

The fight against imperialist war in New Zealand and the Pacific

Tom Peters
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The following speech was given by Tom Peters, a leading member of the Socialist Equality Group in New Zealand, at the International May Day 2024 Online Rally, held Saturday, May 4.

On behalf of the Socialist Equality Group in New Zealand, I extend revolutionary greetings to workers and young people throughout the Pacific region, who are facing increasingly imminent dangers as a result of the warmongering by US imperialism and its regional allies, Australia and New Zealand.

Impoverished countries such as Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, which saw some of the bloodiest fighting of the Second World War, are now being drawn into plans for a catastrophic war with China.

No island is too small to avoid the militarisation of the Pacific. The recent agreement between Australia and Tuvalu, which has just over 11,000 people, has effectively turned this tiny country into a colony, giving Canberra the power to dictate defence, security and foreign policy.

Governments that try to maintain security ties with China and fail to bow to US dictates face the threat of violent regime change. This was the message sent to the Solomon Islands government when it experienced a US-backed coup attempt in 2021.

New Zealand, as a member of the Five Eyes spy network and an imperialist power in the Pacific, is fully integrated into US war plans.

Last August, the then Labour government's Defence Minister Andrew Little openly declared that military spending had to double so that the armed forces were "equipped and prepared" to "play a role" should war break out in the South China Sea.

The Labour-led government, which included the Green Party, also sent troops to Britain to assist in

training Ukrainian conscripts to fight in the US-NATO war against Russia.

Labour suffered a devastating defeat in last October's election after six years in which it oversaw increased poverty, inequality and homelessness, and a closer alliance with the United States.

Jacinda Ardern resigned as prime minister in the lead-up to the election, followed by several of her ministers, like rats leaving a sinking ship. In its final days, the Labour government endorsed Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza, calling it an act of "self-defence."

The current deeply unpopular government, a coalition of the National Party and the far-right ACT and New Zealand First parties, is picking up where Labour left off.

It has sent troops to assist in the bombing of Yemen, to defend supply routes for the Zionist regime. It intends to bring New Zealand into the anti-China AUKUS alliance; and it recently established military ties with the authoritarian Marcos regime in the Philippines, which plays a major role in US war plans. The Labour Party does not fundamentally disagree with any of this.

Speaking for the entire ruling class, a prominent *New Zealand Herald* columnist recently wrote that "full-scale war in Europe and Asia [is] now a real possibility" and for New Zealand to remain "part of the Western defence network, that comes with a price—first in money and treasure, and perhaps later in blood."

In the working class, however, there is widespread anti-war sentiment. Tens of thousands continue to join protests against the genocide in Gaza. When the organisers invited Labour MPs to speak at the demonstrations, these pro-imperialist politicians have been booed and shouted down.

A recent survey found 68 percent of New Zealand

residents oppose increased military spending, and nearly two thirds agree that “the economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful.”

To fund the expansion of the military and cut taxes for the rich, the government is imposing brutal austerity measures. Thousands of public sector jobs have been destroyed, including in education, child welfare and the ministry of health, and 30,000 people across the country could lose their jobs in the next year.

School lunches and disability services are being cut; public hospitals, already grossly understaffed, are being forced to make further cuts. Meanwhile, dozens of people continue to die every month from COVID-19, due to the murderous policy of mass infection imposed by Labour in late 2021.

The Socialist Equality Group stands alone in warning that none of the capitalist parties represents a progressive alternative. The only way forward is to build a socialist movement that unites working people in New Zealand and internationally, to stop World War III by abolishing its root cause: the capitalist system.

This requires a political struggle against middle-class pseudo-left groups, like the International Socialist Organisation (ISO), which fraudulently pose as socialists while doing everything they can to prevent the movement against austerity and war from getting out of the straitjacket of parliament and the union bureaucracy.

The ISO campaigned in the election for Labour and its allies the Greens and Te P?ti M?ori. It calls on these capitalist parties, with their record of imposing savage cuts to essential services, to lead protests against austerity along with the unions. It glorifies the unions for issuing press statements calling for a ceasefire in Gaza.

This covers up the role of the corporatist trade unions, which are an industrial police force for the ruling class. They enforce attacks on jobs and living standards, and are preventing any action by workers to stop the production and supply of weapons for Israel and the US.

Like their counterparts in other countries, the pseudo-left in this country represents an upper-middle-class layer, including union officials, whose privileges depend on New Zealand being part of the imperialist alliance that is seeking to carve up the world.

That is why the ISO has cheered NATO’s aggressive

war in Ukraine and glorified the extreme right-wing regime in Kiev. The pseudo-lefts promote the absurd lie that the same imperialist powers supporting genocide in Gaza are defending freedom and democracy against Russia.

We call on workers listening in New Zealand and throughout this region to take up the fight for a genuine socialist, anti-war movement. This will require new organisations—rank-and-file committees, independent of the unions—to mobilise the working class to stop this developing Third World War.

Most importantly, I urge you to contact the Socialist Equality Group and join our fight to build the New Zealand section of the International Committee of Fourth International.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)