Rally in Auckland, New Zealand promotes US-NATO war against Russia

Tom Peters
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On June 5, several hundred people joined what was falsely advertised as an "anti-war march for Ukraine" in Auckland, New Zealand's biggest city.

The event was called by the Ukrainian Association of New Zealand, an expatriate group, and promoted on social media by the middle class, pseudo-left groups Auckland Peace Action, and Peace Action Wellington.

The aim of the rally, which had the character of a government-sponsored event, was to justify NZ's growing military contribution to the US-NATO proxy war against Russia. The Labour Party-led government has joined the sanctions against Russia and sent about 90 troops to Europe to assist with supplying and training the Ukrainian armed forces.

The marchers gathered outside the Auckland War Memorial, where they were addressed by representatives of the Labour Party-Greens coalition government: Priyanca Radhakrishnan, minister for ethnic communities, and Green MP Ricardo Menéndez March, as well as former Labour leader Phil Goff, now mayor of Auckland. Other speakers included diplomats from Poland and Latvia.

This line-up revealed the pro-war character of the event, which went beyond denouncing Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and embraced the actions of NATO and the US in flooding Ukraine with weapons. Speakers called for more military support to ramp up the war against Russia and oust President Vladimir Putin.

This dovetails with the aims of US and European governments, which provoked Putin's invasion in order to inflict a decisive military defeat on Russia and to bring it under their imperialist control. Driven by the worsening global economic crisis, these governments are seeking to redivide the world, at the expense of Russia and China, and to whip up nationalism and deflect growing class tensions at home onto an external enemy.

Goff delivered a bellicose speech, which began with the shout "Slava Ukraini!" (Glory to Ukraine)—the battle cry used by Ukrainian fascist forces in World War II, which has been adopted by governments around the world. With staggering hypocrisy, Goff posed as the opponent of unprovoked invasions. He said the "independence and sovereignty of all nations should be respected," and referred to "the victims of this aggression, those who have been killed and wounded, those who have been raped, those who have lost their homes…"

Goff served as foreign minister and defence minister during the 1999–2008 Labour Party-led government, which sent NZ troops to join the illegal US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. These wars, started with lies about fighting terrorism and the threat of "weapons of mass destruction," were aimed at cementing US imperialist control over resources and strategic areas of the globe. New Zealand's repeated troop deployments, which resulted in the killing of civilians and other war crimes, were aimed at strengthening New Zealand's alliance with the US war machine.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a reactionary response to NATO's expansion and threats. It has led to widespread suffering, deaths and dislocation. But it does not come close to the destruction of entire societies by US imperialism over the last 30 years, leading to the deaths of well over a million people in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and elsewhere.

Chillingly, Goff compared the war in Ukraine with World Wars I and II, saying that "30,000 New Zealanders… gave their lives for independence, for freedom, for the values of our country and for a better

world." In fact, NZ involvement in these imperialist wars was aimed at supporting the British Empire and ensuring that New Zealand's ruling elite could seize new colonies in the Pacific.

Goff declared that Putin will be "held to account." He called Putin a "Nazi" who "is doing what Adolf Hitler did in 1938 by invading Sudetenland, in '39 by invading Poland. The world came together to resist that fascism and that aggression, and the world must do the same for Ukraine today."

This false comparison is intended to prepare public opinion for a much larger war, involving nuclear-armed powers, which would eclipse even the barbarism of the Second World War.

Goff's references to fascism are particularly cynical, since it is well-known that extreme right-wing militias make up a large part of the Ukrainian military, including the notorious Azov Battalion. These neo-Nazis, armed to the teeth by NATO, have been responsible for numerous war crimes, including the execution of Russian prisoners.

The war in Ukraine did not begin in 2022 with Russia's invasion. The US and European powers, which falsely claim they are defending "democracy" from Putin, funded and coordinated the 2014 coup in Kiev, which overthrew an elected, pro-Russian government. The fascist Right Sector and Svoboda organisations played a leading part in the putsch, which provoked Russia's annexation of Crimea and the civil war in the breakaway Russian-speaking eastern provinces.

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In response to the 2014 events, New Zealand's parliament, including Labour and the Greens, voted unanimously to align with the US, tacitly supporting the coup and blaming the conflict on "Russian aggression."

Minister Radhakrishnan, in her speech to the gathering, outlined New Zealand's involvement in the war. In addition to sanctions against Russia, New Zealand has "provided over $33 million in assistance to Ukraine in financial and in-kind support to Ukraine," including "the contribution towards weapons and ammunition procurements," "funds to provide commercial satellite imagery to Ukrainian defence intelligence, and to the NATO trucks fund" to transport military equipment.

Last month, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced that New Zealand troops in the UK are helping to train Ukrainian forces in the use of the howitzer artillery cannon.

Green Party MP Menéndez March, who spoke after Goff and Radhakrishnan, did not challenge their pro-war remarks. He called for greater support for refugees fleeing Ukraine.

The Greens, which are part of the coalition government, criticised NZ's provision of weapons, saying it should instead concentrate on "humanitarian" assistance. But the party is completely aligned with New Zealand's support for NATO and participation in the war, and has demanded the expulsion of the Russian ambassador.

The role of Auckland Peace Action (APA) and Peace Action Wellington in promoting the rally exposes their fraudulent pretence of opposition to war. In a Facebook post later in the day, APA sought to whitewash the event: it made no reference to the government's support for NATO and the militarist comments by Goff and Radhakrishnan. It declared that "some speeches took place," saying nothing about their content, and that the rally was "heartening and a display of strength in people's commitment to humanity, opposition to the invasion, and understanding that peace and justice are interwoven and interconnected."

The "pacifist" groups, which are close to the Greens, represent a middle class milieu that is galloping to the right and, like the pseudo-left International Socialist Organisation and the "left-wing" *Daily Blog*, has embraced imperialism.

The rally last Sunday underscores that a genuine anti-war movement can only be built based on a socialist and internationalist program, in opposition to the Ardern government, including the Greens, and the pseudo-left apologists for these imperialist parties.

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