

New Zealand WSWS meeting discusses election outcome

Our reporters
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A *World Socialist Web Site* public meeting in Lower Hutt, New Zealand, and last Sunday discussed the outcome of the September 20 election and put forward the socialist alternative to the agenda of austerity and militarism shared by the political establishment. The meeting followed an earlier meeting at Victoria University, Wellington.

WSWS correspondent Tom Peters gave the main report in which he explained that the most significant aspect of the election was the historic collapse of support for the opposition Labour Party. It received less than 25 percent of the vote, its worst defeat in 92 years. There was no significant swing towards the conservative National Party government but almost one million people abstained from voting—about the same number that voted for National.

Peters stated: “This points to the gulf that exists between the working class and the entire political establishment. As we have found in campaigning for these meetings there is widespread anger and hostility towards every party. But disgust and anger, while necessary, are not enough by themselves.

“The working class urgently needs a socialist party to provide it with the necessary leadership to fight against the increasing onslaught on its standard of living and the drive to war.”

The speaker detailed how Labour had stressed its agreement with National’s austerity measures over the past six years—which included slashing thousands of public sector jobs, raising the Goods and Services Tax, partially privatising power companies, cuts to education and healthcare budgets, and pushing people off welfare benefits.

Labour’s main support party, the Greens, which sometimes presented themselves as a more “progressive” alternative, had spent the election

campaign promoting their pro-business credentials, including a demand for lower company taxes.

The speaker drew attention to the unanimous support in the political establishment for the renewed US war against Iraq and Syria, stating: “Before the election Labour leader David Cunliffe and Prime Minister John Key both publicly endorsed US President Obama’s decision to begin bombing Iraq. The Greens didn’t condemn it but said that it would be better if it had United Nations approval. The Internet-Mana Party, which wanted to enter parliament as a prop for Labour, did not criticise Cunliffe’s comments.

“No one wanted to make the war into an election issue because they all basically agreed with it,” Peters continued. “The middle class so-called “radical” groups that are part of the Maori nationalist Mana Party—Fightback, Socialist Aotearoa and the International Socialist Organisation, which are more accurately described as fake left or pseudo-left—also remained silent. The last thing they wanted to do was attack Labour, because these groups were campaigning for a Labour victory.”

The opposition parties all attempted to whip up hostility to Chinese investment and Asian immigration, with Labour courting the xenophobic NZ First Party as a potential coalition partner. The report explained that this campaign was bound up with the support of these parties for the Obama administration’s “pivot” to Asia—a strategy aimed at militarily encircling China and preparing for war.

Now that the election is out of the way the government is preparing to send New Zealand soldiers to join the war in Iraq and Syria, and there is a steady drumbeat in favour of military involvement in the corporate media.

Peters explained that the growing drive by US

imperialism and its allies towards war—including the interventions in the Middle East, the threats against Russia, and the military encirclement of China—was rooted in the profound crisis of the capitalist system. He compared the present global instability with the scramble for colonies by the imperialist countries in the lead-up to World War I.

The speaker explained that the contradictions of capitalism—between the globalised economy and the division of the world into competing nation states—which led inexorably to war a hundred years ago, had now reached an even more advanced stage. He discussed the ideological campaign underway to promote war, including the glorification of New Zealand's participation in World War I.

He warned that preparations for another major war require attacks on democratic rights. “That is why the US and all its allies, including New Zealand, engage in mass spying on millions of innocent people. The entire population are increasingly regarded as potential enemies of the state.”

Peters quoted from the resolution, adopted by the Socialist Equality Party (US) in August, *The Fight Against War and the Political Tasks of the Socialist Equality Party*: “The same contradictions that give rise to imperialist war produce an immense intensification of the class struggle. Imperialism is a predatory solution to the intractable crisis of world capitalism, the solution of the financial aristocracy as it strives to unify the world economy under a single hegemon. This is the path of war. Socialist revolution is the progressive solution to the same crisis, the solution of the working class.”

He concluded by appealing for those in attendance to join the fight to build a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International in New Zealand to lead the working class in the coming struggles.

The report to the Lower Hutt meeting was followed by a lively and wide-ranging discussion. One participant stated that there was no opposition in the working class to the Key government's plans to join the US war in the Middle East, and that many were apathetic or uninformed.

In response, WSWS correspondent John Braddock pointed out that there had been no discussion of the war in the media or from any of the parties during the election campaign. “The New Zealand people have had

no chance to express an opinion about this,” he said.

Braddock explained that there was widespread suspicion and hostility to many of the government's policies, including the alliance with Washington and the complicity of NZ's Government Communications Security Bureau in mass surveillance by the National Security Agency. But this opposition found no reflection in the policies of any of the established parties.

Braddock explained that since the crash of 2008 the escalating crisis of capitalism, and the resulting increase in inequality and poverty, had produced changes in the consciousness of masses of workers around the globe. Inevitably these objective processes would drive millions of people around the world into struggle. He stressed that “the critical question is the need for an articulated political alternative and a leadership, which is what we put forward every day on the *World Socialist Web Site*.”

Another participant, Ciaran, expressed agreement with the report's analysis of the drive towards war, adding that Germany's war aims in World War I and II were rooted in the drive of German capitalism to expand. He said, “I feel like a world war is going to happen again as an outcome of an economic war.”

He added that he “felt pressured into voting by people saying ‘if you don't vote you can't complain,’ so I voted for the Greens. I really didn't agree with any of the parties. The current system isn't working for the people. I've heard a lot of people grumbling about the current situation, but this is the first group of people willing to do something about it. I feel like once we have a good solid leadership towards this direction, we'll be getting a lot of support.”



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