

SEP public meeting in New Zealand

# The socialist alternative to unemployment, austerity and war

1 November 2012

Four years after the global financial crisis triggered economic turmoil and slump worldwide, the working class in New Zealand is facing the greatest assault on its living conditions since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The National government is imposing austerity cuts to welfare, education and services to meet the demands of the financial markets for a budget surplus, as employers slash jobs and conditions.

Since 2008, an estimated 40,000 jobs have been lost in manufacturing, while 5,000 have been axed from the public service. The cuts have accelerated over the past two months, hitting Solid Energy, KiwiRail, the Tiwai Point aluminium smelter and elsewhere. The Alliance Matura sheep-meat plant is earmarked for closure while newsprint producer Norske Skog will halve capacity at its Kawerau mill next year. Teachers and support staff in earthquake-ravaged Christchurch face forthcoming school closures, while 150 jobs will go from Canterbury University. Gould's meat processors in Petone has been shut and TVNZ's Avalon studio sold off.

The Key government has savaged spending on healthcare and education. University student allowances have been cut and the rate of student loan repayments increased. The government is exploiting rising unemployment—officially 6.8 percent but unofficially much higher, and over 20 percent for youth under 25—to impose a poverty-level “starting out” wage for young workers of just \$10.80 an hour. Punitive measures to cut people off welfare are aimed at driving down the wages of all workers.

The onslaught in New Zealand parallels that being

imposed by governments in Europe, the US, and around the world. In every country, working people are being made to pay for the breakdown of the capitalist profit system. At the same time, geo-strategic conflicts are intensifying, creating potential flashpoints internationally as the American ruling elite unleashes military violence to try and maintain its global dominance against its rivals.

Since assuming office in 2008, the National government has increasingly lined up behind Washington's neo-colonial wars in Afghanistan and Libya and its criminal regime-change agenda in Syria and Iran, in order to guarantee US support for New Zealand imperialism's own strategic and corporate interests. Key has followed the Gillard Labor government in Australia in backing Washington's military build-up against China in the Asia-Pacific region, which risks triggering a confrontation between nuclear-armed powers.

The alternative to austerity and war is the development of an independent political movement of the working class that fights for a workers' government based on socialist policies. This requires a complete political break by workers and youth with the Labour Party, the trade unions and all the organisations of the official political establishment.

Labour paved the way for National's agenda with its attacks on the working class and its revival of military ties with the US. Amid the assault on jobs and conditions, Labour, the Greens and the newly-formed Maori nationalist Mana Party promote anti-Chinese chauvinism, while blaming immigrants, not the

capitalist system and its defenders, for unemployment and poverty.

The trade unions have collaborated with employers and both Labour and National governments over the past three decades to drive down workers' conditions, and are once again playing a pivotal role in enforcing the latest assault on jobs. The Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union recently channelled opposition to the Spring Creek coal mine closure in Greymouth into demands that the owners involve union officials in the mine's cost-cutting plans. Similarly, cuts at KiwiRail were carried through after a series of consultation meetings organised by the Rail and Maritime Transport Union.

Workers need to establish fighting rank and file organisations, independent of the unions, including workplace and community committees, which are genuinely dedicated to the defence of jobs, working conditions and social rights such as health care, education and other essential services.

Above all, the working class needs a socialist and internationalist perspective and party. Just as in the last period of capitalist breakdown, between 1914 and 1945, there is no national solution to the global failure of the profit system. The working class of New Zealand must unite with its counterparts in Australia, China, Europe, the US and internationally in the common struggle for the revolutionary reorganisation of society to meet the needs of the vast majority, not the profit interests of the wealthy few.

The Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* ([www.wsws.org](http://www.wsws.org)) urge workers and young people to attend our public meeting in Lower Hutt, and to participate in a discussion on the critical historical and political issues confronting workers in New Zealand and around the world.

**Meeting details;**

Sunday November 25, 2.00 p.m.  
Meeting Room 1  
Te Awa Kairangi Community Centre,  
47 Laings Road, Lower Hutt



To contact the WSWs and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**