

New Zealand: Socialist Aotearoa endorses Mana-Internet Party alliance

John Braddock
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The pseudo-left group Socialist Aotearoa (SA) has published a statement endorsing the sordid electoral alliance between the Maori nationalist Mana Party and the Internet Party (IP), a right-wing, pro-business party established and funded by the dubious multi-millionaire Kim Dotcom.

SA, along with the pseudo-left groups Fightback and the International Socialist Organisation, joined Mana when it was founded in 2011 and falsely promote it as “pro-poor.” Mana’s leader Hone Harawira split from the right-wing Maori Party, which was and is part of the conservative National Party government. Harawira worked with the government for two years, helping to impose its austerity measures, and left only after the Maori Party had become discredited in the eyes of the working class. Mana represents the same indigenous business interests as the Maori Party.

Now the pseudo-lefts are providing their services to provide “left” cover for the new Internet-Mana Party (IMP) and campaign for it in the September election. Dotcom is spending \$4 million on the IMP campaign. The IMP aims to boost its presence in parliament (Harawira is currently the only MP) and help install a government led by the Labour Party, which would only deepen the assault on jobs, living standards and democratic rights.

SA, the ISO and Fightback all supported Mana’s talks with the IP despite previously voicing reservations about Dotcom’s business background. Fightback published a statement prior to the merger which declared that Dotcom had “looked ... to the left” by entering talks with Mana.

Writing on the union-funded web site the *Daily Blog* on May 30, SA leader Joe Carolan baldly asserted—without a single reference to the IP’s policies—that claims it is right-wing are “not based in reality.” Carolan declared that the IP “was born out of a struggle for freedom and civil rights, the same way the Mana movement was.” The statement is absurd on both counts.

Dotcom won public sympathy because of his persecution by the government, which sent armed police to arrest him in 2012 on orders from the US Justice Department. The operation exposed the clandestine activities of the NZ Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB), which was later found to have illegally spied on him and at least 85 other New Zealand residents. Dotcom now confronts possible extradition to the US to face copyright and fraud charges related to his defunct Megaupload file sharing web site.

The pseudo-left groups that are now championing the IP were either hostile towards, or indifferent to, a principled defence of Dotcom’s basic democratic rights. Fightback flatly refused to defend Dotcom, saying he was “a businessman with an amoral attitude towards commerce,” like a drug dealer. SA remained silent on the police raid and ridiculed Dotcom’s connection with far-right ACT Party leader John Banks. All this changed when Dotcom emerged as a useful political figure fronting protests over the spying activities of the GCSB, with the pseudo-lefts now claiming he had been “radicalised.”

Dotcom (b. Schmitz) is a German Internet hacker turned multi-millionaire. In Germany he was convicted of several crimes, including insider trading and embezzlement. He set up Megaupload in Hong Kong in 2003 before applying for New Zealand residency. Dotcom told journalist David Fisher, author of *The Secret Life of Kim Dotcom*, that he was attracted by NZ’s apparent isolation. He said “if there is ever a crisis in the world people will be looking for places like New Zealand and you will attract high wealth individuals ... This could be the Switzerland of the region, attracting the wealth and the money ...” He was granted residency in 2010 under the privileged “investor plus” category, which admits wealthy immigrants if they invest \$NZ10 million.

Dotcom rented the country’s most expensive mansion and established a close connection with Banks, who was

then mayor of Auckland. Banks subsequently went into parliament as head of the ACT Party, which is in coalition with the National government. Dotcom donated \$50,000 to Banks' unsuccessful 2010 mayoralty campaign. According to Fisher, "Dotcom said he saw Banks as a forward-thinking politician who was pro-internet and pro-business."

ACT was founded in 1993 by Roger Douglas who, as finance minister in the 1980s Labour government, oversaw drastic privatisation and pro-market restructuring. ACT advocates a flat tax, the destruction of welfare, further deregulation to benefit big business and privatization of health and education services. It also calls for greater spending on law and order and the military. Banks was the architect of the current government's policy to introduce for-profit charter schools in oppressed areas.

According to Dotcom, his "friend" Banks had promised to support his bid to purchase NZ property, but the relationship soured after Banks refused to intervene on Dotcom's behalf following his arrest. Following a two-week trial in the Auckland high court, Banks was found guilty on June 5 of filing a false electoral return when he fraudulently declared Dotcom's donation as "anonymous."

Increasingly embittered over his treatment by the government for supporting Washington's extradition case, Dotcom used his growing public profile and wealth to establish the Internet Party (IP) earlier this year.

Far from being "anti-establishment" the IP is a pro-business outfit seeking to further liberalise the market in favour of upwardly mobile Internet entrepreneurs like Dotcom himself. It has been set up on business lines, with candidates sought through media advertisements, along with the promise that they will be paid the equivalent of an MP's salary while campaigning.

The IP promises to attract business investment using "incentives and benefits" and introduce a "digital currency" to establish NZ as "a key hub for a growing financial sector." It says it will deliver cheaper, high-speed Internet in order to encourage "more innovative business models," reform copyright laws, and boost green businesses with "greater investment in green technologies."

There is no demand for the abolition of the GCSB but, like Labour, the IP calls for "a review of our national security arrangements" so "they reflect New Zealand's future interests," a policy that will be used to ramp up the repressive powers of the state.

Socialist Aotearoa's Carolan hails Dotcom's decision to hire "left winger" Laila Harre to lead the party, falsely claiming that she "fought to uphold the Alliance Party's opposition to war." Harre was women's affairs minister in the 1999–2002 Labour-Alliance coalition government, and in 2001 she voted with other Alliance MPs in favour of Labour's decision to send troops to Afghanistan.

In 2009, Harre became human resources manager for the government's Auckland Transition Agency, which sacked more than 1,200 workers during the amalgamation of Auckland's councils.

The IP's mission statement makes one vague reference to "reducing social inequalities." What this means was spelled out during Dotcom's pitch to the Mana Party conference in April, where he said he stood for "social fairness." Dotcom declared that his break from poverty came when he received a million-dollar loan from the German government for an IT initiative. He said everyone should have the same "opportunity."

Socialist Aotearoa's claims that the IP is progressive are a fraud. It is not that Dotcom has been "radicalised," but rather that the entire pseudo-left fraternity has taken a further step to the right, in lockstep with Mana, to embrace a right-wing advocate of pro-market restructuring. There is a class logic to this coalition: like Mana and the pseudo-lefts, the IP's political appeal is directed towards layers of the upper middle class whose ambitions lie in improving their own position within capitalism.



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