

NZ Internet-Mana Party meeting promotes nationalist, pro-business agenda

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An Internet-Mana Party (IMP) election meeting held in Wellington on August 4 exposed the IMP's campaign for the September 20 election as a charade, offering nothing to working people but intensifying austerity, nationalism and war.

The IMP is an opportunist electoral alliance between the Internet Party (IP), formed by entrepreneur Kim Dotcom, and the Maori nationalist Mana Party. Both want to capitalise on widespread alienation from the opposition Labour Party, which has slumped to 26 percent support in the polls. The Wellington meeting was part of a nationwide tour ostensibly aimed at young people and alienated working-class voters.

The IMP campaign is backed by so-called liberal media pundits as well as NZ's main pseudo-left groups—the International Socialist Organisation, Fightback and Socialist Aotearoa—which are part of Mana.

Despite the IMP's pitch to represent the “poor and dispossessed,” its pro-business agenda was revealed by the character of the meeting. The IMP is being funded by Dotcom to the tune of \$NZ4 million (\$US3.4 million). The meeting was held in the function room of a hotel, adjoining the NZ Stock Exchange building, frequented by corporate patrons. The mainly young, middle class audience was entertained by the IMP's “Youth Ambassador,” Hip-Hop artist King Kapisi, on an array of expensive hi-fi equipment. A supply of party T-Shirts was up for sale, in contrast to a thin amount of literature.

One striking feature was the absence of any reference to the deepening economic and political crisis of global capitalism and growing danger of war. The gathering took place amid Israel's brutal massacres in Gaza, the intensifying Western confrontation with Russia over Ukraine, the ongoing US-led military build-up in the

Asia-Pacific against China, and growing turbulence on global share markets.

All of this was ignored. Instead the focus of the meeting was a parochial concentration on domestic politics. In a paean to nationalism, a Maori entertainer opened the proceedings with a bracket of songs lionising “Aotearoa” (the Maori name for New Zealand) and finishing with a rendition of Bob Marley's “Get Up, Stand Up [for your rights].”

The IMP defends the profit system and is steeped in nationalism and ethnic identity politics. According to its election statement, the IMP stands for “a stronger, more connected New Zealand.” It bases itself on the Treaty of Waitangi, which has become a tool for exploiting the historical injustices wreaked on the Maori people to cultivate a privileged layer of business and political leaders wedded to the private profit system.

Both parties were represented by three speakers, including their national leaders. For the IP, Dotcom and political leader Laila Harre spoke, along with local candidate Callum Valentine. Mana's speakers were leader Hone Harawira, party president Annette Sykes, and candidate Georgina Beyer, a former Labour MP.

Harawira declared that under National “too many people” had been driven into poverty, homelessness and unemployment because the government is “committed to maximising the wealth for their elite friends.” The IMP's program, however, centres on improving the position of just a narrow social layer within the capitalist system. According to Harawira, Mana “encourages individual effort but rejects corporate excess.”

Dotcom called for a series of policies to favour IT entrepreneurs and “create middle class businesses.” Dotcom, originally from Germany, described how he

got his start in the IT business with a \$1m interest-free loan from the German government. “Why don’t we have this kind of incentive program for our young bright minds in New Zealand?” he asked.

Dotcom lauded South Korea’s economy, claiming that if NZ similarly increased its global IT “market share,” it would eliminate unemployment and “lift the game for everybody.” He boasted that the IMP could “double NZ’s GDP within a decade.” Such a plan is premised on further driving down wages and impoverishing the working class to make New Zealand “competitive” with countries like South Korea.

The IMP’s Wellington central candidate Callum Valentine spoke for the middle class social layer the party represents. His comments make clear that the party’s limited opposition to government restrictions on the Internet are not motivated by concerns about democratic rights, but the interests of Internet entrepreneurs and their profits.

Valentine opposed monopoly corporate control of the Internet because it “is where we earn our living.” The Internet was something, he said, “we all own” and should not be used as “corporate property.” State agencies which are using the Internet to spy on the population, he declared, were threatening the security, not of millions of ordinary people, but of “our banking systems.”

IP leader Laila Harre made demagogic references to poverty and young people being “disenfranchised” by the “political elites.” However, she said the root cause of this was the “digital divide” and called for a program to “open up the institutions,” absurdly claiming access to the Internet could provide a path out of social misery for the 280,000 children living in poverty. Justifying her own recent transition from the trade union bureaucracy to her highly paid job leading the IMP, Harre declared that “progressive politics” is about “building alliances.”

The speakers put forward a number of limited policies to make an appeal to young audiences. Dotcom and Harre advocated increased taxes on the “super rich,” while supporting tax breaks for small and rural businesses. Free tertiary education is proposed in order to lessen the debt burden on young people.

Sykes and Beyer made an overt pitch to the poverty and inequality that is entrenched in Maori communities. However, their purpose was to use ethnic identity

politics to corral opposition to the deepening social crisis behind Mana and its parliamentary ambitions. Beyer catalogued her bitter experiences within the Labour caucus over her opposition to the Helen Clark government’s Seabed and Foreshore legislation, which extinguished Maori claims to the inter-tidal zone and thus cut off benefits for the Maori elite.

One of Mana’s central demands is for Maori “independence” and “self-determination”—which really means private property rights for an upper-class layer. Reminding the audience that “most of us” in Mana are “on the protest lines every week” over asset sales and deep sea drilling, Sykes demanded an end to land sales to foreigners and “assets going offshore.”

Mana uses the issues of land, foreign ownership and migrant labour to whip-up anti-foreigner—especially anti-Chinese—chauvinism. On a TV3 debate on August 9, Harawira falsely claimed there are “tens of thousands” of immigrants “taking jobs that other people should be having.” He called for preference quotas for New Zealanders, “Maori in particular,” who should get priority for jobs. The IMP has just announced that a longstanding adviser to the right-wing anti-immigrant NZ First Party has been recruited to work “in policy” for the IMP.

The Wellington event and the entire Internet-Mana election campaign demonstrate that claims the parties are progressive are a sham. If elected, IMP candidates will prop up the discredited Labour Party and help impose its pro-business, militarist agenda on the working class.



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