

Working class disenfranchised in New Zealand election

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19 September 2014

Whichever party or coalition of parties form the New Zealand government after tomorrow's election, the working class will have been totally disenfranchised. The established parties are all committed to deepening the assault on living standards, while further aligning the country with US imperialist aggression in the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Asia.

This agenda has been decided behind the backs of the population by the banks and big business backers of the National government and opposition Labour Party, in response to the worsening crisis of the capitalist system. Six years after the Wall Street crash of 2008 unleashed the most severe crisis since the Great Depression the global economy has not recovered and is entering into an even deeper slump. The OECD has slashed its growth forecast for developed countries and there are growing warnings of a greater slowdown in China.

At the start of the year the government and numerous commentators described New Zealand's economy as a "rock star" that had weathered the global recession. In fact, the upswing was highly unstable and the country was exposed to a downturn in Asia. Recent figures show that prices for dairy products, NZ's main export, have plummeted by over 40 percent since February, mainly due to falling demand from China, the country's biggest trading partner.

The final televised debate between Prime Minister John Key and Labour leader David Cunliffe on Wednesday demonstrated again that the response of the entire political establishment will be to impose greater burdens on working people.

While Cunliffe demagogically declared that people were struggling "to put food on the table to feed their kids," neither Labour nor any other party is offering anything to address the profound social crisis. More

than one in four or 270,000 children live in poverty; median wages have declined since 2006; and there has been a sharp rise in homelessness due to soaring housing costs, especially in earthquake-devastated Christchurch.

As in previous debates Cunliffe praised Key for "taking the country through the GFC [global financial crisis]", signalling Labour's agreement with the harsh austerity measures imposed over the past six years. These include the increase in the regressive Goods and Services Tax (GST), thousands of public sector job cuts, pushing single parents off welfare and reducing spending on health and education.

Labour is promising a meagre \$2 increase in the minimum wage, while at the same time increasing the pension age from 65 to 67 and forcing workers to pay more for their own retirement through a compulsory savings scheme.

The party has already slashed hundreds of millions of dollars from its alternative budget in response to the Treasury downgrading the country's growth forecast. In a column in Wednesday's *Australian Financial Review*, Cunliffe emphasised that Labour's so-called "economic upgrade" would focus on paying off National's debt and returning budget surpluses, which will inevitably mean further cuts to spending on social programs.

While attacking the working class at home, the political establishment has also responded to the economic crisis by aligning more closely with US imperialism and its preparations for war.

After the 1999–2008 Labour government sent troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, National cemented military and intelligence ties with the US. The NZ ruling elite relies on the de facto alliance to defend its own neo-colonial interests in the South Pacific.

Throughout the campaign period there has been no debate on the question of war. While Cunliffe and Key declared their support for Obama's bombing and deployment of troops to Iraq, the other parties raised no objections and remained silent, indicating their agreement.

Twice this year every party—including Labour's allies the Greens and the Maori nationalist Mana Party—voted for parliamentary motions that endorsed the US-backed coup in Ukraine and Washington's provocations against Russia.

All the parties have also welcomed the Obama administration's "pivot" to Asia, a strategy aimed at militarily encircling and preparing for war against China. The Key government has been cautious in its public statements, however, having based itself for the past six years on building up trade with China. Labour, the Greens, Mana and the right-wing NZ First Party represent sections of the bourgeoisie who favour a more explicit embrace of Washington, as the Australian government has done.

The opposition bloc has carried out a xenophobic campaign against Chinese investors over the past two years. Along with the media, the parties whipped up "corruption" scandals to force the resignation of two government ministers—Judith Collins and Maurice Williamson—who had close ties with Chinese business figures.

Labour and its allies have also scapegoated immigrants, especially those from China, for unemployment, the high cost of housing, and other aspects of the social crisis. Labour, which is polling at just 25 percent and is widely discredited among workers, hopes to form a coalition government with the viciously anti-Asian NZ First, along with the Greens and supported by the Internet-Mana Party.

As in the US, Europe and elsewhere, the bourgeoisie's plans for war and deeper austerity measures cannot be imposed democratically and have gone hand in hand with the build-up of sweeping police state powers.

On Monday Edward Snowden provided evidence that NZ's spy agency, the Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB), carries out surveillance in collaboration with the US National Security Agency on millions of New Zealanders and other people around the world.

While there is widespread outrage over the revelations, none of the parties offers any alternative. The Internet-Mana Party (IMP), which hosted Snowden via video-link at Monday's public meeting in Auckland, is a pro-business alliance which does not call for the GCSB to be dismantled but supports vague pledges by Labour and the Greens for a "review" or "inquiry" that would only whitewash the spy agencies and strengthen their powers.

The IMP and the middle class pseudo-left groups that are part of it—the International Socialist Organisation, Socialist Aotearoa and Fightback—have campaigned on the slogan "change the government" and portray Labour as a lesser evil to National. This is a total fraud aimed at corralling workers behind a right wing coalition which, if elected, will carry out further attacks on living conditions and democratic rights, including the rights of immigrants, in order to prepare the country for war.

The only way to oppose war, austerity and attacks on democratic rights is through the construction of a party based firmly on the principles of internationalism and socialism and dedicated to the overthrow of the global capitalist system. That means building a revolutionary leadership of the working class in New Zealand as a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement.



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