctant to explicitly endorse the US military build-up and threats of trade war against Beijing. Labour and NZ First have called for greater military spending and attacked the government for encouraging Chinese investment and immigration.

Brown's role is to ensure that the next government ends any wavering and fully aligns with the US war drive. A former Republican Senator for Massachusetts, he was appointed ambassador by Trump and arrived in June. He spent 35 years in the Army National Guard and is known for supporting waterboarding and other forms of torture. He has also spoken of his admiration for Trump's fascist ex-advisor Steve Bannon, describing him as "a patriot."

In a TVNZ interview on October 15, Brown rebuked Prime Minister Bill English for failing to fully endorse Trump's threats against North Korea. In August, English said he would "consider" supporting a US war against North Korea, but offered no definite commitment and described Trump's threat to rain "fire and fury" on the impoverished country as "not helpful."

Brown told TVNZ: "With respect to the prime minister... the president's policy, after years of basically languishing, are (sic) actually working." He pointed to the crippling UN sanctions imposed on North Korea, which are heightening the danger of war. With breathtaking hypocrisy, the ambassador declared that North Korean leader Kim Jong-un was the one "threatening to wipe out and kill people."

TVNZ journalist Corin Dann asked Brown if the US was "concerned ... that New Zealand is becoming too aligned, particularly economically, with China." Brown replied that trade was "up to the Kiwi government" but declared that China was "destroying coral reefs and militarising islands and changing the law of the air and

sea.”

So far, the National government has been wary of openly criticising China’s construction on disputed islands in the South China Sea, which the US has used as a pretext for its own militarisation of the region, including provocative naval exercises.

On September 27, Brown was asked by Newshub if Washington expected New Zealand to “join some kind of fight against North Korea.” He replied: “That’s completely and totally up to your government, whichever government it is.” However, he added: “I would hope that New Zealand would do whatever it can do to protect its environmental interests, its fishing interests, its territorial interests... China is ... building and militarising islands. That has a direct effect. And then their trade with North Korea, that’s important, we have to stop that.”

In his interviews, Brown stressed New Zealand’s importance as a partner in the US-led Five Eyes intelligence network. He told Fairfax Media on October 2 that New Zealanders “should be really proud of that fact.” NZ’s Government Communications Security Bureau plays a major part in war preparations by spying on China and other countries, in collaboration with the US National Security Agency.

Brown’s statements coincide with an intensifying anti-Chinese campaign by sections of the New Zealand media, working with the Washington-based think tanks, the Wilson Center and the Jamestown Foundation. A widely-publicised report by the Wilson Center’s Anne-Marie Brady, published days before the election, claimed the government was beholden to Chinese business interests and alleged, without any evidence, that National Party MP Jian Yang and Labour MP Raymond Huo were “agents” of the Chinese Communist Party. Brady called for the NZ Security Intelligence Service to carry out a sweeping investigation of Chinese “influence” in New Zealand politics.

NZ First echoed Brady’s demands and called for Yang to step down while an “inquiry” is conducted. Labour leader Jacinda Ardern also indicated she would consider empowering the spy agency to investigate Chinese “influence,” as Australia’s intelligence agency is now doing.

None of the parliamentary parties has commented publicly on Brown’s extraordinary post-election

statements, which undoubtedly have been discussed behind the backs of the population as part of the coalition negotiations with NZ First.

All the parties, including the Greens, support the alliance with US imperialism and are extremely concerned about the widespread anti-war sentiment in the working class. This is why the immense danger of war was barely discussed during the election campaign.

The *Daily Blog*, funded by several trade unions and supported by the pseudo-left Socialist Aotearoa and the Communist Workers Group, is playing a key role in whipping up anti-Chinese xenophobia. After the election it declared Chinese influence in the National Party was “the major issue” facing the country. The blog, which is pushing for a Labour-Green-NZ First government, endorsed Brady’s report and has published racist articles opposing Asian immigration.

Washington’s intervention into the political crisis is an indication of the immense dangers facing the working class. The next government, whichever party leads it, will intensify the attacks on immigrants, whip up nationalism and xenophobia, and accelerate the preparations to drag the country into war.



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