

NZ pseudo-left group defends Mana-Internet Party alliance

Tom Peters
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Two of New Zealand's minor opposition parties, the Maori nationalist Mana Party and the overtly right-wing Internet Party founded by multi-millionaire internet entrepreneur Kim Dotcom, are expected to shortly announce the outcome of their negotiations to formalise an alliance for the country's September general election.

Since the Mana Party's annual general meeting voted unanimously on April 12 to pursue an electoral deal with the Internet Party, two of the pseudo-left groups that are part of Mana—the International Socialist Organisation (ISO) and Socialist Aotearoa—have kept silent about their support for the sordid negotiations. A third organisation, Fightback, published a statement on May 4 making clear that despite its qualms, it remains part of a Mana-Internet Party alliance.

An agreement between the two parties is aimed at boosting support for Mana ahead of the election, while establishing a parliamentary presence for the Internet Party. Both parties are exploiting widespread alienation from the opposition Labour Party, which is widely regarded as constituting no alternative to the National Party government's policies of austerity and militarism.

The Internet Party postures as “anti-establishment.” The German-born Dotcom gained some public sympathy after his persecution by the government, which is attempting to extradite him to the US on charges of copyright infringement by his former web site Megaupload. The case exposed the fact that the Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB), the state intelligence agency, illegally spied on Dotcom and at least 85 other NZ residents and citizens, in collaboration with the US National Security Agency (NSA).

The Internet Party, however, is a capitalist party representing the interests of a layer of Internet entrepreneurs who want measures to enhance their ability to expand their business empires. Dotcom, a right-wing libertarian, previously donated to the far-right ACT party

and supports its policies for extreme pro-market restructuring.

The ISO and Fightback have previously raised objections to an alliance with the multi-millionaire Dotcom and his party, only because it made their task of providing “left” window-dressing for Mana even harder. They were clearly stung by the WSWs exposure of their rotten manoeuvres at the Mana AGM.

Mana president Annette Sykes posted the WSWs article on Facebook, describing it as “harsh criticism” and, in effect, appealing for political assistance. Dozens of Mana supporters and members left comments berating, and attempting to dismiss, the WSWs article. None of them addressed its content, however.

One comment, for instance, declared that Kim Dotcom “came to MANA. Not the other way around”—as if it makes any difference who initiated the negotiations. Another attributed the WSWs's opposition to “JEALOUSY, FEAR and ENVY”—presumably of the money and media attention that Dotcom will bring to Mana's election campaign.

Fightback is the only pseudo-left group to try to publicly justify its support for a Mana-Internet Party deal, and in doing so withdraws its limited previous criticisms.

On April 18, Fightback noted that Dotcom had donated money to ACT, and dismissed suggestions that he had any interest in helping the poor. However, just two weeks later, on May 4, Fightback suddenly declared that the policies on the Internet Party's web site “are all supportable” and that Dotcom had “looked ... to the left” in seeking an alliance with Mana.

Fightback hailed Dotcom's plan to bring down Internet costs by increasing competition—a policy that the Internet Party web site explains is designed to attract more business investment to New Zealand. Fightback also noted Dotcom's statement that he supports “free university education.” It did not mention Dotcom's

statement at the Mana AGM that taxation should be limited to the richest “one percent” of businesses, nor his support for generous government loans to entrepreneurs.

Fightback still claimed to be “opposed to an alliance” with the Internet Party, even though its delegates at Mana’s AGM clearly did not vote against the negotiations. But, it continued, Fightback would “continue to participate in the MANA movement, provided there is no compromise of core policy or principles.”

One is entitled to ask: what policies and what principles? Mana is a capitalist party, whose leaders regularly collaborate with Labour, the Greens, the anti-immigrant New Zealand First Party, and now the right-wing Internet Party.

Mana represents the interests of a thin layer of Maori entrepreneurs and bureaucrats. Its leader, Hone Harawira, founded the party in 2011 after two years in the Maori Party, which is a partner in the National government. During that time, he voted for National’s budgets—which cut thousands of jobs, increased the regressive Goods and Services Tax, and began the privatisation of welfare services through the Whanau Ora scheme, devised by the Maori Party. He only left the Maori Party once it had completely discredited itself in the eyes of the working class.

Harawira called on the services of the pseudo-left organisations precisely because he needed to distance himself from the anti-working class record of the Maori Party. Without them, Harawira and Mana would have had difficulty in posturing as defenders of working people and the poor. In reality, the Maori Party and Mana have no fundamental differences—a fact underscored by Harawira’s attempt last year to re-unite the two parties.

Fightback did not oppose the talks with the Maori Party, just as it has now reconciled itself to an alliance with Dotcom. It stated that “MANA and the Internet Party are not necessarily ... strange bedfellows,” adding that if the Internet Party’s “focus on innovation and entrepreneurialism ... overshadows MANA’s goal of lifting everyone out of poverty, that becomes a problem.”

In reality, Mana has no such objective. It proposes modest reforms, like raising the minimum wage and providing meals in schools—which are no more than window dressing for its big business agenda. Like the Maori Party, Mana calls for “much greater investment” by the government in “sustainable Maori businesses,” as well as “establishing a fund to assist small businesses become medium or larger businesses, providing they are

kept in New Zealand.”

Another policy calls for “increas[ing] the value of settlements” paid to Maori tribes by the government. These multi-million dollar payments, ostensibly made to redress the crimes of colonialism, have enriched a thin layer of Maori capitalists, who now control \$37 billion in business assets, while the majority of Maori make up one of the most impoverished layers of the working class.

The business elite was well represented at Mana’s AGM. Besides Dotcom, guest speakers included multi-millionaire investment banker Gareth Morgan, businessman and broadcaster Willie Jackson and former ACT Party member and convicted fraudster Donna Awatere Huata.

On the basis of demands for Maori “self-determination” and “sovereignty,” Mana seeks to shackle Maori workers to “their” business and tribal leaders. It promotes the most poisonous forms of nationalism, including anti-Chinese chauvinism, restrictive immigration and prioritising jobs for NZ residents, to divide NZ workers from their international class brothers and sisters.

Over the past three decades, pseudo-left organisations such as Fightback have played a central role in promoting various forms of identity politics based on race and ethnicity, as well as gender and sexual preference, in opposition to the primacy of class. They speak for layers of the upper middle class for whom identity politics is an entree card to greater wealth and privileges. The pseudo lefts are above all deeply hostile to the fight for the independent mobilisation of the working class.

Mana’s negotiations with the Internet Party have again highlighted the class role of Fightback, the ISO and Socialist Aotearoa. As the entire political spectrum lurches to the right under the impact of the global economic crisis, the pseudo-lefts are seeking to prevent workers and youth breaking from the parties of the political establishment and turning to a revolutionary socialist perspective.



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