New Zealand: Internet-Mana parties wage bogus anti-establishment campaign

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9 August 2014

The Internet Party (IP), formed by millionaire Internet entrepreneur Kim Dotcom, has begun its campaign alongside the Maori nationalist Mana Party for the September 20 New Zealand election with nationwide meetings and concert "parties" aimed at establishing a base among young people and alienated working-class voters.

The IP and Mana have formed an electoral alliance, Internet-Mana (IMP), in an effort to capitalise on widespread alienation from the opposition Labour Party, which has slumped to 26 percent support in the polls. After defeats in 2008 and 2011, Labour is facing electoral oblivion.

Mana currently has a single member of parliament, leader Hone Harawira, who represents one of the seven Maori-only electorates. By presenting a combined slate of candidates, the IMP alliance is seeking to circumvent the 5 percent threshold normally required to enter parliament. The two parties are promising to support the return of a Labour-led coalition, which could include the Greens and the right-wing anti-immigrant NZ First Party.

While posturing as "anti-establishment," the IP and Mana are seeking to corral hostility among workers and youth to National and Labour within the framework of parliamentary politics. Both parties represent layers of the upwardly mobile middle class, including privileged Maori business leaders and IT professionals, who are seeking to improve their social position within capitalism.

In an effusive review of an IMP meeting in West Auckland on July 21, *New Zealand Herald* political editor John Armstrong declared the alliance was offering genuine "hope" to those "on the bottom of the heap" and generating enough energy to "drag this segment of the voting population in the direction of the voting booth." A video clip taken during an IMP "party" in Christchurch, posted on its website, shows Dotcom addressing a crowd of young people, asking: "Are you ready for a revolution? Are you ready to take down the Government?" The crowd then breaks into chants of "f*** [Prime Minister] John Key."

The national "roadshow" has underlined the pro-business perspective of both parties. Speaking in Wellington last Monday, Dotcom put forward a raft of policies aimed at liberalising the hi-tech market in favour of IT entrepreneurs. These include incentive funding for IT start-ups, interest-free business loans and less monopoly control by the major IT corporations.

Dotcom lauded South Korea's capitalist economy, which rests on high levels of worker exploitation enforced by the increasingly autocratic methods of the right-wing administration of President Park Geun-hye. If New Zealand followed Korea's example and increased its global IT "market share," Dotcom said, it would eliminate unemployment and "lift the game for everybody." He absurdly boasted that the IMP could "double NZ's GDP within a decade."

The IP's political leader and highest ranked candidate, Laila Harre, made demagogic references to poverty and young people being "disenfranchised" from the "political elites." Harre called for a program to "open up the institutions" so that the future leaders of capitalism's industry, politics and trade unions can emerge from among the 280,000 children living in poverty.

Mana makes a more direct claim to be pro-poor, appealing to Maori youth and workers on the basis of race-based identity politics and nationalism. Mana president Annette Sykes opposed land sales to overseas buyers, thereby aligning Mana not only with Labour but with the anti-immigrant NZ First and the

Conservative Party. Sykes is calling for the blocking of a current farm sale in the central North Island to a Chinese consortium and for the land to be offered to the local Maori tribe. Mana consistently seeks to use these issues to whip-up anti-Chinese and anti-foreigner chauvinism.

In order to grease its entry into parliament, the IMP makes a number of empty promises—including higher taxes on the super-rich, token restrictions on the state spying apparatus and free tertiary education—to boost its anti-establishment credentials.

The ruling elite is increasingly alarmed at the deep gulf that has opened up between the political establishment and the mass of ordinary people. In 2011, 31 percent of young people aged between 18 and 24 did not even enrol and nearly a million people refused to vote—almost the number that voted for the ruling National Party.

A strenuous effort is being made to "engage" young people in official parliamentary politics. A "RockEnrol" campaign aimed at getting young people to vote is being run by three Aucklanders who were involved in similar efforts in the US and Canada. Seventeen-year-old musician Lorde has released a video for the Electoral Commission encouraging youth to vote. The Council of Trade Unions (CTU) is also organising a "Get out and Vote" campaign—significantly without identifying with Labour.

The three pseudo-left groups—the International Socialist Organisation (ISO), Fightback and Socialist Aotearoa (SA)—are playing the key role in presenting the IMP as a "progressive" alternative. They are all affiliated with Mana and are campaigning on behalf of the IMP. These organisations quickly shelved their limited criticisms of Dotcom and the Internet Party after the Mana leadership consummated the alliance.

The pseudo-lefts have all latched onto the appointment of Harre as leader as "proof" that the Internet Party is progressive. Harre, however, epitomises the privileged upper-middle class layer for which the pseudo-left groups speak. She and her husband run several businesses, including a medical research company, a winery and an Auckland restaurant.

Harre has had a long career in the Labour Party, the trade unions and other formations, such as NewLabour

and the Alliance, that acted as safety valves for popular discontent. Before being selected by Dotcom for the well-paid position of Internet Party leader, Harre was the human resources manager for the National government's Auckland Transition Agency (ATA), which sacked more than 1,200 workers during the amalgamation of the region's councils.

In a recent interview on the *Werewolf* website, Harre declared she was "proud" of this achievement, which no doubt resonates with the social layers that the Internet Party is seeking to win. She offered her constituency of "educated, empowered people who know that we have to take a great leap forward" the prospect of establishing a "courageous government" that is willing to invest in the Internet.

This is the thoroughly capitalist political formation that Mana and the pseudo-left organisations are promoting.

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