

New Zealand's Internet and Mana parties merge

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The New Zealand Maori nationalist Mana Party and newly-established Internet Party confirmed on Tuesday they had reached a deal to merge for the duration of the country's elections, which are to be held on September 20. The alliance, to be known as the Internet Mana Party (IMP), is a cynical electoral manoeuvre designed to maximise the chances of both parties gaining MPs in the next parliament. It expires on November 1, after the election, at which point it may or may not be renegotiated.

The Mana leadership was given the green light to negotiate the agreement by a unanimous vote at its Annual General Meeting on April 12–13. The openly pro-business Internet Party was founded this year by multi-millionaire internet entrepreneur Kim Dotcom. Mana leader Hone Harawira boasted to the media that discussions with Dotcom and other big-business figures showed that “Mana can no longer be pigeonholed as a party for Maori, the disaffected and for the radical fringe.”

The IMP aims to expand the parliamentary numbers of both parties by using Harawira's position as a sitting MP. This means the IMP is not required to meet the threshold of 5 percent of the total party vote in order to gain seats. In return, the Internet Party offers money, technical expertise and heightened media profile. Dotcom is bankrolling the Internet Party with \$3.25 million from his personal fortune. His party's political leader, Laila Harre, will occupy second place behind Harawira on the IMP's joint candidate list.

Both parties are exploiting alienation from the opposition Labour Party, which is widely regarded as presenting no alternative to the National Party government's policies of austerity and militarism. The IMP is seeking the support of disaffected young people by linking with the union-backed “Get out the Vote”

campaign and targeting young Maori and Pacific Island voters, in order to corral them behind a pro-business agenda and the existing parliamentary set-up.

Writing on the *Daily Blog*, Mana vice president John Minto declared the merger a “strategic alliance” that would mean “we are more likely to increase our parliamentary representation without any compromise whatever on Mana policies or principles.” In fact, behind a facade of pro-poor rhetoric, Mana is based on the same basic “principle” as the Internet Party—the defence of capitalism. Whereas Mana represents the interests of a thin layer of Maori businessmen and bureaucrats, Dotcom, a right-wing libertarian, supports further pro-market restructuring.

Dotcom gained a public profile after the government attempted extradite him to the US on charges of copyright infringement by his former web site Megaupload. The case exposed the illegal spying on NZ residents by the Government Communications Security Bureau in collaboration with the US National Security Agency (NSA). While making a limited appeal on the basis of free tertiary education and opposing the secret activities of the government spy agencies, the Internet Party was founded to pressure for a more open business environment for IT entrepreneurs.

The merger has been presented, totally falsely, as an “inspired” initiative among so-called “left” commentators and activists. The announcement on Thursday that Harre—a former Alliance Party MP, Women's Affairs Minister, union bureaucrat and restaurant owner—has been installed as the Internet Party's political leader, reinforced these absurd claims.

Blogger and Internet Party insider Martyn Bradbury wrote of Harre's appointment: “If this works the way we hope it will, Hone Harawira, Laila Harre, [Mana president] Annette Sykes and John Minto will be in

Parliament. Where's all that left wing angst and screams of sell-out now?" Pro-Labour columnist Chris Trotter predicted that the arrangement would prove to be "not only be a game-changer, it will be a government changer."

Harre has been brought forward to provide a "progressive" front for the right-wing Internet Party and its deal with Mana. She is part of a move to rehabilitate former Alliance figures who were instrumental in blocking a rebellion in the working class against the Lange Labour government's vicious free-market restructuring program in the 1980s. Ex-Alliance chairman Matt McCarten is the new chief of staff for Labour Party leader David Cunliffe, while another former Alliance MP, broadcaster and businessman Willie Jackson, has announced he may stand as a Mana candidate.

Harre is, in fact, a loyal servant of the ruling elite. As an Alliance MP she voted in favour of sending SAS troops to join the US-led invasion of Afghanistan. After the Alliance imploded, she secured a career in the union bureaucracy including in the International Labour Organisation in Fiji. Harre served as the Human Resources Manager at the Auckland Transition Authority overseeing job cuts and personnel "restructuring" when the nine local councils were amalgamated in one "super city." For her new position she was "poached" from her membership of the Greens and job as the Council of Trade Unions' "Get out the Vote" campaign manager.

The re-emergence of former Alliance figures into key political roles has a particular significance. As the entire political spectrum lurches to the right under the impact of the global economic crisis, the ruling class needs experienced figures to set up new political mechanisms to prevent workers and youth from turning to a revolutionary socialist perspective.

A critical role in providing the much-needed "left" camouflage for the IMP is being played by the pseudo-left groups—Socialist Aotearoa, Fightback and the International Socialist Organisation—all of which are affiliated with Mana and voted to support the merger.

The only objection to the agreement came from founding Mana Party co-leader and former Greens MP, Sue Bradford, who tendered her resignation. "Sucking up to a German millionaire is not my vision of the future and I think Mana has made a big mistake," she

told the media. Bradford has been a mouthpiece for a succession of capitalist parties, including the Alliance, the Greens and Mana. She is positioning herself as a political trap for opposition that emerges to the IMP.

The election campaign is yet to officially begin. Both Mana and the Internet Party are not only looking to expand their parliamentary numbers but to play a role in the next government. With its own poll ratings at near record lows, Labour has not ruled out working with either Mana or the Internet Party after the election.



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