

Right-wing New Zealand blogger suggests becoming part of Australia to build a war machine

Tom Peters
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A prominent right-wing political commentator in New Zealand, David Farrar, earlier this month published an op-ed in the *Post* calling for New Zealand “to take up the 125-year-old invitation to become a state of Australia.”

His proposal, while it was publicly opposed by Prime Minister Christopher Luxon and other political leaders, does not emerge from nowhere. It reflects mounting discussions in ruling circles over how best to position New Zealand in the far-advanced US plans for war against China.

Farrar is well-connected: he runs the widely-read *Kiwiblog*, which is aligned with the National Party-led coalition government, and owns *Curia Market Research*, a polling company used by the party.

He stated that “the change in the world order over the last decade” meant New Zealand could no longer survive as an independent country. “We do not have, and never will have, the economic or military might to defend our interests,” he added.

Farrar pointed to Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney’s comments at the World Economic Forum where he said there had been a “rupture of the world order,” in which rules had given way to “a brutal reality where geopolitics among the great powers is not subject to any constraints... the strong can do what they can, and the weak must suffer what they must.”

Carney called for “middle powers” like Canada to “act together, because if we’re not at the table, we’re on the menu.” The speech followed Donald Trump’s threats to annex Greenland, which called into question the stability of the NATO military alliance. Trump has also previously suggested that the US should annex Canada itself.

US imperialism is responding to its long-term economic decline by violently asserting its hegemony over the entire western hemisphere. The attacks on Venezuela and Iran are also bound up with cutting off China’s access to resources, oil in particular, in preparation for war.

There is growing nervousness in New Zealand’s ruling elite that Trump’s economic warfare and military interventions will have severe economic consequences, given that China is the country’s main trading partner.

Farrar said global agreements and institutions like the World Trade Organisation allowed New Zealand to “prosper, and develop strong economic and political relationships with competing powers such as the US and China,” but the resurgence of nationalism meant this was no longer possible. “Nine of the 12 largest countries in Europe either have nationalist governments, or have nationalist parties leading in the polls,” he noted.

Farrar expressed outrage over Trump’s threats against Greenland, writing on *Kiwiblog*, “The US is now more of a threat to NATO than Russia!” But he supports New Zealand’s long-standing military and intelligence alliance with the US. He backed New Zealand’s participation

in the criminal US-led wars against Afghanistan and Iraq and has defended the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza. Farrar also endorsed the US attack and kidnapping of Venezuela’s president Nicolas Maduro.

His proposal to merge with Australia reflects the needs of the ruling class in both countries, minor imperialist powers in the Pacific, to build a larger war machine in order to secure a “seat at the table” alongside the US in the violent redivision of the world. Farrar told the far-right Platform podcast that impoverished island nations in the Pacific could also join a NZ-Australia “federation”—placing them under direct colonial control.

A combined NZ-Australia, Farrar wrote, would be the world’s 12th largest economy, “larger than Spain, South Korea and Turkey.” Its “combined defence force would have 70,000 active personnel and 35,000 reserves,” with a military budget of \$35 billion (\$NZ58 billion)—“the 11th largest in the world—larger than Canada, Poland and Israel.”

Speaking to *Newstalk ZB*, Farrar challenged politicians: “If you don’t think the answer is becoming a state of Australia, which is admittedly radical, what’s your solution? Is it just: hope no one notices us?”

In fact, the government is taking major steps to put the country on a war footing. Its 2025 Defence Capability Plan will nearly double military spending from just over 1 percent to 2 percent of GDP over eight years, involving \$NZ9 billion in new spending over four years alone. Luxon has declared this figure “is the floor, not the ceiling, of funding for our defence force.” The Defence Force is also discussing how it can quickly ramp up recruitment.

Military ties with Australia have also been significantly strengthened in recent years, with the stated aim of creating a fully-integrated “Anzac force”—referring to the Australia and New Zealand Army Corps created during World War I. Luxon also supports the AUKUS military pact—the aggressive trilateral alliance between Australia, the US and Britain—which is accelerating Australia’s transformation into a frontline base for the US-led military build-up.

This is the real content of Farrar’s proposal. It has nothing to do with protecting people or improving living standards in New Zealand or Australia. Its aim is to create a more powerful military entity to police the Pacific in an alliance with US imperialism and to join a devastating war against China.

The opposition to Farrar from the media and the political establishment, however, is equally reactionary, rooted not in concern for democratic and social rights but in the defence of New Zealand’s own imperialist prerogatives.

A spokesperson for Luxon’s office declared that unity with Australia “won’t be happening” because New Zealanders “value our unique national identity and our sovereignty.” The leaders of the far-right ACT Party, as well as Labour and the Greens, also voiced opposition. All these parties, steeped in nationalism, support a strong alliance with Australia

and the US and a dramatic increase in military spending.

The bourgeoisie fears that its own imperialist interests—including New Zealand’s colonial domination over countries like Samoa, Tonga and the Cook Islands—may be compromised by unity with Australia.

Moreover, despite NZ’s close ties with Australia, “national identity” and “sovereignty” serve important ideological functions for the capitalist class—namely, to keep workers divided from their class brothers and sisters across the Tasman Sea. Anti-Australian sentiments are routinely stoked by the NZ media, politicians and the union bureaucracy in order to deflect anger over worsening social inequality, poverty and the cost of living.

An example of this is the pro-Labour Party Daily Blog, which denounced Farrar as “a disloyal coward quisling.” Its editor Martyn Bradbury absurdly declared that “we are already a colony of Australia,” based on the leading position of Australian-owned banks in New Zealand. The false implication of such statements is that New Zealand capitalists are less ruthless than their Australian counterparts.

The Daily Blog’s intense xenophobia was viciously expressed in its response to devastating bushfires in Australia in 2020. It demanded anti-immigrant measures to stop “Australians fleeing climate change” from moving to New Zealand.

Bradbury agreed with Farrar that “we need to increase what we spend on the military,” while falsely claiming this is for defensive purposes. The Daily Blog has also called for the reintroduction of compulsory military service. It has repeated Washington’s anti-China war propaganda while denouncing the Socialist Equality Group as “traitors” for opposing imperialist war.

Why New Zealand did not join Australia

New Zealand nationalism has always had an extremely reactionary and militarist character. After conquering Māori tribal lands in a series of brutal wars during the nineteenth century, the NZ bourgeoisie—which had become fabulously wealthy—made a deliberate decision not to join the federation of Australia in 1901. This served two basic purposes: to maintain a separate apparatus for the exploitation of the New Zealand working class, splitting the trans-Tasman workers’ movement, and to pursue NZ’s independent imperialist interests in the Pacific.

A ten-member Royal Commission, established in 1900 by Premier Richard Seddon, unanimously rejected becoming a state of Australia. Its report expressed racist fears that non-white immigration to Australia would spill over into New Zealand and sully “the purity of the British race.” Australian and New Zealand governments—including the Labour Parties of both countries—supported laws barring Asian immigration, out of fear that this would create a “dangerous class,” that is, a proletariat with ties to the oppressed masses of Asia.

Many who gave evidence to the commission, including trade union officials, expressed the chauvinist view that New Zealanders were superior to Australians because the latter were largely descended from convicts. For example, William Hood, president of the Workers’ Political Committee in Dunedin (one of the precursors to the Labour Party), told the royal commission that “the origin of the people” meant that “even now the moral tone in Australia is lower than among the New Zealanders.”

Most importantly, Seddon feared that joining Australia would frustrate his ambition to build a “Greater New Zealand” in the Pacific. His government annexed the Cook Islands and Niue in 1901 and wanted to gain control over Samoa, Tonga, Fiji and even Hawaii. Samoa was seized from Germany by New Zealand in World War I and the islands were ruled by a brutal colonial regime for nearly 50 years.

The division of the Australasian working class into separate national frameworks became a priority for the ruling elite, particularly after the powerful trans-Tasman unity displayed in the 1890 maritime and related strikes, which lasted three months before being defeated.

The national barrier erected between Australia and New Zealand assisted in the isolation and defeat of New Zealand’s 1913 “great strike.” Australian Labor leader Billy Hughes (later prime minister) played a key role in quashing demands from workers for support strikes and definitively splitting the trans-Tasman union movement in the name of “industrial peace” in Australia.

National divisions also prevented a unified working class movement against World War I, in which 62,000 Australians and 18,500 New Zealanders were slaughtered, with tens of thousands more injured.

In Australia, the revolutionary syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) played a leading role in the powerful working class movement against the Labor government’s participation in WWI. An attempt to introduce conscription was defeated in a referendum. In New Zealand, however, the IWW was suppressed following the outbreak of war and conscription was imposed in 1916. The NZ Labour Party purported to oppose conscription but openly supported participation in the imperialist war and urged young men to enlist.

For the international unity of the working class

More than a century later, the deep integration of the Australian and New Zealand economies and populations makes a mockery of the nationalist frameworks promoted by all sections of the political establishment in both countries. A study by the Australian National University last year estimated the total New Zealand diaspora in Australia at more than 1.2 million people, encompassing NZ citizens, NZ-born individuals and their children. This is equivalent to more than one-fifth of the New Zealand-resident population.

Moreover, workers in both countries are exploited by the same transnational corporations and are facing the same attacks on wages, conditions and public services.

Workers must reject Farrar’s proposal for New Zealand to merge with Australia—a plan aimed at building a more powerful war economy and strengthening the state apparatus to suppress growing working-class opposition to austerity and war.

Equally reactionary, however, is the nationalism of Farrar’s opponents, who seek to bind New Zealand workers to “their” own ruling class. The borders artificially drawn between Australia and New Zealand—and across Asia and the Pacific—have for more than a century served to divide workers, weaken their struggles, and entrench capitalist and imperialist domination.

The famous declaration by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* that “the workers have no country,” and their call for the workers of all nations to unite, resonate today more powerfully than ever before.

The contradiction between the globalised world economy and its division into rival nation-states is propelling the imperialist powers—led by the United States—toward a third world war, one that will be fought with nuclear weapons. If they are not stopped, human civilisation confronts a catastrophe of unprecedented scale.

The struggle against imperialism is inseparable from the fight against all forms of nationalism, racism and anti-immigrant chauvinism, which are fostered by every capitalist party and organisation, including the union bureaucracy. In Australia, New Zealand, and across the world, the decisive task is to build a socialist leadership capable of uniting workers internationally on the basis of their common class interests, to overthrow capitalism and establish a socialist society.

This means fighting for the abolition of national borders and the unification of Australia and New Zealand within an international socialist federation. The strongest allies of Australian and New Zealand workers in the struggle against war are their class brothers and sisters in China, across Asia and the Pacific, and throughout the world.

This is the perspective advanced by the Socialist Equality Party in Australia, as part of the International Committee of the Fourth

International, and by the Socialist Equality Group, which is fighting to establish a section of the ICFI in New Zealand.



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