

# New Zealand ruling elite glorifies British monarchy

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New Zealand's political and media establishment has joined in the mind-numbing glorification of Queen Elizabeth II and the British monarchy over the past fortnight. The Labour Party-led government announced a period of mourning, culminating in a state memorial service and one-off public holiday to be held on September 26.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern told a press conference on September 9 that “this is a time of deep sadness” and “we share our thanks for an incredible woman who we were lucky enough to call our Queen.” Ardern stated that “the Queen has been such a constant in our lives” and was the embodiment of “service, charity and consistency... courage, compassion and humour.”

Beyond these platitudes, which have been repeated ad nauseum by politicians and media pundits, Ardern was unable to explain why the population should be particularly moved or interested in the death of the extremely wealthy 96-year-old monarch.

Throughout the world, the mourning for the Queen is driven by a yearning for authoritarian forms of rule, and for a symbol of national unity and “stability,” which can then be used to suppress social conflict. As the WSWS noted, her death occurs at a time of acute economic, social and political crisis for British imperialism and its allies, including the NATO war against Russia over Ukraine, collapsing living standards, the ongoing pandemic, and the threat of widespread class conflict.

In New Zealand, the endless tributes to the Queen have served the immediate purpose of diverting attention from the government's open adoption of the criminal policy of mass COVID infection. Just three days after the monarch's death, Ardern falsely declared that “the worst of the pandemic is, in many ways, over” and announced an end to mask mandates and daily reporting of cases. In fact, COVID has become a leading cause of death in New Zealand, and during the winter months the country's death rate from the virus was among the highest in the world, thanks to the government's removal of public health measures.

The Ardern government also confronts the re-emergence

of workers' struggles, driven by the soaring cost of living with inflation at 7.3 percent. Firefighters, manufacturing workers, healthcare workers and others have all recently engaged in strike action. Anger over worsening levels of poverty and homelessness has contributed to falling support for the Labour Party.

Amid this rising political uncertainty, Ardern has downplayed her previous statements that she expects New Zealand to eventually become a republic. She declared at a proclamation ceremony that she expects New Zealand's ties with Britain to “deepen” under King Charles III. She told the BBC that moving towards a republic is “not a process I have any intent of instigating.”

Making New Zealand a republic, under capitalism, would change nothing fundamental: all power would remain in the hands of the super-wealthy layer represented by both major parties and their allies. The ruling elite, however, is clearly concerned that opening up discussion on the issue could have unpredictable consequences.

Writing in the *Listener* magazine, former Prime Minister Helen Clark expressed concern that a debate over “constitutional arrangements” could contribute to “polarisation in a society where political rhetoric has become more charged, and where there are heightened perceptions of marginalisation and exclusion.”

Ardern's stance was also applauded by a September 13 *New Zealand Herald* editorial, which declared that the “strength” of aristocratic rule “is that it places constitutional stability in a person who cannot be replaced, and a family everyone recognises. It is ancient, familiar and works.”

Among the key considerations for Wellington is the fact that the governor-general, the Queen's unelected representative, retains significant anti-democratic reserve powers. The notion that the monarchy never intervenes in politics is a fraud. In 1975 Australian Governor-General John Kerr dismissed the Labor government of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam—who the ruling class viewed as incapable of suppressing the growing upsurge of workers against historic attacks on wages.

Referring favourably to this action, known as the Canberra coup, Newstalk ZB radio host Andrew Dickens declared on September 12 that New Zealand should keep the monarchy in order to provide “an impartial tool for when things go very wrong, as they did in Australia in the Gough Whitlam years.”

The Ardern government may also be concerned that a debate on republicanism could encourage opposition to New Zealand’s role in the imperialist world order. As a minor imperialist power, NZ has historically depended on its alliance with the British Empire to secure its own neo-colonial interests in the Pacific and more broadly. Since World War II, NZ and Australia have been more closely allied to the United States. But ties with the UK remain important as all the major powers charge into another world war; the Ardern government has sent hundreds of soldiers to Britain to assist in training Ukrainian troops to fight Russia.

The bloody history of British imperialism, over which the Queen presided during her 70 year reign, is generally being buried beneath a flood of fawning tributes.

Leaders of the Green Party and Māori Party referred in parliament to the brutal impact of British colonialism on indigenous Māori in the nineteenth century. But this did not prevent Greens co-leader Marama Davidson from declaring in a statement that the Queen “lived a life of unwavering public service to her country and its former colonies.”

Māori Party leader Rawiri Waititi, who has previously called for a republic, told Radio NZ: “[The Queen has] been a constant over three generations and an anchor in a rapidly changing globe, and it’s a huge responsibility for one person to have.”

One of the most fawning statements in the media came from Martyn Bradbury, editor of the pro-Labour Party *Daily Blog*, who declared: “She fought the Nazis, empowered Feminism and was the only functioning Matriarch... She was the Grandmother to 20th Century Western Democracy.”

This was followed by a similarly unhinged endorsement of King Charles III, who Bradbury said was “championing more resources for climate adaptation,” and would stand up against Prime Minister Liz Truss’s “free market fanaticism” and “trashing of the environment.”

There is no discussion in the media or political establishment of the many crimes committed during Elizabeth II’s reign, including the suppression of the Mau Mau insurgency in Kenya during the 1950s, in which British troops killed an estimated 150,000 people, and other brutal actions and interventions in the city of Aden in Yemen, Cyprus, Malaya (now Singapore and Malaysia), Uganda and Zimbabwe, known then as Rhodesia.

Instead, the British monarchy is being falsely portrayed as the guarantor of the rights of indigenous Māori, who make

up about 15 percent of the NZ population.

According to Bradbury, “Māori see a personal connection to the Royal Family” because of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi between the Crown and several tribal chiefs in 1840. The Treaty, which is now treated as a founding national document, made false promises that Māori land and other interests would be protected by the Crown.

Queen Elizabeth II played a key role in the transformation of the colonial-era Treaty into a mechanism for the enrichment of a small tribal elite. Representatives of this bourgeois and aristocratic layer, including the Māori king Tūheitia and Ngai Tahu leader Tipene O’Regan, were among 20 New Zealanders who accompanied Ardern to the Queen’s funeral in London.

In 1995, the Queen personally signed an apology to the Waikato-Tainui tribes for “the loss of lives because of the hostilities arising from [the British] invasion” and for the “confiscations of land and resources.” This was accompanied by a financial handout from the NZ government totalling \$170 million—one of the most significant Treaty settlements, which have been used in recent decades to transform the tribes into capitalist enterprises.

As a result, Waikato-Tainui has since developed a billion dollar business arm, Tainui Group Holdings. The settlement opened the door for similar deals, which have converted several tribal leaders into wealthy capitalists and ardent royalists.

The total value of Māori business assets, including in tourism, property, fisheries and agriculture businesses, has soared in the past 20 years from \$16 billion to \$70 billion, creating a bourgeois layer that lives in a different universe from the vast majority of the population, Māori and non-Māori alike. In fact, the vast majority of Māori remain among the most impoverished and oppressed sections of the working class.

Workers of every ethnicity and nationality face soaring social inequality, a worsening public health disaster, and the danger of a third world war—all of which is pushing them to the left, in New Zealand and internationally. Whatever the immediate effect of the barrage of propaganda accompanying the Queen’s death, it will not hold back the class struggle, which will continue to intensify and bring workers into direct conflict with the crisis-ridden Ardern government and all its allies.



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