

New Zealand’s pseudo-left ISO calls for “anti-war” alliance with pro-imperialist Labour and Green parties

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The International Socialist Organisation (ISO), a pseudo-left group in New Zealand, published an article on May 24 by Sh?mi Yoon titled “How to turn anti-war sentiment to action.” It argues that “socialists” should oppose imperialist war by building “coalitions” with the pro-imperialist Labour and Green parties and the union bureaucracy.

New Zealand is approaching an election in November amid widespread opposition to the criminal US-Israeli war against Iran, and its economic impact, and the ongoing genocide in Gaza. The fuel price shock caused by the war has accelerated the country’s social and economic crisis. The deeply unpopular National Party-led government is pouring money into the armed forces while imposing austerity in education, healthcare and welfare services.

Under these conditions, middle class organisations like the ISO and Socialist Aotearoa are busily trying to channel anti-war sentiment among workers and young people behind the bourgeois opposition parties that support New Zealand’s alliance with US imperialism and the government’s own war preparations.

Pointing to the “resurgence of protest” internationally against the Gaza genocide, Yoon writes that “Protest is not enough” and that “Understanding how to stop such wars requires more than outrage. It demands strategy, organisation, and a clear anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist political perspective.”

It is a fact that some of the biggest and most sustained global protests in history failed to convince the imperialist powers to stop the genocide. Despite mass public opposition, the US and Israel are now expanding their war with the attacks on Iran and the invasion of Lebanon. The protests were led into a dead-end by capitalist politicians and their pseudo-left hangers-on, who peddled the illusion that simply continuing to protest would “pressure” capitalist governments to stop the war.

That is precisely the bankrupt strategy that the ISO advanced. Its statement on March 23, 2024, for instance, stated: “Mass demonstrations force the political conversation towards solidarity. This cannot happen without pressure.” As supposed proof of the effectiveness of “mass protest,” it pointed to calls for a “ceasefire” from capitalist politicians—which were always hollow and duplicitous and did nothing to stop the genocide.

Confronted with the failure of this perspective, the ISO calls for more of the same. It does not seek to mobilise the working class based on an “anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist political

perspective,” which would require a political fight to break workers from all bourgeois influences. Instead, Yoon insists that an anti-war movement can only be built in an alliance with pro-imperialist parties and organisations.

Yoon calls for “building coalitions that include trade unions, student organisations, community and church groups, human rights groups, and reformist organisations like Greens and Labour parties, willing to oppose a specific war or [support a] narrow set of demands.”

In an attempt to give this proposal a “Marxist” window-dressing, Yoon writes: “Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky developed the concept of the ‘united front’ in the 1920s in the backdrop of rising fascism and working-class fragmentation. Trotsky argued that socialists must work with broader forces—even those with differing political perspectives—around concrete, immediate goals.”

This completely distorts the united front tactic—not an overarching strategy as the ISO asserts—that was first developed by Lenin and Trotsky and adopted at the Third Congress of the Communist International in 1921. Its purpose was not to promote collaboration with any “broader forces” that professed the same immediate goals. The united front was a means for Communist parties to win workers away from mass reformist parties by proposing common action around concrete demands, including the defence of workers’ organisations against right-wing and fascist thugs. At every step, the Communists would retain complete political independence and the right to criticise the reformist leaders and expose them as defenders of the capitalist order.

What the ISO calls for is not a united front of mass workers’ organisations, but a twenty-first century version of the 1930s Stalinist Popular Front, which subordinated the working class to alliances with “progressive” capitalist governments and parties. The results were catastrophic: in the name of propping up “left” bourgeois governments, the Stalinists violently suppressed the Spanish revolution and strangled a revolutionary situation in France—paving the way for the victory of fascism.

In New Zealand, the Communist Party’s Popular Front with the 1935–1949 Labour government played a key role in suppressing strikes and working class opposition to the country’s entry into the Second World War.

Similarly, the ISO is telling workers, students and young people, who are moving leftward and are increasingly hostile to the entire

political establishment, that they must collaborate with parties of big business and militarism—which it falsely labels “reformist”—and their backers in the union bureaucracy, churches and other forces.

Its call for a “coalition” with Labour and the Greens is timed for the pre-election period, when the bourgeoisie most urgently needs anti-war sentiment channeled into support for the opposition capitalist parties. As in previous elections, the ISO will campaign for these parties as a “progressive” alternative to the National Party and its far-right allies.

This requires covering up the record of the 2017–2023 Labour Party-Greens coalition government, which actually strengthened New Zealand’s alliance with US imperialism. Jacinda Ardern’s government called for the military to be equipped and prepared for a US-led war against China. The Greens worked with the far-right NZ First, which was also part of the coalition in its first term, to argue for more military spending.

In the government’s final year, Labour’s prime minister Chris Hipkins, who replaced Ardern, supported Israel’s genocidal assault on Gaza as a “defensive” action.

The Labour-Greens government also sent New Zealand troops to Britain to assist in training Ukrainian conscripts to fight in the US-NATO proxy war against Russia—a war that the ISO itself enthusiastically supports.

The ISO’s statements on Ukraine went well beyond opposing the Putin regime’s reactionary invasion, which had been provoked by the NATO-sponsored coup in Kiev in 2014. In March 2022, the ISO declared that Ukraine must have the “freedom” to join NATO and that opposing NATO expansionism meant making “concessions to Russian imperialism.” The designation of Russia as “imperialist” by pseudo-left groups internationally has no basis in any economic or historical analysis; its purpose is to justify political support for US imperialism and its far-right client regime in Kiev.

The ISO’s position on Ukraine reveals that its “anti-war” stance on Gaza is fraudulent; it does not oppose imperialist war as such, only particular wars when it is impossible to cast the US in the role of defender of democracy and “self-determination.”

In reality, Ukraine, Gaza and Iran are not separate wars. They are different fronts in a developing world war being waged by the US and its allies to seize resources and markets and to recolonize the world at the expense of Russia and China.

As it has done throughout the genocide in Gaza, the ISO seeks to sow as much complacency as possible about the war against Iran. Yoon declares that “There are reasons for hope that things may change quickly” because the war is “deeply unpopular” and the death of US soldiers will bring “pressure” to stop it. All that is required is “postering, petitioning, leafletting... wearing antiwar badges,” attending protests, and occasionally spouting “anti-capitalist” slogans while supporting Labour, the Greens and the unions.

The ISO’s glorification of the union bureaucracy further reveals its hostility to any independent working class movement against war. Yoon states that New Zealand’s unions “passed motions and statements of support for Palestine,” adding, “While these mean little on their own, they can lay the foundation for future solidarity

action.”

This is a fraud. No such “foundation” has been laid anywhere. Yoon refers to strikes by workers in Spain and Italy, which may have temporarily disrupted supplies for Israel’s military. These were isolated actions, called reluctantly by the bureaucracy in order to assuage workers’ anger before returning to business as usual.

In New Zealand—as in Australia, the UK and practically everywhere else—the unions have worked with the state to ensure that nothing has disturbed normal trading and diplomatic relations with Israel and NZ’s military-intelligence alliance with the US.

New Zealand’s biggest union, the Public Service Association, issued numerous statements expressing “solidarity” with the Palestinian people, which committed the union to precisely nothing and were just as empty as the calls for a ceasefire by the government itself. The same union endorsed the government’s plan to massively increase military spending to prepare for joining a US-led war against China.

The unions ceased to be workers’ organisations decades ago. They have transformed into the adjuncts of corporations and the state, whose function is to suppress strikes and impose concessions on behalf of the employers. They promote nationalism to divide the working class and are hostile to any serious struggle against imperialist war.

In opposition to pseudo-left groups like the ISO, which work closely with the unions, the International Committee of the Fourth International and the Socialist Equality Group in New Zealand call for workers to rebel against the union bureaucracy by building new organisations, rank-and-file committees, that workers themselves control. This is the only way for workers, in NZ and internationally, to coordinate strike action to shut down the production and supply of weapons for war, and to fight back against attacks on jobs and living conditions.

What is required above all is the building of a genuine socialist and anti-imperialist party to provide political leadership to the working class—in opposition to all the capitalist parties and their pseudo-left apologists like the ISO. The Socialist Equality Group fights for precisely such a party, based on the socialist and internationalist program of the ICFI, the world Trotskyist movement. Only the revolutionary mobilization of the international working class, not Popular Front alliances with imperialism’s “loyal opposition,” can stop the developing world war, which threatens the entire planet with catastrophe.



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