New Zealand election: Labour's phony "principled" foreign policy

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On September 23, New Zealand's opposition Labour Party presented a foreign policy approach described as "independent, principled and unafraid."

The speeches by leader Chris Hipkins and foreign affairs spokesperson Vanushi Walters had an air of unreality. They largely consisted of bland phrases about the need for more "diplomacy" and "the peaceful resolution of conflicts and disputes."

On the same day, US President Donald Trump told the United Nations General Assembly that he was deciding whether to "annihilate the Islamic Republic" of Iran and "drive them into hell with no chance of survival."

Hipkins and Walters did not mention, let alone condemn, Trump's genocidal threats and the criminal war against Iran, part of an expanding global war in which New Zealand's ruling class is complicit as an ally of US imperialism.

With an election looming on November 7, Labour is highly conscious of anti-war sentiment. The war against Iran, which has led to soaring prices, is opposed by nearly nine in ten people in New Zealand. Protests continue against the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza, and the US is viewed as a greater threat than China, according to one survey.

Labour is attempting to rhetorically distance itself from Washington, while remaining fully committed to the military-intelligence alliance with US imperialism. The 2017–2023 Labour-Greens government supported the military build-up against China in the Indo-Pacific region and the US-NATO war against Russia over Ukraine.

The media highlighted Walters' statement that a Labour-led government would recognise the state of Palestine, impose "economic sanctions on Israel," and support South Africa's case in the International Court of Justice arguing that Israel has breached the Genocide Convention.

Walters criticised the National Party-led government for its "silence" on the genocide and for "failing to stand up a sanctions regime." This had damaged NZ's reputation as an "honest broker," she said.

Labour's own record on Gaza is one of active complicity followed by belated, disingenuous crocodile tears. Following October 7, 2023, the Labour government joined the US and every other imperialist power in declaring support for Israel's "right to defend itself" against "terrorism"—the fraudulent pretext for the slaughter of Palestinians. This stance contributed to Labour's crushing defeat in the October 14 election.

On November 7, 2023, Hipkins (who was still the caretaker prime minister) again refused to condemn Israel, which had by then killed more than 11,000 people, saying he was "not going to make a judgement" about whether it had breached international law. Labour MPs were booed when they tried to speak to protesters and posture as supporters of the Palestinian people.

Three years later, with Gaza in ruins, Labour's proposed sanctions are entirely hypocritical. Hipkins made clear that a Labour-led government will strengthen NZ's alliance with the United States, a full partner in the ongoing genocide of the Palestinians and the widening war against Lebanon and Iran.

Hipkins said it was "vital" that New Zealand remain in the Five Eyes, the intelligence sharing network led by the US, which also includes Australia, Canada and the UK. Seeking to downplay the Five Eyes, he said it was "not a formal military alliance." The Five Eyes partners, however, are actively spying on China, the Middle East and elsewhere and discussing war plans against China.

At a public meeting on September 19, Hipkins similarly defended the government's decision to allow the FBI to open a permanent office in Wellington. He declared: "this might sound unusual coming from a lefty politician like me, but it's actually quite helpful to us," claiming it provided important information from "like-minded

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countries."

Opening the office last year, FBI director Kash Patel said its purpose was "countering the CCP [Chinese Communist Party]" in the Indo-Pacific "theatre"—i.e. preparing for war.

Hipkins said on September 23 that the US and China were both among New Zealand's "most important partners," adding: "I reject the idea that countries like New Zealand must choose between one relationship and another." Walters criticised current Foreign Minister Winston Peters, from the far-right NZ First Party, for his "outright racism" towards Chinese people.

Successive governments have, in fact, firmly aligned New Zealand with US warmongering. The 2017–2023 Labour-led government, which included the Greens, repeatedly issued statements denouncing China and Russia as the main "threats" facing the world. In August 2023, then Defence Minister Andrew Little stated that NZ needed "a combat capable, ready force," adding: "If for example conflict does break out in the South China Sea, where $20 billion of our exports flows through every year, we have a stake in that, and we may be called on to play a role."

Hipkins declared last week that Labour would not join the AUKUS agreement between the US, Australia and Britain, under which Australia is being further militarised and will be armed with nuclear-powered attack submarines.

He added, however, that "we will work with partners on the new frontiers of security, including artificial intelligence in weaponry and the militarisation of space." The Labour leader described NZ's alliance with Australia as one of "the closest relationships any two countries share."

Australia has been transformed into a vast base for military operations against China; the US controls or has access to more than 110 defence facilities there. The New Zealand military's extremely close integration with Australia's armed forces means that it is automatically part of these war preparations.

Australia and New Zealand are both imperialist powers and have dominated much of the Pacific region for more than a century. They have always relied on the support of the major imperialist power—first Britain and then, after World War II, the US.

Labour governments have actively supported criminal imperialist wars led by the US, including by sending New Zealand troops to Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003.

As well as joining the military build-up against China, the last Labour-led government actively supported the US-NATO proxy war against Russia by sending NZ troops to Britain to train Ukrainian conscripts. The current government has also deployed troops to Poland.

Hipkins declared that Labour would "continue to support Ukraine in defending its sovereignty and territorial integrity." This is a fraud. In the name of "independence" and "freedom," Ukraine's far-right regime has turned the country into a police state and placed it at the disposal of the US and NATO.

Having provoked Russia's disastrous invasion in 2022, the imperialist powers are escalating the war, sacrificing hundreds of thousands of lives, so that they can plunder the resources of Ukraine and of Russia itself. Left-wing and anti-war parties are banned within Ukraine and a court has sentenced the socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk to 15 years in prison for the "crime" of calling on Russian and Ukrainian workers to unite and put an end to the war.

The working class must be warned: another Labour government will continue and escalate New Zealand's involvement in the widening world war. It will rapidly increase military spending and recruitment, which will be funded by cutting social programs and workers' living standards. The Greens and the union bureaucracy will work with Labour to enforce this agenda.

To stop the plunge into world war and barbarism, workers and young people must break from all the capitalist parties and build a new movement, based on the program of socialist internationalism, to put an end to the capitalist system which is the source of war.

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