

Anti-China campaign ramps up in New Zealand

Tom Peters
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This week the corporate media in the United States and Australia launched a coordinated barrage aimed at preparing their populations for war against China in the very near future. Prominent articles in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age* call for the introduction of mass conscription and preparations for Australia to host as many as 200,000 US military personnel.

In the US, President Joe Biden has requested a record \$1 trillion budget for military spending. This is both to escalate the US-NATO war against Russia over Ukraine and to boost the militarisation of Taiwan and the Indo-Pacific region in preparation for war with China, which is viewed as the main obstacle to US geopolitical dominance.

US imperialism is hurtling towards all-out war against Russia and China, in a desperate bid to resolve its historic decline, and to divert the explosive class tensions over social inequality within the United States. It is becoming increasingly clear that Russia's invasion of Ukraine, provoked by the US and NATO, is only the opening stage of what threatens to be a catastrophic Third World War involving nuclear-armed powers.

Washington is demanding that its allies fall into line. This includes New Zealand, a minor imperialist power allied to the US and Australia, and a member of the US-led Five Eyes intelligence sharing network.

Successive New Zealand governments have sent soldiers to join the bloody US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and have welcomed the growing US militarisation of the Indo-Pacific over the past decade. The current Labour Party-led government has sent hundreds of NZ troops to Britain to help train Ukrainian conscripts, and has provided millions of dollars in funding for the war against Russia.

The government and the corporate media have been considerably more reluctant to openly join the belligerent US-led denunciations of China, for fear of damaging New

Zealand's most important trading relationship. In the year ending March 2022, China accounted for 26.8 percent of New Zealand's exports, mostly dairy and other agricultural products.

With the media, politicians and military leaders in the US and Australia now declaring that war is inevitable, pressure is being applied to the New Zealand government to drop any pretence of a "neutral" or "independent" position.

On March 7, *Newshub's* Melissa Chan-Green asked Prime Minister Chris Hipkins whether he had been contacted by US officials regarding "potential sanctions on China if they were to support military assistance [for Russia] in Ukraine." Hipkins refused to reveal what has been discussed with the US, but said New Zealand would "take a very dim view of any other governments that were seen to be supporting the Russian invasion of Ukraine." Beijing has denied Washington's claim that it is considering providing weapons to Russia.

Three days later *Newshub* interviewed Scott Brown, a former US Republican senator who served as ambassador to New Zealand from 2017 to 2020. He declared that while New Zealand had to make its own decisions, China should face "consequences" for "meddling and helping" Russia. Brown, who was a US military officer during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, hypocritically ranted that China was "militarising islands," "stealing our intellectual property" and "not playing by the rules"—that is, the rules set by US imperialism.

Addressing concerns about the impact on trade if New Zealand supported US moves against China, Brown said "it will be up to the United States and all the other countries to backfill any loss New Zealand has in their trade."

Brown has a record of intervening publicly in New Zealand's domestic politics. Following an inconclusive election in September 2017, he gave a series of

extraordinary media interviews in which he made clear that Washington viewed the National Party government as too close to China and wanted the next government to take a tougher line against Beijing.

Shortly afterwards, the Labour-NZ First-Greens government was formed, with the right-wing and viciously anti-Chinese NZ First leader Winston Peters serving as foreign minister and deputy prime minister. NZ First, which is deeply unpopular in the working class, failed to win any seats in the 2020 election.

Brown's reappearance sends a clear signal that Washington is closely observing NZ politics and is demanding a more decisive shift against China.

Canberra is also stepping up its collaboration with New Zealand in preparation for war. On March 9, the *New Zealand Herald* revealed that last October the Australian government spoke with New Zealand officials about "domestic and international efforts to build resilience to economic coercion."

The newspaper quoted New Zealand academic Anne-Marie Brady—a prominent anti-China hawk whose work has been funded by NATO—declaring that China had "a tendency to use trade as a weapon" and New Zealand was over-exposed and needed to "diversify" its trade.

On the same day, *Stuff* reported that New Zealand's spy agency, the Security and Intelligence Service, has been investigating Yuan Zhao, a senior public servant, for allegedly passing information to Beijing. Zhao, a New Zealand citizen who immigrated from China in 2006, said he was detained and interrogated at Wellington Airport last October. The SIS confiscated his phone and he was suspended from his job at the Public Service Commission.

No evidence has been released against Zhao, who maintains his innocence and has complained to the inspector-general of Intelligence and Security that he felt threatened by the SIS. The Chinese embassy denounced the allegations against Zhao, telling the media they were "ill-founded, and with an ulterior motive to smear and attack China, which we firmly oppose."

Despite the lack of evidence, and the well-known close collaboration between the intelligence agencies and their US counterparts, the pro-Labour Party *Daily Blog* immediately declared: "we have another Chinese Spy." The blog's editor Martyn Bradbury has echoed allegations made by Brady that the opposition National Party is a tool of Beijing, and demanded surveillance of NZ's Chinese community. He has also regurgitated the far-right conspiracy theory that COVID-19 originated in a Chinese laboratory.

Last April, in *World Socialist Response*'s exposure of his militarist and anti-China propaganda, Bradbury published an inflammatory article demanding that the SIS "openly investigate [the] Socialist Equality Group as Chinese enablers and for possible treason."

The *Daily Blog*'s embrace of the SIS and frothing hostility towards anti-war socialists exposes the fraud of its claims to support a "neutral" foreign policy. Yesterday, Bradbury published an article supporting the Maori Party's proposal for a withdrawal from the Five Eyes. He declared: "Let's be clear, not one of us wants to get tricked by America into fighting China."

The same article demanded a "vastly larger military" with military spending increased from the current level of less than 2 percent of GDP to 3 percent, in line with NATO and the US. The blog has aligned itself with elements in the political establishment and business elite, including Maori capitalists, who are in favour of stepped up preparations for war and the demonisation of China, while maintaining a pretence of "independence."

History proves that there is no pacifist tendency in New Zealand's ruling class, which sent tens of thousands of people to fight and die in two world wars, and which depends on a close alliance with the US and Australia to uphold NZ's imperialist interests in the Pacific region and more broadly.

In the working class there is widespread and deeply-entrenched hostility to war, which has yet to find organised political expression. This requires the building of a socialist party, independent of all the parliamentary parties and hostile to the Labour-Greens government and its pseudo-left and liberal supporters. The fight against war is impossible without the fight to mobilise the international working class to overthrow its source: the capitalist system.



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