

New Zealand PM silent on Trump's culpability for Washington coup

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As the fascist coup incited by outgoing US President Donald Trump unfolded in Washington on January 6, New Zealand's Labour-led government responded, like political leaders around the world, with a mixture of nervousness and evasion.

Several hours after the coup began playing out in the local media, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern released a statement on Twitter. Avoiding any real characterisation of the Washington events, Ardern declared: "I share the sentiment of friends in the US—what is happening is wrong. Democracy—the right of people to exercise a vote, have their voice heard and then have that decision upheld peacefully should never be undone by a mob."

She concluded by saying: "I have no doubt that democracy will prevail"—a complacent remark that deliberately obscures the seriousness of what was taking place in Washington.

Ardern, whose Labour-led government was re-elected last October, has regularly been portrayed in the world's media, entirely falsely, as a progressive and compassionate leader—the antithesis to Trump. Her silence over Trump's key role in the attempted coup, which is far from over, proves the opposite.

Even over the past week, as Trump faced impeachment while continuing to defend his seditious speech as "totally appropriate," and with evidence emerging of more planned fascist violence, Arden has made no further comment. Her continued silence speaks volumes.

In fact, Ardern has, throughout her more than three years in office, enjoyed a close relationship with the White House. The Trump administration played a significant role in Ardern forming government following the 2017 election. US ambassador Scott Brown, a Trump appointee, made extraordinary public

statements criticising the National Party's reluctance to fully align with US threats against North Korea.

In the wake of Brown's intervention, the racist and nationalist NZ First Party announced it would form a coalition with Labour and the Greens. Ardern's government rested centrally on NZ First, despite it receiving just 7.2 percent of votes in the 2017 election. Ardern handed several critical ministries to NZ First. Party leader Winston Peters became both deputy prime minister and foreign minister, and Ron Mark the defence minister.

The Trump-like NZ First for years fomented anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim chauvinism, similar to that in the fascist manifesto of the Christchurch terrorist Brenton Tarrant. Before taking office, NZ First and Labour both campaigned against Chinese immigration and Beijing's "influence" in the Pacific, seeking to align New Zealand with the US economic and military build-up against China. The deeply unpopular NZ First is effectively moribund after getting just 2.6 percent of the vote in the election last year.

During the 2020 campaign both Ardern and National Party leader Judith Collins pledged to work with Trump if he remained in office. Neither criticised Trump's threats to ignore the US election outcome and carry out a coup, or his incitement of fascist violence. Collins praised Trump's foreign policy record, dishonestly declaring he had done "stuff with Israel and UAE" that proved he wasn't "ready to rush into war."

As the WSWS has pointed out, the coup attempt on January 6, incited and directed by Trump, was a watershed in the erosion of democratic norms and a turn to dictatorship in the centre of world imperialism. Under conditions of explosive social polarisation and rising class struggles, exacerbated by the disastrous COVID-19 pandemic, the ruling classes around the

world, including in New Zealand, are turning to authoritarianism and fascism.

There is certainly alarm in New Zealand's political establishment over the implications of the January 6 coup plot. Opposition leader Collins repeated that the US events were "a disgraceful attack on democracy" and called for "a peaceful and orderly transition of power." Despite widespread evidence of prior planning of the coup, former Labour prime minister and ex-UN official Helen Clark claimed; "never in one's wildest imagination could one have envisaged the dangerous events involving mob violence unfolding in Washington DC."

The country's ruling elite relies on its decades-long strategic partnership with the US to advance its imperialist interests in the Asia-Pacific. Welcoming Biden's electoral victory in November, Ardern emphasised that her administration had "enjoyed positive and cooperative relations with the United States over the period of the Trump administration, especially in the Indo-Pacific and Pacific Island regions," and wanted this to continue.

At the same time, there has been support for Trump in the New Zealand ruling elites. Sections of big business and the media have repeatedly praised Trump for his purported "achievements"—boosting the stock market to unprecedented heights and imposing vicious levels of inequality while militarily confronting China and Russia.

In response to the greatest crisis of capitalism since the Great Depression the NZ ruling class is rapidly moving to the right. The Labour-Green Party coalition government is presiding over soaring social inequality and poverty. Its main response to the COVID-19 crisis has been to hand out billions of dollars to big business. Meanwhile tens of thousands of people have lost their jobs and 30 percent of households have reported a drop in income this year.

Acutely aware of broad disillusionment among the working class with the entire political establishment, the ruling class, as in the US and Europe, is promoting nationalism and xenophobia while strengthening the state in preparation for violent crackdowns on resistance to deepening attacks on the jobs, social position and basic rights of working people.

This has encouraged the emergence of far-right and fascist groups, which are being elevated and protected

by the political establishment. On Thursday, a pro-Trump "freedom rally," led by media figure Billy Te Kahika, attracted 50 protesters outside the parliament building in Wellington, which was vandalised in an axe attack two days earlier.

The recently released report of the inquiry into Tarrant's 2019 terror attack on two Christchurch mosques, in which 51 people died, has meanwhile white-washed the state agencies and suppressed evidence of the growing threat of fascist networks. In response, Ardern has promised to significantly increase the resources of the intelligence agencies and introduce tougher "hate speech" laws—measures that will be ultimately used against the working class.



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