

New Zealand diplomat sacked after criticizing Trump

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Winston Peters, foreign minister in New Zealand's far-right National Party-led government, sacked the country's high commissioner to the United Kingdom, Phil Goff, on Thursday for criticising US President Trump's negotiations with Russia to reach a ceasefire in Ukraine.

The position is one of NZ's most important diplomatic posts. Goff, appointed in 2022, is a former Labour Party leader, foreign affairs minister and Auckland mayor.

As the rift widens between Washington and the major European powers—which are demanding the continuation of the proxy war against Russia—Goff's sacking sends a clear message that the New Zealand government will not tolerate open criticism of Trump's new Ukraine policy.

While the New Zealand government continues to support the US-NATO proxy war against Russia over Ukraine, Wellington is also anxious to avoid offending Trump as it strengthens New Zealand's alliance with US imperialism and its integration into the US build-up to war against China.

At a public event in London, Goff told Finnish Foreign Affairs Minister Elina Valtonen that he had been rereading a speech by Winston Churchill in 1938 after the Munich Agreement. Churchill had said to Britain's then prime minister Neville Chamberlain: "You had the choice between war and dishonour. You chose dishonour, yet you will have war."

Goff then asked: "President Trump has restored the bust of Churchill to the Oval Office. But do you think he really understands history?"

Goff's question implied that Trump is seeking to "appease" Moscow by negotiating over the fate of Ukraine, in the same way that Chamberlain and other European leaders agreed to allow Nazi Germany to annex large parts of Czechoslovakia in 1938.

Goff was sacked within hours of Peters learning of the incident. A spokesperson for the minister said Goff's comments "do not represent the views of the NZ

Government and make his position as High Commissioner to London untenable."

Peters, who is also deputy prime minister in the ruling coalition, told the *New Zealand Herald* he did not consult Prime Minister Christopher Luxon on the decision. Luxon later said he agreed with the decision.

Significantly, opposition Labour leader Chris Hipkins also agreed that Goff's comments went "too far" and did not oppose his sacking.

As mayor of Auckland and then as high commissioner to London, Goff vociferously supported the US-NATO war against Russia. He posted numerous photos on social media of his visit to New Zealand troops who are in the UK training Ukrainian conscripts. Many of his posts were signed off with the fascist slogan "Slava Ukraini!"

The Trump administration is, as the WSWs explained, responding to the crisis of American capitalism through a reorientation of foreign policy. It aims to dominate the Americas to prepare for war with China, the greatest competitor of US imperialism.

During the explosive meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at the White House on February 28, Trump made it clear that he regarded the Ukraine war as an expensive failure and would seek a peace deal with Russian President Vladimir Putin. He has also demanded US control over trillions of dollars in Ukrainian resources, effectively reducing the country to a colonial status.

The sudden shift has triggered a crisis in ruling circles around the globe. Following a summit of European leaders in London on March 2, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced plans for a European "coalition of the willing," involving preparations for "boots on the ground [in Ukraine] and planes in the air," nominally as peace-keepers to enforce a future ceasefire deal with Russia. All the European powers are massively rearming and there are open discussions of conscription.

New Zealand's PM Luxon and opposition Labour Party

leader Chris Hipkins have also indicated they would consider sending “peacekeepers” to Ukraine in the event of a ceasefire. The Greens, which occasionally posture as opponents of military spending, also support sending troops to assist in what would in fact be an imperialist occupation of Ukraine.

New Zealand’s ruling elite is desperately seeking to maintain ties with both the US and the European powers. The sacking of Goff shows that this balancing act is becoming increasingly difficult.

Luxon has refused to criticise Trump, whose administration he has pledged to work closely with. He described the Oval Office confrontation with Zelensky as a “tough watch” but told the media he maintained “trust” in the Trump White House.

At the same time, Luxon insisted that New Zealand’s position on the Ukraine war has not changed, posting on X on March 1: “New Zealand remains steadfast in its support for Ukraine as it defends itself in a war that Russia started. It’s mounting the defence of a proud, democratic and sovereign nation, but also the defence of international law.”

Labour’s Hipkins posted the same day: “The NZ govt must continue to stand with Ukraine. The values they are fighting for are Kiwis values. We should continue to do all we can to support them. Time for our govt to speak up!”

The fact is that while Putin’s February 2022 invasion was thoroughly reactionary, it was provoked by the US and NATO powers, which backed the anti-Russian coup in Kiev in 2014, and relentlessly escalated the war to cement their domination of the Eurasian landmass. Trump’s open admission that America intends to seize Ukraine’s raw materials has exploded the endless propaganda that the war is about “national self-determination” and the defense of “democracy.”

New Zealand is a minor imperialist power with interests throughout the Pacific and internationally. Since the end of World War II, it has relied on Washington’s backing for its own neo-colonial operations. Wellington has supported all the US-led wars over the past 30 years, including the criminal invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and fully endorsed the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza.

In Ukraine, New Zealand has provided Defence Force personnel for training, intelligence, logistics and liaison worth \$NZ35 million and over \$130 million in direct financial aid. It has also supported various international efforts to hold Russia to “account” over the invasion.

A minority section of the political establishment, which

is anxious to protect the country’s vital trade with China, is calling on the government to distance itself—at least to some extent—from the White House. Labour and the Greens have opposed joining Pillar 2 of AUKUS, the quasi military alliance involving Australia, the UK and US, which would involve sharing of advanced military technology.

Former Labour Prime Minister Helen Clark has questioned New Zealand’s position in the Five Eyes, the intelligence and spy alliance that also comprises the US, Australia, United Kingdom and Canada, which is increasingly used as a vehicle for member countries to take a united stand on diplomacy and security.

With the developing trade conflict between the US and Canada, Clark told TVNZ: “There’s been some talk in the media that Trump might want to evict Canada from [the Five Eyes]... Please, could we follow.” The current Labour leader Hipkins, however, has made no similar statements, and successive Labour governments, including Clark’s, have strengthened the alliance with US imperialism.

Whatever the immediate outcome of the Ukraine crisis, the imperialist drive towards world war is intensifying, and New Zealand’s ruling class is preparing to join the new redivision of the world. Both the National-led government and the Labour Party are calling for a major military spending increase, in line with US demands.

An anti-war movement can only be built by mobilising the international working class in opposition to all the parliamentary parties and the capitalist system, which is the source of war.



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