

New Zealand political leaders congratulate Trump

John Braddock, Tom Peters
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The leaders of New Zealand's establishment political parties all congratulated the new fascist president of the United States, Donald Trump, on his inauguration on January 20.

Following the obscene spectacle of Trump's inauguration, in which he enunciated his far-right agenda including mass deportations and imperialist expansionism, New Zealand's politicians are pitching to "work with" Washington as closely as possible.

New Zealand's Prime Minister Christopher Luxon, who leads the National Party-NZ First-ACT coalition government declared: "Bound by history and shared values, the relationship between our two great countries has strong foundations. I look forward to working together to make the most of the opportunities that lie between us."

At a media conference on Wednesday, Luxon was asked: "President Trump has threatened to take back the Panama Canal, he's also refused to rule out sending military forces into Greenland. Does that align with the rules-based international order that you often talk about?"

Luxon refused to respond, saying that he was "not commenting on affairs of another country."

Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters, leader of the anti-immigrant, populist NZ First party, congratulated J.D. Vance on being sworn in as vice president, saying he also looked forward to "working together to further deepen the relationship between New Zealand and the US." He added effusively that both countries were two of the world's "great, longest-running democracies."

Peters, who is also Foreign Minister, proffered his congratulations and best wishes to anti-China war hawk Marco Rubio on his confirmation as Secretary of State. "A strong US-NZ relationship supports close cooperation in a turbulent world," Peters said. "We look forward to working together to advance our shared interests, including in the Indo-Pacific."

New Zealand, which is a minor imperialist power with interests throughout the Pacific and internationally, is already integrated into US-led wars. It is part of the US-led Five Eyes intelligence alliance including Australia, Canada and Britain. Successive Labour and National Party governments have supported the US militarisation of the Indo-Pacific in preparation for war against China.

Peters, who has led the strengthening of relations with the US in the Pacific, believes the government is better placed this time than in 2016 to forge links to Trump's circle. He told *Newsroom* on January 9: "We've done all we possibly can thus far to make every connection we possibly can to get close to that presidency."

Far-right ACT Party leader David Seymour, a key figure in the government, hailed Trump's installation, telling *Newstalk ZB* it was part of a global "uprising" against "bureaucracy" and "government waste," that included the extreme right-wing president Javier Milei in Argentina and growing likelihood of a far-right government in Canada.

Greens co-leader Chloe Swarbrick issued a statement that ignored Trump's expansionist threats, mass deportation plans and the fascistic character of his inauguration remarks. She merely tut-tutted at Trump's withdrawal from the 2016 Paris Agreement on climate change—a toothless agreement that consists of nonbinding promises and has done nothing to restrain fossil fuel giants and other major polluting corporations.

The main opposition Labour Party leader Chris Hipkins, according to *Radio NZ*, "congratulated Trump on his inauguration, saying the party wished him and the American people success."

The unanimous kowtowing of the country's leadership to would-be Führer Trump is confirmation that bourgeois politics is lurching violently to the right in New Zealand, as in the US and internationally. The ruling classes, as the WSWWS noted in its New Year statement, are restructuring

politics in accordance with the oligarchical character of contemporary capitalist society to wage war abroad and war on the working class.

Since assuming office at the 2023 October election, following the collapse of support for the incumbent Labour-led government, the National-led coalition has imposed a brutal austerity agenda to destroy tens of thousands of jobs and public services. It is looking to Washington to maintain New Zealand's neo-colonial role in the Pacific by cementing the security-military alliance.

The ACT Party responded to Trump's statements last week threatening Greenland, Canada and the Panama Canal by saying New Zealand must avoid "isolation" by doubling its military budget from 0.9 to 2 percent of GDP. ACT MPs Mark Cameron and Laura McClure said in a statement on January 15: "We can no longer rely solely on goodwill and historic alliances... Leaders like Trump have sent a blunt message: allies who don't pull their weight shouldn't expect protection."

The diversion of billions more dollars for war will be paid for with even deeper attacks on social programs on which working people rely. This is not an agenda that can be imposed democratically. The government is preparing major attacks on free speech and other basic rights, including through the Foreign Interference Bill, which is supported by the Labour Party.

Labour's welcoming of the Trump regime is particularly significant. In January 2017, then MP Jacinda Ardern—months before she was elevated into the party leadership and became prime minister—joined a protest outside the US Consulate in Auckland, part of global actions held in opposition to Trump's threats against abortion rights and other fascist pronouncements.

Ardern's attendance was entirely cynical and hollow. Her Labour government between 2017 and 2023 strengthened New Zealand's alliance with US imperialism, supporting the build-up of US military assets in the Pacific to prepare for war against China, and sending New Zealand troops to Britain to help train Ukrainians to fight against Russia. Domestically, Ardern oversaw a massive transfer of wealth to the rich and increased poverty and homelessness.

Ardern last year joined the US Center for American Progress (CAP), an influential Democratic Party-aligned outfit specialising in imperialist propaganda. She then appeared at the Democratic National Convention to praise Kamala Harris—whose administration was backing Israel's genocide in Gaza and suppressing domestic opposition—as the embodiment of kindness and empathy.

The rightward shift in New Zealand's political establishment is echoed in the media. In an op-ed in the *New Zealand Herald* on January 11, the paper's business editor Fran O'Sullivan expressed admiration for his threats to reorganize the Americas and Greenland under US domination.

Intimately connected within the corporate and political elite, O'Sullivan has long been a mouthpiece for advancing right-wing economics and the demands of big business. According to her, there is "geographical logic" to Trump's "musings vis-à-vis Panama, Canada and Greenland." There is plenty of "distaste for his tactics," she observed, but "he is not a lone horseman either. Make no mistake on this, he means business."

O'Sullivan did not oppose Trump's threat to take the Panama Canal by force, simply noting that Panama President José Raúl Mulino had disputed claims the canal is under Chinese influence. "Irrespective" of Mulino's objections, she said, US House Republicans had introduced a bill to repurchase the canal "after Trump's concerns that the critical waterway is under Chinese control."

She suggested that New Zealand move decisively to forge closer ties with Washington, raising the possibility of hosting a US military base.

The grovelling adulation of the new fascist president must be a warning to the working class. Trump's program of social counter-revolution and imperialist war is not just an American phenomenon; it is shared by New Zealand's ruling elite and its political parties. The rise of the far-right and fascism, genocide and world war, can only be stopped through the building of a socialist movement of the international working class to abolish the capitalist system, which is the source of war, dictatorship and inequality.



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