



Aotearoa Independence Movement

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INTRODUCING AIM

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Let's give the man credit. Within a remarkably short period of time Donald Trump has succeeded in pissing off a remarkably large and diverse chunk of the world's population, ranging from the global (women) to regional (Muslims, Palestinians) to very specific (black American football players). Trump has done something to offend everyone. This country is no exception.

The Campaign Against Foreign Control of Aotearoa (CAFCA) decided that the advent of Trump provides an unprecedented opportunity to take a good, hard look at Aotearoa's place in the world. And to ask the question - why are we still a loyal member of the American Empire? As the old saying goes, you are judged by the company you keep. But let's be very clear, from the outset – this is not all about Donald Trump. He is simply the catalyst who offers us a once in a generation opportunity to build this campaign, called the Aotearoa Independence Movement (AIM), and create a truly non-aligned Aotearoa. AIM's focus is the Empire and this country's place in it – who the Emperor happens to be at any given time is neither here nor there.

AIM Is Not All About Trump But The Bigger Picture

- It's time for this country to pull the plug, to finish the business started in the 1980s which saw NZ both nuclear free and out of ANZUS; and to break the chains - military, intelligence, economic and cultural - that continue to bind us to the American Empire. The Americans are very proud of having won their independence from the British Empire; it's time for us to do the same from the American Empire. Let's deal with the world on our terms, not on those dictated from whichever empire we happen to be a junior member of at the time.
- **AIM's goal is initiate and drive a nationwide dialogue to advance the case for a non-aligned Aotearoa based on policies of economic, military and political independence.**
- **What is AIM? It's a campaign, not an organisation. And definitely not a new political party.**
- Since AIM was first publicised, there have been comments on it not including reference to tino rangatiratanga or the whole issue of internal sovereignty and independence. This is a valid comment. Equally, AIM makes no mention of internal class or gender relations. Its initial focus is external, on Aotearoa's place in the world, specifically in the American Empire. Tino rangatiratanga and other internal questions will form part of the national dialogue that AIM wants to kick off.

AIM thinks that gaining true independence from the American Empire, and becoming non-aligned, is an idea whose time has well and truly come. It is not "anti-American" (or "racist" or "xenophobic", for that matter). We stand with the American people who are fighting back in their millions against the daily outrages being perpetrated by Trump and his reactionary billionaire cronies. We stand with them as we have stood with them in common causes ranging from the war in Vietnam to the invasion of Iraq and the campaign to impose the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) on our peoples.

This is hardly a radical position anymore – pillars of the Establishment are also calling for more independence from the American Empire. For example, the Christchurch *Press* published an editorial (18/2/17) entitled: "Ties With US Must Be On NZ's Terms". To which we say, hear, hear! To quote: "What has to be remembered is that New Zealand has also grown up a lot since the ANZUS tiff 30 years ago. The anti-nuclear stance has matured into a more robustly independent New Zealand foreign policy".

“The old alliances with Britain and the US are in the past. New Zealand is now more interested in the United Nations and other multilateral arrangements. Our independent small-nation stance will become more important in the Trumpian era, when US foreign policy will become more uncertain and unpredictable. Our helpful American friends are very welcome here, but it is good to extend the hand of friendship on our own terms, and not as a junior partner in an outdated alliance”.

Independence is a subject which has been very much in the world news in the past 12 months. Referenda in both Kurdistan and Catalonia resulted in the peoples of those places voting to declare independence from, respectively, Iraq and Spain. In both cases the reaction from the rejected central Government was swift and violent – Iraq used military force to punish the Kurds and Spain used police brutality and the full weight of the Spanish Constitution and State to try and frighten the Catalans back into line. Independence of the secession variety is a recurring global theme at present – for example, Biafra is once again campaigning to split from Nigeria. If you’re my age the name Biafra will bring back vivid and horrific memories from your dim distant youth.

AIM is not proposing to do anything similar – there is no suggestion of any formal “declaration of independence” (the only such movement in my lifetime was the gimmicky South Island independence movement which campaigned on the catchy slogan of “cut the cable”). But we do recognise that a true independence from the American Empire would require laws and changes to things like the various “free trade” deals that our Governments, both National and Labour, have blithely signed us up to.

And if New Zealand is ever to be quit of the final vestiges of our membership of the British Empire (which is my personal wish), there will need to be changes to our constitutional laws. So, in that sense, AIM is talking about secession – from empire. But we do not advocate NZ transferring its allegiance to become a loyal servant of the arising Chinese Empire. Why jump from the frying pan into the fire? There is talk of a trade war between the US and China. Or worse. John Pilger’s latest film is titled “The Coming War On China”, by which he means an actual shooting war. All the more reason why we should stay independent of anyone’s empire.

Trump showcases another, extremely negative and reactionary, model of independence – namely independence from the rest of the world, taking the quasi-religious belief in “American exceptionalism” to its logical conclusion. It can be boiled to a single three-word catchphrase of his: “We don’t care”. AIM does certainly not see that as any kind of model of independence to be followed. Under Trump, the US still wants to dominate the world through brute strength and nuclear terror, whilst rejecting all of the obligations that come from being part of the global community (walking away from the fight against climate change is the most egregious example. Not only that, but pursuing policies that deliberately make that global problem worse).

And Trump’s America can definitely not be defined as “non-aligned” – he has openly aligned the US with some of the world’s worst dictators and autocrats. So, rest assured that AIM is not campaigning to “make Aotearoa great again”. AIM is not isolationist. On the contrary, we want Aotearoa to be fully engaged with the world, but for the nature of that engagement to be different from what it is now.

NZ’s Engagement With World Must Be Our Terms

The central principle is that the engagement be on the terms set by the people of Aotearoa, not on terms set for us by membership of an empire, terms reinforced by overt and covert military and intelligence ties, political ties and economic constraints through things like “free trade” agreements. It is exactly the same principle that led this country to take the historic step to become nuclear free, defying intense pressure from the US and its various deputies, such as Australia. For once, the interests of the New Zealand people were put above those of powerful foreign governments and the New Zealand people prevailed. That was a generation ago and the sky hasn’t fallen yet, despite the dire predictions at the time.

As I’ve said, the initial focus of AIM is external, on Aotearoa’s place in the world (as opposed to its current place in the US Empire). Immediately before Christmas 2017 the Prime Minister explained this country’s vote against President Trump’s declaration of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital by saying that New Zealand won’t be bullied and, furthermore that “New Zealand has, and always has had, an independent foreign policy”. Highly commendable fine words – if only they bore any semblance of reality. Whatever Aotearoa has, and “always has had”, it certainly isn’t an independent foreign policy.

I’m not going to spell out what I think a truly independent, non-aligned, foreign policy would look like. That is the job of Keith Locke, one of our two keynote speakers today. But you will find some suggestions from me on foreign policy in AIM’s generic leaflet, which is online at <http://canterbury.cyberplace.co.nz/community/CAFCA/aim/aim-generic-leaflet.pdf> Our other keynote speaker today is Bill Rosenberg, whose topic is what a people-friendly globalisation would look like.

But I will say this about a truly independent and non-aligned Aotearoa. I will quote from CAFCA's Charter: "CAFCA is a protest group, an educational group and a Leftwing progressive group. We define ourselves as 'progressive nationalists' – we take the viewpoint of working people in Aotearoa. We reclaim the legitimacy of 'nationalism'. We reject racism, either as used against foreigners or as used against opponents of foreign control. We are also internationalists - as we are fighting a global enemy, we work with global allies".

I want to stress this point, because the word "nationalism" is one that has been stolen and besmirched by the Right, both globally and in NZ. CAFCA is both simultaneously internationalist and nationalist – Leftwing, progressive nationalist (another good phrase suggested to us recently is "positive nationalism"). Words are funny things, which can mean different things in different eras – when I started off as a young Leftwing political activist (as a 1960s' high school boy) I was proud to call myself a libertarian. Because that's what I was – it meant I was an anarchist and anarchists were called libertarians in those days. Not now – it means quite the opposite. Another word stolen and besmirched by the Right.

How Would This Affect Kiwis' Daily Lives?

How would being non-aligned and truly independent affect ordinary New Zealanders in their daily lives? For starters, it would give the people of this country more control over our own destiny. That's a lesson we learned when we adopted the nuclear free policy a generation ago. With regards to transnational corporations and foreign individuals buying New Zealand companies and land, the central principle would be that their presence here would have to be genuinely deemed to be in the national interest and in the public interest.

This is our home and they are visitors to our home – the home owner sets the rules for the visitors. Let's apply that slogan that we keep being told in other contexts – it is a privilege, not a right. As far as foreign purchases of NZ rural land are concerned, there is a good case to be made for a blanket ban. If that is deemed "aspirational", then the "realistic" option is to only allow land to be leased by foreigners, not bought.

This has got nothing to do with immigration. We have no argument with people from overseas wanting to live in this country and contribute to it. But what we do need a lot less of are the foreign absentee owners buying up and sealing off great tracts of NZ's rural land for use as boltholes or private playgrounds. AIM is very pleased that the Government announced that the rules around foreigners buying NZ farmland have been tightened up. But this new regime "does not change the rules regarding acquisitions of significant business assets", to quote from the press release announcing it. Land sales, although they get a lot of attention, only involve tens of millions of dollars.

The real guts of any modern economy, the high rollers' lounge of the capitalist casino, is the business sector. That's where the billion-dollar deals are done. And we've heard nothing from the Government about what, if anything, it plans to do about the transnational corporations (TNCs) that so dominate the NZ economy (apart from the commendable, but comparatively minor, aim of trying to get them to pay their fair share of tax). It needs to be a lot bolder. Labour in government is always terrified of upsetting business. Labour never has, and never will, confront the fundamental nature of the economic system. It always markets itself as the more attractive administrator of capitalism. The stated goal of this Government is to "put a human face on capitalism".

But AIM sees capitalism as the problem, not the solution, and this needs to be part of the national dialogue. As I've already said, AIM fully intends that internal relations – the big ones being race, gender and class – will be part of this dialogue that we want to kick off. But our initial focus is external and international, because the increasingly unhinged Trump Presidency has outraged and united people right across the political spectrum in the US and around the world. Including in this country. This is the best possible time to launch a campaign to examine Aotearoa's place in the world and demand our independence from the US Empire. Because there is both global and national unease about where the US is going under Trump, and unease about that country's very stability.

A campaign for non-alignment and true independence puts a whole range of seemingly innocuous issues under scrutiny. For example: Christchurch Airport has hosted a US military base for more than 60 years. But surely that is just a transport base to provide logistic support for peaceful scientific research in Antarctica. That is only part of the story and for a long time it was more of a cover story for masking that US military presence in Christchurch as actually being a vital link in a Pacific chain of US military and spy bases, including one of their most important war fighting bases anywhere (namely Pine Gap, in Australia).

What's the connection between Christchurch Airport and the "Mother Of All Bombs", which the US dropped on Afghanistan in 2017? It is because that bomb was dropped, not by a US Air Force bomber, but from a common or garden old US Air Force C130 Hercules transport plane. The type of plane that routinely comes and goes from Christchurch Airport without anyone taking any notice or raising any questions (a C-130 was used in Afghanistan

because that bomb, the biggest non-nuclear weapon ever used by the US, is too big and heavy to be carried by a bomber). Proving that there is no such thing is a "harmless" aircraft in the US military arsenal.

And that raises the question again, why does NZ keep hosting a US military transport base at Christchurch Airport? One which - no matter how "harmless and innocuous" it appears - ties us into the US war machine and leaves us with some of the blood on our hands from the wars it is fighting in other people's countries. That Antarctic connection is happily milked for its propaganda value by NZ media mouthpieces of the US alliance.

When a US Coastguard icebreaker called into Lyttelton in January 2018 en route to Antarctica, TVNZ News really played up the politics, trumpeting that it was only the third US Navy ship to have visited NZ since the nuclear ship ban was instituted a generation ago. And all three of those visits, which have only taken place since late 2016, have gone out of their way to impress upon New Zealanders that the US military really are nice guys, helping out against South Island natural disasters in all three cases. It's called "winning hearts and minds".

Here's another seemingly worthy issue that could have connected us further with the US Empire – pest eradication. But in this case, it was revealed that US military funding was behind a proposal to use Aotearoa's offshore islands for experimenting with genetically modified predators. Fortunately, the Government vetoed the proposal because it posed "serious risk to New Zealand's environmental reputation".

In November 2017, the media reported that: "A prominent academic is urging the new Government to direct the country's Security and Intelligence Service to investigate China's local activities". I don't have a problem with that, it might give the SIS something to do. But I've got another suggestion – a truly non-aligned and independent Aotearoa would direct the SIS to "investigate America's local activities".

I guarantee that it would uncover a much more long-established and extensive network of influence embedded deep into NZ's power and opinion-making structures (including within its own ranks, of course). When Wikileaks made public US Embassy papers in 2010 (when Obama was President and Clinton was Secretary of State) the sheer scale of American penetration into NZ Government and society was revealed. And while they're at it, the SIS could look into the "local activities" of Aotearoa's old imperial masters – the British – and those of our Australian brethren. Both of those senior Five Eyes spy alliance partners have never been shy about pulling strings in NZ.

A Mad Emperor With Nuclear Weapons

Now, I started this by saying that AIM is not all about Donald Trump. But it is certainly prompted by the alarming behaviour towards the rest of the world by the US Empire under its current emperor. He really is like one of the more spectacularly vulgar, dangerous and totally mad Roman Emperors. AIM is far from alone in asserting that the world feels poised on more of a knife edge than usual at present. Trump is a mad emperor with access to the world's biggest stash of nuclear weapons. Remember when the US was fond of describing various countries as "rogue states"? It is currently the world's biggest rogue state.

All of us remember the Cold War, with its ugly policies of "balance of terror" and "mutual assured destruction" (giving us the appropriate acronym of MAD). I'm old enough to remember, as an 11 year-old primary school kid, the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. Our tearful old headmaster assembled us all on the playground of our Christchurch school and told us that nuclear war might well be imminent. Strangely enough, that is a childhood memory that has stuck very strongly in my mind. Recent events, such as the very recent false alarm "missile is coming" warning in Hawaii revive the atmosphere of those years, a past which people assumed had been consigned to history. It hasn't.

Trump is the bright orange figurehead of American imperialism and, as such, presents an opportunity to build a campaign with a whole broad swathe of society who can't stand the man and everything he represents. If AIM really does get going as a national campaign, there is even the possibility of us showing him in person the revulsion felt towards him by the people of Aotearoa. US Presidential visits are rare – there have only ever been two of them.

The most recent one, by Bill Clinton in 1999, was the last time NZ hosted the APEC Leaders' Summit. Well, NZ – specifically Auckland – is hosting it again, in November 2021. That is beyond the 2020 elections in both the US and NZ (which only coincide every 12 years). But, if Trump runs again and is re-elected, there is every likelihood of him being in NZ in three years' time.

There's a target worth incorporating into the AIM campaign. It would be a win win situation for the movement – if he decides not to come, as he has just done vis a vis the UK, that is a great victory for us. And if he does come,

then the opportunity arises for New Zealanders in their tens of thousands to show him what we think of him and of the empire that he heads.

As I said, it's not all about Donald Trump – there is a need for AIM and a truly independent Aotearoa regardless of who is the emperor. But he is the emperor right now and, to use the analytic language of yesteryear, he intensifies the contradictions of capitalism and imperialism. To an unprecedented degree, he embodies them. He really is an enemy of the people, as is the empire that he rules. It is high time that this country was shot of both of them.