

# New Zealand pseudo-lefts promote new Labour leader

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New Zealand's middle-class pseudo-left groups—Fightback, Socialist Aotearoa (SA) and the International Socialist Organisation (ISO)—have all rallied behind the new opposition Labour Party leader David Cunliffe, who was installed in September following a three-week leadership contest. The pseudo-lefts joined the desperate campaign by Labour and the corporate media to promote the illusion that Cunliffe's leadership would revive the party's fortunes, or, in the words of the ISO, "push Labour, to some extent, to the Left."

Labour is a big business party, widely discredited in the eyes of working people. Labour governments have been responsible for making deep inroads into the social position of the working class. Out of office, the party has collaborated with the National government's attacks on living standards, including cuts to healthcare and education, a regressive increase in the Goods and Services Tax and thousands of public sector job cuts. In the 2011 election, Labour received its lowest vote in 80 years and was headed for another landslide defeat in 2014 under the previous leader, David Shearer.

Despite the efforts to depict Cunliffe as "left wing", he has a long pro-business record. He graduated from Harvard University School of Business then worked as a diplomat in Washington and a business strategist for Boston Consulting Group. As health minister in the 1999-2008 Labour government, he advocated cost-cutting, including financial penalties for hospitals which did not meet safety standards. He also supported public-private partnerships on infrastructure projects.

Cunliffe's elevation comes amid deepening social inequality and a new wave of job cuts—including 2,000 announced recently by NZ Post. The government's Children's Commissioner Dr Russell Wills last month confirmed that 265,000 children—one in four—are living in poverty. He told the *New Zealand Herald* the median annual income of someone in poverty was about \$NZ10,000 (\$US8,256), or less than \$NZ200 per week. Meanwhile the country's billionaires have expanded their wealth

throughout the economic crisis, with this year's *National Business Review* Rich List "bigger and richer than ever before."

Amid such widening class polarisation, the historic collapse of support for Labour raises, for the ruling elite, the danger that opposition within the working class to the National government will erupt outside the control of the political establishment. In this context, the pseudo-lefts are performing a vital service for the bourgeoisie by attempting to steer workers and youth back behind Labour and its parliamentary allies, the Greens and the Maori-nationalist Mana Party, and to forestall any revolutionary challenge to capitalist rule.

The ISO has given the most open and enthusiastic support to Cunliffe's leadership bid. On August 29 it urged workers in Labour-affiliated unions to vote for Cunliffe in the leadership ballot. Cunliffe, the ISO declared, was "appealing to the left-wing desires of Labour's membership... and is talking a language almost unheard of from Labour politicians in a generation."

Four of the six Labour-affiliated trade unions endorsed Cunliffe's leadership campaign, as did the unaffiliated Unite union—in which the pseudo-lefts are all active. Unite leader Matt McCarten declared that Cunliffe would pursue "unabashed left policies", including raising the minimum wage by \$1.25 and a small increase in the top income tax rate.

The ISO's claim that Cunliffe represents a break with the Labor governments of the past three decades is a fraud. In the 1980s, the Lange-led Labour government was instrumental in carrying out the program of pro-market restructuring that was being implemented at the same time in Britain by Margaret Thatcher and by Ronald Reagan in the US. Jobs and workers' living standards were decimated. Labour's membership plummeted from about 50,000 in 1980 to less than 10,000 a decade later, as workers abandoned the party in disgust.

In a speech in April last year, Cunliffe declared that the Lange government's policies were to Labour's "eternal

shame”, but neither he nor any other Labour leader has any intention of reversing them. For all his populist rhetoric, the new Labour leader is just as committed as the Nationals to the austerity agenda demanded by big business. In 2011, Cunliffe told Radio NZ that “under any government there would have to be cuts” because finances were tight.

In an article on September 9, the ISO claimed that Cunliffe would be held “accountable” by members who are “more left wing than the [parliamentary] caucus.” It declared that Labour’s 2013 Policy Platform, endorsed by the membership, was “the strongest indicator” of these “left wing” sentiments.

In fact, Labour’s Policy Platform, endorsed by the ISO, is thoroughly pro-business. It calls for a lower exchange rate and tax incentives for big business; raising the retirement age from 65 to 67; “cost containment” in the government’s Accident Compensation Corporation; and a “partnership” between the government, unions and businesses “to drive improved economic performance”—that is, increase profits at the expense of workers. Its support for collective bargaining is to ensure that the union bureaucracy retains its position as the chief industrial policeman for the corporate attacks on the working class.

The platform is also nakedly pro-imperialist, endorsing New Zealand’s participation in the Australian-led neo-colonial occupations of Bougainville, East Timor and the Solomons. It also calls for participation in “UN-mandated, full combat missions”—in line with the previous Labour government’s troop deployments to the criminal wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The ISO’s endorsement of Labour’s pro-war program reflects the pseudo-lefts’ role as open supporters of US-led imperialist interventions in Libya and Syria.

While the ISO has cravenly endorsed Cunliffe, Socialist Aotearoa (SA) and Fightback, conscious of the deep hostility within the working class towards Labour, have criticised him. Fightback declared: “Far from sowing illusions in Labour, the workers’ movement needs to create a new party—one that is prepared to take on the big business profiteers and implement socialist policies.”

Fightback and SA, however, along with the ISO, are all affiliated with an openly bourgeois party—the Maori nationalist Mana Party—which represents the class interests of a narrow privileged stratum of the Maori elite. The pseudo-lefts promote as “progressive” Mana’s reactionary politics of Maori identity, which fosters poisonous racial divisions in the working class and shackles Maori workers to “their” tribal and business leaders.

In its article supporting Cunliffe, the ISO hailed Mana Party leader Hone Harawira as “the only principled MP in parliament.” For two years, Harawira was an MP for the

right-wing Maori Party, which backed the minority National Party government and voted for its pro-business policies. He split in 2011 to form Mana, but has no fundamental differences with the Maori Party.

Like the Maori Party, Mana enthusiastically supports the current government’s privatisation of welfare through the Whanau Ora scheme and the creation of charter schools run by Maori businesses. Both parties support privatising state-owned power companies, provided the Maori tribes receive shares. Along with Labour, the Greens and the right-wing NZ First, Mana last year organised a chauvinist campaign against Chinese investment and advocates discrimination against immigrants by prioritising jobs for New Zealand residents.

Currently, Mana is seeking to position itself, with the support of Fightback and SA, as a “left” coalition partner in a future Labour-Greens government. SA revealed its real position on Cunliffe in a September 26 statement celebrating Labour’s jump in the polls following his installation. It described Labour and the Greens as “a government in waiting with the numbers and the resolve to take the Treasury bench”, and declared, “Roll on 2014.”

In other words, the pseudo-lefts are united in their support for the formation of a Labour-Green-Mana coalition government that would continue to impose austerity at home and line up with US imperialism abroad. These organisations represent a layer of the affluent upper middle class—including union bureaucrats, academics and Maori entrepreneurs—who seek not the abolition of capitalism but a more privileged existence within it. Their stock-in-trade is socialist phrase-mongering to keep workers tied to the political establishment and the parliamentary set-up, and to block any independent movement of the working class against capitalist rule.

The working class can only fight back against the unending attacks on living standards and preparations for war by establishing its complete political independence from Labour, the Greens, Mana, and their pseudo-left supporters. The central political task facing workers and young people is to build their own party based on a socialist and internationalist program, to unite with workers around the world in a struggle to overthrow the profit system. This means building a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement, in New Zealand.



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