

New Zealand: Mana and Green parties stage anti-oil drilling protest

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During commemorations of New Zealand's Waitangi Day holiday on February 6, the Maori nationalist Mana Movement and the Green Party organised a protest against forthcoming oil drilling off Northland's Ninety Mile beach by Norwegian company Statoil.

About 70 protesters, including Mana MP Hone Harawira and Greens co-leader Metiria Turei, gathered in front of Te Tii Marae, the Maori meeting house at Waitangi, before the arrival of Prime Minister John Key. It followed a three-day march to Waitangi from Cape Reinga.

Turei told TV3 the northern coastal people did not want oil drilling "because they know the risk it poses to their kai moana [seafood], their sustainable jobs. [Key] can't expect to come to Waitangi and not be told by Maori whether his policies are right or wrong. He needs to front up to Maori over his decisions."

US company Anadarko began drilling operations off the North Island's west coast last year in a government-supported program to find commercial quantities of oil and gas. In November, thousands of people turned out to voice their opposition in rallies organised by environmental groups at beaches around the country.

A protest flotilla shadowed Anadarko's exploration vessel in order to draw attention to safety concerns over deep-sea drilling. Anadarko had a 25 percent stake in BP's Deep Sea Horizon well in the Gulf of Mexico at the time of the 2010 rig explosion and spill disaster. Protesters have challenged the ability of New Zealand authorities to respond to any similar event.

While appealing to public concern about the environmental impact of drilling, the protest was centrally bound up with defending the property rights and business interests of a privileged layer of the Maori tribal elite. This is a pro-capitalist and nationalist agenda that the Greens, along with the pseudo-left

groups, which are all affiliated with Mana, support to the hilt.

The Mana Movement's "policy priorities" are to ensure that supposed obligations to Maori tribes under the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi "are understood and actioned" and that tribes obtain decision-making powers equal to central and local governments "so they can exercise kaitiakitanga [custodianship] over lands, coastal areas, and waterways."

Mana seeks to fend off "foreign" exploitation of natural resources in order to secure financial advantages for the wealthy tribal businesses whose interests it represents. Harawira earlier complained that "the government is giving overseas oil giants an open invite to drill and mine our seas."

Protests against drilling follow the 2012-13 campaign by Mana and the Greens based on anti-Chinese chauvinism against the National government's asset sales program. The Greens organised a petition against the sales complaining that they would "send profits offshore" instead of benefiting local capitalists. Far from opposing the sale of shares in three public electricity companies, the Maori Council, backed by Mana and the pseudo left groups, went to court to claim Maori ownership of the waterways used to generate electricity.

The avaricious class outlook of the tribal elite was on display in another episode at Waitangi. Key offered the local Ngapuhi tribe a multi-million dollar "advance" to enter into Waitangi Treaty claims negotiations. A spokesman for the Iwi (tribal) Leadership Group promptly announced that as the tribe was four times larger than those that had already settled claims, Ngapuhi would demand four times the previous largest payouts, or about \$600 million. The *New Zealand Herald* approvingly noted: "Treaty claims long ago

ceased to be adversarial contests; the Government is as keen as most Maori to see iwi acquire capital and invest it for their benefit.”

The Waitangi Treaty “benefits” have only flowed to a thin layer of business leaders, entrepreneurs, lawyers and advisors, while ordinary Maori remain among the most impoverished sections of the working class. One in five Maori households and one in three children live in poverty. Maori unemployment is officially 12.2 percent, double the overall rate. Maori suffer disproportionate rates of incarceration and diseases associated with poverty. Meanwhile the tribal elites control some \$37 billion in business assets. Inequality, unemployment and poverty are particularly acute in the Northland region, over which Harawira presides as the local MP.

In a Radio Live interview Harawira declared oil drilling to be a “Treaty related issue.” The Treaty of Waitangi established the basis for the cession of New Zealand to British imperialism. Signed in 1840 by naval captain William Hobson on behalf of the British Crown, and the major chiefs, it purported to give the Maori people the rights of British subjects. It was a legal fiction, clearing the way for a brutal process of military conquest and colonial subjugation, and the dispossession of the indigenous inhabitants.

With the establishment of capitalism, Maori became embedded as the most exploited section of the working class. For most of the treaty’s existence the document was left to rot, and dismissed by Maori as a “fraud.” However, in the 1980s, the Lange Labour government began promoting it as the country’s “founding document.” Just as Labour launched a pro-market onslaught on jobs and living standards, it paid out millions of dollars in order to create a privileged layer tasked with tying oppressed Maori to the profit system.

The Maori nationalists claim that the treaty gives Maori the right to self-determination—the right to conduct their “own” affairs within the framework of capitalism. This is a right-wing, nationalist agenda, designed to divide the working class along racial lines while boosting the prospects of Maori businesses.

The alignment of Mana, the Greens and the pseudo left groups—Socialist Aotearoa, Fightback and the International Socialist Organisation—has a definite purpose. Under conditions of a deepening assault on the social position of the working class, the promotion of

Maori nationalism is another dead-end for the Maori and entire working class, designed to block the establishment of a genuinely independent and unified movement of workers based on a socialist perspective.



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