

New Zealand: Mana Party seeks alliance with pro-business Internet Party

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Over the past few weeks, the Maori nationalist Mana Party's leader Hone Harawira, and other prominent members, have campaigned in the media for the party to enter an alliance with the Internet Party, an openly pro-business outfit founded by multi-millionaire Kim Dotcom.

Dotcom told the *New Zealand Herald* on March 23 that he met Harawira and Mana secretary Gerard Hehir, a leading organiser in the Unite trade union, on February 28 to discuss a possible alliance ahead of the September general election.

The talks come amid widespread alienation from the established opposition parties. Labour, which received its lowest vote in 80 years in the 2011 election, is headed for another major defeat, with less than 30 percent support in recent polls. It backs spending cuts to health and education, will not reverse the National Party government's increase in the regressive Goods and Services Tax or thousands of public sector job cuts, and wants to lift the pension age.

Mana is frantically manoeuvring to boost its support in order to enter a coalition government with Labour and help it impose the next round of attacks on workers.

Mana's membership is set to discuss whether to do a deal with the Internet Party at Mana's annual general meeting next weekend, which Dotcom is due to address. Whatever the outcome, the alliance talks again highlight the reactionary politics of Mana and, above all, its pseudo-left affiliates: the International Socialist Organisation (ISO), Fightback and Socialist Aotearoa.

Dotcom has also spoken to MPs from Labour, the Greens and the ruling National Party about possible deals. He has ruled out a deal with the National Party, with its government seeking his extradition to the US for alleged copyright infringement by his former web site Megaupload.

The German-born entrepreneur has considerable public

sympathy because of his persecution by the government, which sent armed police to arrest him in 2012 on the orders of the US Justice Department. The operation against Dotcom exposed the activities of the New Zealand intelligence agency, the Government Communications Security Bureau, which was later found to have illegally spied on him and at least 85 other New Zealand residents.

The WSWs opposed the anti-democratic campaign to extradite Dotcom, but gives no support to his politics or to the Internet Party. While Dotcom describes the Internet Party as "anti-establishment," it is clearly a right-wing outfit. Dotcom has previously donated money to the far-right ACT Party and supports its opposition to business regulation (see: "New Zealand: Kim Dotcom to launch pro-business Internet Party").

A brief "agenda" released by the Internet Party proposes a New Zealand-sponsored "digital currency" to make the country a "hub for a growing financial sector," as well as copyright reform and better Internet services to "attract innovation and new businesses." It also echoes Labour's deliberately vague call for "better oversight of spy agencies"—that is, to legitimise and protect their operations, not abolish them. The agenda does not oppose any of the government's brutal austerity policies or NZ's military-intelligence alliance with Washington; it calls for "national security arrangements" to reflect NZ's "future interests."

None of this has deterred Mana's leaders. Harawira told Maori TV on March 31 that he wanted to "build a really strong coalition to change the government, and up until just last week that was Labour, the Greens and Mana, and now it looks like the Internet Party's joined in." John Minto, another leading Mana member, told TV3 that the Internet Party could capitalise on "the massive disillusionment with politics ... So there may be some way that we can work together." Numerous liberal commentators, including the union-funded the *Daily Blog*,

run by former Mana strategist Martyn Bradbury, are pushing for a “Mana-Dotcom” alliance in order to increase the party’s presence in parliament (Harawira is currently its only MP).

The craven opportunism of the talks with Dotcom has provoked some criticism within Mana, but this is completely hypocritical and driven purely by concern about the party’s image. Sue Bradford, a former Greens MP and founding Mana member, told Radio LIVE on March 24 that she would resign if a deal went ahead with the “right wing Internet billionaire.” Bradford was in parliament when the Greens supported the 1999–2008 Labour government, which sent troops to Afghanistan and Iraq and oversaw widening social inequality.

The ISO published an exasperated article on March 28, asking “what the hell” Harawira and Hehir were doing. It declared: “If Mana aims to represent the poor, is a deal with a millionaire going to build the ‘brand’? Mana struggles to be taken seriously in the media: is a rapping, super-rich videogamer really going to help?” The ISO proudly campaigns as “part of” Mana and has described Harawira in the past as “the only principled MP in Parliament.”

Fightback, which previously dismissed suggestions that the Internet Party is progressive and even refused to defend Dotcom against extradition, has so far said nothing about the Mana-Internet Party talks. Socialist Aotearoa has also remained silent.

In fact, Mana has never been anything other than a pro-business party. Harawira founded the party in 2011 after splitting from the right-wing Maori Party, which had become discredited in the eyes of the working class for going into coalition with the National government in 2008. Harawira stayed in the coalition for two years, helping to carry out attacks on the working class, including thousands of job cuts, attacks on welfare beneficiaries, and an increase in the regressive Goods and Services Tax. After the Maori Party’s support collapsed, he quit the party, declaring that it had “betrayed” its base.

All the pseudo-lefts joined Mana, hailing it as “left wing,” and campaigned for it in the 2011 election. Mana, however, represents the same indigenous business interests as the Maori Party. Both parties call for increased government payments to tribal businesses, while seeking to divide the working class on the basis of race. They both supported the privatisation of welfare through the Whanau Ora scheme to benefit Maori trusts, and the introduction of tribal-run, for-profit charter schools. Last year, Mana attempted to re-unite with the

Maori Party, with Harawira saying that both parties had “the best interests of our people at heart” (see: “New Zealand: Mana Party seeks unity with right-wing Maori Party”).

The pseudo-lefts expressed no opposition to the Mana-Maori Party talks, which are currently stalled. They have also remained silent on Mana’s willingness to work with the right-wing, anti-immigrant NZ First Party. Like NZ First, Mana advocates discrimination against immigrants by prioritising jobs for New Zealand residents. Along with Labour and the Greens, both parties have sought to whip up anti-Chinese sentiment over the sale of farmland to Chinese investors.

Mana is positioning itself to act as a prop for a future Labour-led government, which would deepen National’s attacks on working people. Harawira told Radio NZ on April 2 that Mana, Labour and the Greens were “all heading in the same direction.” Socialist Aotearoa and Fightback have issued statements calling for Mana not to support Labour—but this has not prevented them from campaigning for Mana. The ISO, for its part, has openly welcomed Mana’s collaboration with Labour, and fraudulently portrayed Labour leader David Cunliffe as left wing.

All these pseudo-left organisations have spent the past three years actively supporting Mana, a pro-capitalist party, based on nationalism and racial identity politics. Through Mana, they are lining up with Labor, the Greens and NZ First and a program of austerity at home and militarism abroad. This is not a mistake or an accident. The pseudo-lefts represent the class interests of layers of the upper middle class, such as the Maori elite, that exploit race, ethnicity and gender to boost their privileged position under capitalism. They bitterly oppose any attempt to mobilise the working class to fight for its own independent class interests on the basis of a conscious struggle for socialism and internationalism.



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