

New Zealand government expands police training in schools

Tom Peters
14 February 2019

On February 1, New Zealand's Labour Party-led government launched police training courses at three high schools in the greater Wellington region: Aotea, Mana and Kapiti Colleges. Year 13 students are being encouraged to take the "Introduction to Police Studies" course for academic credits to go towards their National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), NZ's high school qualification.

The course was originally announced in November 2017, just days after the formation of the coalition government, as a pilot scheme at two high schools in the working class town of Rotorua. Last year 35 students completed the course, which is now being expanded to the three largely working-class schools in Porirua and Kapiti, near the country's capital.

At the launch ceremony, a police sergeant said the course would be "useful for the recruitment process, such as helping [students] train for the physical entry requirements." It incorporates a 12-week pre-entry course which all police applicants complete as part of their training.

Moving this course into high schools further demonstrates the right-wing character of the coalition Labour-led government, which also includes NZ First and the Greens. Police officers will run the program with the aim of instilling discipline and unquestioning respect for the forces of the state among young people—the section of the working class worst-affected by low wages and the social crisis.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern falsely claims to be implementing "kind" and "compassionate" policies, while areas such as Rotorua and Porirua remain mired in poverty, with high rates of homelessness, illnesses caused by poor living conditions, and suicide.

Soaring social inequality has fuelled an upsurge of strikes and protests over the past year involving

teachers, health workers, transport workers and others—a trend that has alarmed the ruling class. Like governments around the world, Labour is responding to the developing class struggle with authoritarian measures—strengthening the power of the police, military and spy agencies to suppress popular anger.

In its coalition deal with the right-wing nationalist NZ First Party, Labour agreed to recruit 1,800 more front-line police officers—a 20 percent increase on 2016 figures. During the 2017 election the major parties competed to be the toughest on "law and order." Labour recruited Greg O'Connor, former Police Association leader, as a star candidate—a man with a long record of defending killings by police and calling for all officers to be armed with guns.

The plan to roll out Police Studies in high schools, however, was hidden from the public until after the vote. It cannot be found in Labour or NZ First's pre-election policy statements or media coverage.

The introduction of the course follows years of the military's involvement in schools. Dozens of schools now give academic credit for "Service Academy" programs: "military-focused" training run by the Defence Force. Several were established under the 1999-2008 Labour government and the number increased under the 2008-2017 National Party government, mostly in poor neighbourhoods. According to the Ministry of Education website, 29 schools now run Service Academies, up from 16 in 2011.

The 2008-2017 National Party government opened several for-profit charter schools, including the Vanguard Military School in Auckland, which prepares teenagers to join the armed forces. Labour has integrated the school into the public system while allowing it to keep its "special" militarist character.

Throughout the past year there has been a determined recruitment drive for the armed forces and the police. One of the Labour-led government's first announcements was that a six-week military training scheme offered to unemployed youth—known as the Limited Service Volunteers—would double in size, from 800 to 1,600 people per year.

Schools have been flooded with nationalist material celebrating New Zealand's participation in the First World War, as part of multi-million-dollar Anzac centenary commemorations. Tens of thousands of young New Zealanders died in the war as part of the British Empire's forces in the Middle East and Europe. In the lead-up to WWI, schools were heavily militarised and children were indoctrinated with jingoistic propaganda.

More than a century later, society is once again being militarized in the context of an intractable crisis of the capitalist system and preparations for war by every country, with the United States in the forefront. US imperialism is determined to offset its historic economic decline by seizing resources and markets with military force—including against nuclear-armed powers like Russia and China.

New Zealand's ruling elite is part of the US-led Five Eyes intelligence network and seeks to advance its own imperialist ambitions through its military alliance with the US. The Ardern government has kept New Zealand troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, called for a greater US military presence in the Pacific, and joined the Trump administration in labelling China and Russia the main "threats" to global stability.

Despite widespread anti-war sentiment, there is no opposition within the political establishment to the Police and Defence Force programs targeting teenagers and unemployed youth. The Green Party, which is part of the government, the trade unions and pseudo-left groups have remained silent.

Aotea College principal Kate Gainsford, former president of the Post-Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA), the secondary teachers' union, hailed the Police Studies course, telling the NZ Police website: "We found our school values aligned very well with Police values. We don't see it as necessarily a recruitment tool—it's more about service to the community and opening the door for other possible pathways, including a pathway to Police."

Such statements reflect the anti-working class politics of the unions, which have spent decades working with governments and businesses to suppress workers' opposition to wage freezes and the running down of working conditions. It is no surprise that union bureaucrats would feel a close affinity with the police.

The PPTA is currently negotiating with the Ministry of Education in an attempt to avoid strike action, which teachers have voted for, against low wages, understaffing and the lack of classroom aides.

In 2016, the nationalist *Daily Blog*, which is funded by the Unite union, the Rail and Maritime Transport Union and the New Zealand Dairy Workers Union, promoted NZ First's proposal for unemployed teenagers to be encouraged to undergo army training. The blog has also called for a more aggressive and militarist stance against China.

The demand must be raised for an immediate end to military and police recruitment programs in schools and universities—as part of a broader political and industrial campaign to unite workers, students and parents on the basis of a socialist anti-war program. The struggle of primary and secondary teachers, and other workers, against austerity must be linked with conscious opposition to military spending and law-and-order spending. This requires an implacable struggle against the Labour Party government, including NZ First and the Greens, and a complete break from the trade unions and their pseudo-left allies.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)