

New Zealand Greens support military build-up

Tom Peters
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New Zealand's Green Party purports to have a pacifist foreign policy. Its founding charter lists "non-violent conflict resolution" as one of four guiding principles. Following the recent US assassination of Iranian General Qassem Suleimani, an act of war, Green MP Golriz Ghahraman called for NZ troops to be withdrawn from Iraq, where they are supporting the illegal US imperialist occupation.

Such statements are thoroughly hypocritical. Like its sister parties in Australia, Germany and elsewhere, the NZ Greens fully embraces imperialism. Last year the Greens endorsed Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's decision to extend the troop deployment to Iraq to June 2020. The party has also supported NZ's military presence in Afghanistan, falsely describing it as a "peacekeeping" mission. It has also refused to defend WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who is being persecuted for revealing US war crimes.

As part of Adern's Labour-led coalition government, which includes the anti-immigrant NZ First, the Greens are playing a significant role in one of New Zealand's biggest military build-ups since World War II.

As the US military has encircled and staged provocations against China—viewed as the main obstacle to Washington's global hegemony—the Labour-Greens-NZ First government strengthened its alliance with the US and is actively preparing to join new wars.

Supported by the opposition National Party, the government's 2019 Defence Capability Plan is committed to spend \$20 billion by 2030 to upgrade the navy and airforce and expand the army from 4,500 to 6,000 soldiers. This is at the expense of social programs, including severely overcrowded and understaffed hospitals and schools, which are being starved of funds.

This, the Defence Capability Plan claims, will enable

more effective joint operations with "allies and partners," particularly the US, Australia and the UK, and strengthen NZ's ability to deploy forces throughout the Pacific region, which Wellington considers its neo-colonial backyard.

Green Party co-leader James Shaw, in his role as Minister for Climate Change, is playing a key role in making the "humanitarian" case for the military build-up. In December 2019, he and Defence Minister Ron Mark, a member of NZ First, jointly released the Defence Force document "Responding to the Climate Crisis: An Implementation Plan" (RCC).

Significantly, the RCC endorsed the 2019 Capability Plan, which the Greens initially claimed to oppose when it was released last June. Ghahraman told Radio NZ in June that her party disagreed with replacing five Air Force Hercules planes with newer models at a cost of \$1 billion and enlarging the army, declaring: "Investing in more and more war has not kept anyone safe."

These "anti-war" statements were completely hollow. The Greens-backed RCC states that "planned enhancements to sealift and airlift capabilities, as well as the increase in the size of the New Zealand Army to 6,000 personnel" are needed to address climate-related issues.

Shaw told the media such measures would enhance disaster-relief efforts, saying: "Some of the countries most vulnerable to climate change are also the least well equipped to respond to its worsening impacts. New Zealand needs to be ready to play its part by ensuring humanitarian support is available when it's needed."

In fact, notwithstanding its token references to humanitarianism, the RCC emphasises the need to prepare for the "security impacts of climate change,"

including “both low-level and more violent conflict” over resources and land, particularly in Pacific island countries.

What this means in practice can be seen in the biennial Southern Katipo military exercises, in which New Zealand troops train to invade a Pacific island nation and suppress resistance. The 1999–2008 Labour Party government, backed by the Greens, joined Australian-led interventions in East Timor and the Solomon Islands, and sent troops to Tonga following riots in 2006.

Such exercises are also preparing soldiers to suppress New Zealand’s working class which, as in every other country, is moving to the left and carrying out increasing strikes and protests against social inequality.

Absurdly, Shaw and Mark claim the expanded military will reduce its carbon emissions, thanks to better technology. This is despite the RCC advocating increased maritime patrols and aerial surveillance in New Zealand’s vast exclusive economic zone, waters surrounding Niue, Tokelau and the Cook Islands (semi-colonies of New Zealand) and international waters “from the South Pole to the Equator.” The document warns that “maritime impacts of climate change” could see increased fishing in these areas and “conflicts resulting from resource competition.”

In 2015, NZ First, then in opposition, demanded military action in international waters near Antarctica against foreign fishing vessels encroaching on areas fished by New Zealand companies. Ron Mark denounced the then-National Party government’s approach as “pacifist,” declaring that if fishing vessels refused to be boarded by the NZ Navy “then we must be prepared to use force.”

The arch-militarist NZ First gained significant power after the 2017 election, when it decided to form a coalition government with Labour and the Greens instead of National. Mark became defence minister, while party leader Winston Peters was made foreign minister and deputy prime minister.

The Greens embraced NZ First despite its support for war and its anti-immigrant, anti-Chinese propaganda, which is echoed by Labour and the trade unions. Shaw told *Newshub* he was “absolutely delighted” with the coalition and “really looking forward to building a constructive relationship with [Peters],” who he praised as “diligent [and] very professional.”

The government quickly strengthened military ties with Washington. In 2018, for the first time, a Strategic Defence Policy Statement echoed the US by naming Russia and China as the main “threats” to the world. Peters has repeatedly called on the US to join New Zealand in boosting its military presence in the Pacific to push back against China’s economic influence in the region.

Pseudo-left groups, including Peace Action, the International Socialist Organisation and Socialist Aotearoa, have for years falsely promoted the Greens as a “left” alternative, in order to tie working people and youth to the political establishment. They have remained silent on the Greens’ support for record levels of military spending.

The trade union-backed *Daily Blog* echoed the Greens on January 20, stating that “our military will rapidly become our first response to [climate crises].” It demanded “a dramatic increase in military spending” to turn NZ into a “fortress” against immigrants.

The upper-middle class layers these groups represent have no real objections to NZ imperialism and its alliances with the US and other countries, which, in the final analysis, is the source of their privileges and wealth.

A new anti-war movement must urgently be built, but this can only be done in a political struggle against the Labour government, including the Greens and its nationalist, pseudo-left apologists. Such a movement must be based on a socialist and internationalist perspective, aimed at uniting workers throughout the world to abolish the source of war: the capitalist system and the reactionary division of the world into competing nation states.



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