

NZ pseudo-left meeting on Iran war promotes Labour, Greens and unions

Tom Peters
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The New Zealand pseudo-left group Socialist Aotearoa (SA) organised a public meeting in Auckland on March 11, with the title “No War With Iran,” ostensibly to oppose the criminal and genocidal US-Israeli war against Iran.

Its real purpose was to set a political trap for workers and youth who are looking for a way to fight against the rapidly escalating war, which is part of the violent redivision of the world by US imperialism and its allies.

New Zealand, a minor imperialist power allied to the US, supports its wars in the Middle East and against Russia, and is integrated into preparations for war against China, Washington’s main adversary.

There is widespread hostility to the National Party-led government, which has endorsed the bombing of Iran and refused to condemn blatant US war crimes including the killing of schoolchildren, the bombing of hospitals and desalination plants, and the sinking of the unarmed navy vessel IRIS Dena. Nor has the government said a word to oppose the ongoing Gaza genocide and Israel’s invasion of Lebanon.

The greatest fear of the ruling class is that a movement against war could develop outside the control of the political establishment. In an effort to prevent this, Socialist Aotearoa—a middle-class group with close links to the trade unions—provided a platform at its meeting for the Labour Party, the Greens and the Council of Trade Unions, with the aim of channeling anti-war sentiment behind these organisations, none of which has any fundamental differences with the government’s pro-imperialist positions.

Labour Party foreign affairs spokesman Phil Twyford told the gathering that the war against Iran was “an illegal act of aggression” that would “make the Middle East and the world a much more dangerous and chaotic place.” He criticised the National-led government for failing to denounce the war and the genocide in Gaza, which he called “a massive breach of this idea of a rules-based order.”

He declared that the government’s “entire foreign policy since taking office has been about trying to reinsert New Zealand into a military alliance type relationship with the United States. [Prime Minister] Christopher Luxon wants to be, in his words, a ‘force multiplier’ for a country that is increasingly behaving as a rogue state.”

Neither SA leader Joe Carolan nor any other speaker pointed out the disinformation and hypocrisy in Twyford’s speech. It was, in

fact, the 1999–2008 Labour government of Helen Clark which fully restored New Zealand’s alliance with the US—after a partial rift in the 1980s when the US objected to NZ’s anti-nuclear policy—by sending New Zealand troops to take part in the criminal US-led invasion of Afghanistan and the war in Iraq.

The 2017–2023 Labour Party-led government, which also included the Greens, further strengthened the alliance, including by deploying NZ troops to Britain to provide training for Ukrainian conscripts to fight the US-NATO proxy war against Russia. In 2023, Labour’s Defence Minister Andrew Little declared that the government’s policy was to build “a combat capable, ready force” that would be able “to play a role should conflict break out” in the South China Sea—i.e. to join a US-led war against China, which US imperialism regards as the chief threat to its global dominance.

Labour leader Chris Hipkins, when he was prime minister, also defended Israel’s bombardment of Gaza. Twyford himself was booed off the platform when he tried to address a November 2023 protest against the genocide, amid chants of “Shame on Labour!”

The Greens’ co-leader Marama Davidson told the meeting that, as a Māori woman, she had a special understanding of “the importance of standing against colonisation and imperialism in all of its forms.” She declared that her party stood for “non-violence” and “peace” and opposed “this unlawful war” against Iran, as well as the Gaza genocide.

Her speech was no less fraudulent than Twyford’s. As a coalition partner in the Labour-led government, the Greens openly argued for greater military spending and backed the NZ support for the war against Russia.

Notably, at the March 11 meeting, Davidson did not call for New Zealand to leave the US-led Five Eyes intelligence-sharing alliance but merely called for a “review” of that alliance. She also declared she was “proud” of the New Zealand military’s “record of peacekeeping and of having success through deploying those tools.”

In 2010, the Greens praised New Zealand’s deployment of troops to Afghanistan by fraudulently calling the brutal colonial occupation a “peacekeeping” mission. The party also endorsed neo-colonial troop deployments to East Timor in 1999 and the Solomon Islands in 2003 alongside Australian forces.

In a brief speech, SA’s Carolan—a former Unite union organiser—declared that anti-war protests had to be connected to “the trade union movement, so that when governments ignore our

protests, we use the power that we have to strike, to stop this economic system from working.”

Carolán is well aware that the union bureaucracy is opposed to mobilising workers against war. The union leaders do not represent workers; they are a parasitic, upper middle-class layer that enforces attacks on wages and conditions and supports New Zealand’s imperialist alliances.

Council of Trade Unions (CTU) President Sandra Grey cynically told the meeting that workers must “stand up now” and “join the peace movement” to defend those “killed by US military aggression around the world and by totalitarian regimes.” The CTU and its affiliates have not lifted a finger to organise any concrete working-class action against the Gaza genocide or the war on Iran—no work stoppages, no bans on the transport of military equipment, no industrial action of any kind.

Moreover, like Labour and the Greens, the unions have no objection to the militarisation of society. The CTU’s biggest affiliate, the Public Service Association, openly supports the government’s decision to double military spending as a proportion of GDP in preparation for war against China.

Further exposing the pretense that the meeting had anything to do with building a genuine anti-war movement, Socialist Aotearoa also invited Kelby Dayton, a representative of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), to speak. He suggested that New Zealanders should appeal to the Luxon government to “stop cosying up to the Trump regime” and to “withdraw from the Five Eyes”—something no capitalist government will ever do.

The DSA is an appendage of the Democratic Party—the political instrument of Wall Street and US imperialism. Among its most prominent figures is congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a loyal defender of Joe Biden, who earned the nickname “Genocide Joe” because of his administration’s direct complicity in Israel’s war of extermination in Gaza.

The DSA itself is “cosying up to the Trump regime.” Its high-profile member, New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani, has publicly pledged to “work with” the fascist occupant of the White House. Mamdani had a friendly and highly-publicised meeting with the president two days after Trump’s State of the Union tirade and as the final preparations were being made by the US war fleet off the coast of Iran to launch Operation Epic Fury.

The role of Socialist Aotearoa in organising the Auckland event was to lend the proceedings a “left” veneer, while providing a platform for the very parties and organisations responsible for militarism and imperialist war.

Since it was founded in 2008, SA (which is affiliated with the pseudo-left International Socialist Tendency) has consistently oriented to and campaigned for capitalist parties. It is hostile to the fight waged by the Socialist Equality Group for the independent mobilisation of the working class based on a socialist program.

In 2011, SA joined the M?ori nationalist and anti-immigrant Mana Party, which it glorified as “left-wing” and even “revolutionary.” SA and two other pseudo-left groups, the International Socialist Organisation and Fightback, endorsed Mana’s alliance with tech multi-millionaire Kim Dotcom’s right-wing Internet Party in 2014, with Carolán ludicrously claiming that Dotcom was moving to the left. (Dotcom owns a signed copy

of Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* and now regularly posts openly antisemitic statements on X).

Mana collapsed after its leader Hone Harawira made racist statements in 2017, calling for Chinese drug smugglers to be “executed.”

Meanwhile, SA openly aligned itself with US imperialism. In 2011, it produced an article claiming that China could invade New Zealand and explicitly calling for a bloc with the US, which it said would “deter Chinese aggression and domination.” In 2015 and 2016, it organised rallies supporting the war for regime change in Syria—aimed at removing a key regional ally of Iran and Russia, in preparation for the current war.

After Mana’s collapse, SA and other pseudo-left groups promoted illusions in Jacinda Ardern’s Labour-led coalition government with the Greens and the far-right, anti-immigrant New Zealand First Party. They also backed Labour’s re-election campaign in 2020.

With an election scheduled for November this year, Socialist Aotearoa is once again seeking to divert growing anti-war and anti-austerity sentiment behind a new Labour-Green government backed by the union apparatus.

Like the DSA, the ISO and similar pseudo-left groups, SA is rooted in layers of the upper middle class that seek a more comfortable and privileged position for themselves under capitalism—including within the unions and the political establishment. Its promotion of M?ori nationalist identity politics, and its alliances with Labour and the Greens, are aimed at obscuring the fundamental class divisions in society, and blocking any real fight against imperialist war and austerity.

A genuine anti-war movement will only be built through a political struggle against all the tendencies represented at Socialist Aotearoa’s March 11 meeting. The fight against war, social inequality and authoritarianism requires a conscious break from all factions of the bourgeoisie and their middle-class props, and the building of a revolutionary socialist and internationalist leadership in the working class.

It will also require a rebellion against the trade union bureaucracy, through the creation of new organisations: rank-and-file committees controlled by workers themselves.

We urge all those who agree with this perspective to contact and join the Socialist Equality Group.



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