

New Zealand Greens: A party of big business and militarism

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11 September 2014

As New Zealand's September 20 national election approaches, the main opposition Labour Party has failed to gain significant support. It remains stuck at well below 30 percent in recent polls. This is despite six years of brutal austerity imposed by the National Party government to make workers pay for the economic crisis—including thousands of job cuts, a rise in the Goods and Services Tax (GST), and cuts to healthcare, education and welfare.

Many workers and young people view Labour as a big business party, no different to National. At the last election in 2011, Labour received its lowest vote in 80 years. One beneficiary of the collapse in support for the major parties was the Greens, which increased its vote from 7 to 11 percent between 2008 and 2011 and is currently the third largest party in parliament. If Labour is to form a coalition government after this month's election, the Greens would almost certainly be part of it.

In recent years, under the impact of the global economic breakdown that erupted in 2008, the Greens have steadily moved to the right. The party now portrays itself as more “fiscally responsible” and pro-market than Labour or National, and has openly ditched social policies on which it previously campaigned, such as free university education.

Co-leader Russel Norman underlined the party's pro-business credentials in a September 5 televised debate. Asked which MP outside his party he most admired, he named Finance Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Bill English, who is responsible for six savage austerity budgets. The Greens have promised to pay down debt faster than both major parties—inevitably at the expense of working people.

Norman stressed that the Greens' main environmental policy, a price on carbon emissions,

would fund a cut to the company tax rate. The National government has already reduced corporate tax from 30 to 28 percent. The only other party campaigning for a further cut is the far-right ACT Party. The Greens have also ruled out reversing National's increase to the regressive GST.

The Greens' website justifies the party's plan to raise the top income tax rate from 33 to 40 percent by declaring that it would still be well below the top rates in Australia and the UK (47 percent), the US (48 percent) and most other OECD countries. The revenue raised would fund a policy to “alleviate child poverty”—a pittance of just \$60 a week for low-income families along with some additional healthcare spending.

While the Greens still call themselves “left wing” or “progressive,” this was never the case. From 1999 to 2008 the Greens supported the Labour government of Prime Minister Helen Clark, which presided over deepening poverty and social inequality and the strengthening of military and intelligence ties with US imperialism.

While describing themselves as pacifists, the Greens backed the dispatch of troops to the Australian-led invasion of East Timor in 1999 and the 2003 military-police intervention in Solomon Islands. Unlike Labour's other “left” supporter, the now-defunct Alliance Party, the Greens voted against sending troops to assist the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan. However, the party did support the stationing of about 100 “peacekeeping” troops in Afghanistan's Bamiyan province from 2003 to 2013.

Since Obama's 2008 election, the Greens, like their counterparts in Germany and other countries, have become even more open in their support for US imperialist operations around the world. Last year they

supported calls for a direct US attack on Syria. The party denounced Russia and China for opposing UN Security Council motions that would have paved the way for intervention. As a pretext, the Greens regurgitated Washington's lie that the Assad regime, rather than the Al Qaeda-linked and CIA-backed militias, was responsible for a sarin gas attack on civilians in August 2013.

The Greens tacitly supported the February coup in Ukraine, which was led by fascist groups and supported by the US and European powers. The party joined two unanimous parliamentary resolutions criticising Russia over the annexation of Crimea and the Malaysia Airlines disaster in July. Without any evidence, Washington and its allies have accused pro-Russia rebels of shooting down the plane, and used the tragedy to escalate threats against Russia.

In June, the Greens criticised Prime Minister John Key's support for US bombing in Iraq, only to call for a United Nations-led "multilateral" intervention instead. A decade ago, the Greens fronted protests around the country against Bush's invasion of Iraq and criticised Labour's decision to send 60 army engineers to assist the occupation—all while continuing to support Labour.

Since US bombing began last month, however, the Greens have remained silent, thereby tacitly supporting Labour's position. Labour's foreign affairs spokesman David Shearer told Fairfax Media on August 13 that the "airstrikes are needed" on the bogus "humanitarian" pretext of protecting people from Islamic State militias.

All the opposition parties support an even closer alignment with Washington's "pivot to Asia"—the military and economic encirclement and preparations for war against China. Over the past two years, the Greens, along with Labour, Mana and NZ First, have campaigned vigorously against the sale of land to Chinese companies and against the government's cultivation of business ties with China, which is NZ's biggest trading partner.

The Greens have criticised the other opposition parties' calls to reduce immigration—which is mainly from Asia—but support banning foreigners from buying houses. The Greens would be happy to work alongside NZ First, whose leader Winston Peters has scapegoated Chinese immigrants for social problems such as gambling, unemployment, organised crime, prostitution

and high house prices. Last Thursday, Norman told a business meeting in Auckland that the two parties shared "a fair bit of common ground," including opposition to "overseas ownership of land."

The opposition parties' support for anti-Chinese politics is bound up with New Zealand's neo-colonial interests in the South Pacific, where Wellington and Canberra both rely on Washington. The Greens' defence policy calls for "[m]ore resources ... to be devoted to maritime surveillance of our [exclusive economic zone] and that of our Pacific neighbours." It also stresses the need to "[e]nsure that New Zealand has special forces sufficient for rapid action in crisis situations, including terrorist actions in New Zealand and Pacific nations."

The party suggests "extending the reserve forces and reserve training to a wider section of the population," which would assist the ruling elite's push to foster militaristic sentiments.

The Greens represent an affluent, upper middle class and big business milieu, which profits from "sustainable" capitalist ventures and favours more nationalist and protectionist policies. The party's miserly "pro-poor" proposals are nothing but window dressing. If they form part of the next government, the Greens will support increased austerity and the preparations to join imperialist wars.



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