

New Zealand Internet and Mana Parties split following electoral debacle

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In the wake of an abysmal result in last September's New Zealand election, the Mana and Internet parties agreed to split. The Internet Mana Party (IMP), established last May, was formally dissolved last month. The Internet Party (IP), which was founded shortly before the merger, is "reviewing" its future and may be wound up.

The IMP received just 1.4 percent of the overall party vote, well short of the 5 percent threshold to enter parliament. In a crucial setback, Mana's leader and sole MP, Hone Harawira, lost his Te Tai Tokerau seat, one of the seven Maori electorates, to Labour.

The overall election result reflected the vast chasm that has opened up, under conditions of sharpening social crisis and preparations for war, between the working class and the entire edifice of official politics. The National Party government and the main opposition Labour Party share essentially the same program of ongoing austerity at home and support for US militarism overseas. Approximately a million people did not vote and Labour received its worst result in 92 years, with just 25 percent of the votes. The immediate beneficiary of the near-record abstention was National, which was re-elected.

Amid the collapse in support for the main parties, the IMP presented itself as an "anti-establishment" alternative. Mana leaders repeatedly declared that they represented "the poor and dispossessed" and called for reforms such as lunches in some schools and a higher minimum wage. The Internet Party criticised the state surveillance agency, the Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB), and invited journalist Glenn Greenwald and US National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden to address a public meeting five days before the election.

Despite its campaign rhetoric, however, the IMP was

an alliance of two capitalist parties, which aimed to enter parliament to prop up a Labour-led government. Like Labour, the IMP did not call for the abolition of the state spying agencies but merely a "review" of their activities. It did not oppose the military and intelligence alliance with the US.

In the lead-up to the election, Mana joined Labour and the right-wing NZ First Party in campaigning against immigration and foreign investment, particularly from China. This xenophobic campaign dovetailed with the push by the Obama administration to strengthen its military alliance with NZ as part of Washington's "pivot" to Asia: the US military encirclement and preparations for war against China.

Mana's Maori nationalist platform calls for greater government payouts to indigenous tribal businesses. The IP, founded by the multi-millionaire businessman Kim Dotcom, openly represents an upwardly-mobile layer of young tech entrepreneurs. Dotcom, who had previously donated money to the extreme pro-market ACT Party, called for measures to boost the profits of technology firms like his own. The Internet Party advocated government grants for web-based start-up companies. Dotcom bankrolled the IMP to the tune of \$4 million, prompting Harawira to boast that Mana could "no longer be pigeonholed as a party for Maori, the disaffected and for the radical fringe."

The alliance exposed, in particular, the right-wing character of the pseudo-left groups affiliated to Mana—the International Socialist Organisation (ISO), Fightback and Socialist Aotearoa (SA)—and their integration into the political establishment. All three groups campaigned for the IMP, while leading members of Fightback and SA stood as IMP candidates. They falsely presented Mana as a "left wing" alternative to Labour and National, while

justifying its merger with the Internet Party by absurdly claiming that Dotcom had been “radicalised” by the government’s attempts to extradite him to the US on copyright infringement charges.

Following the election defeat, Mana and IP members continued to defend the alliance. Mana’s John Minto blamed the result on the media’s attacks on Dotcom and Labour’s attempts to distance itself from the IMP. He claimed that the merger had “worried the political establishment” because Dotcom’s “massive wealth” gave the IMP the financial resources it needed to challenge “corporate wealth and power.”

Other IMP apologists cynically blamed the working class for the defeat of the so-called “left:” Labour, the Greens and IMP. Martyn Bradbury, who edits the trade union funded *Daily Blog*, contemptuously declared that New Zealanders rallied to support National’s “mass surveillance and dirty politics.”

Socialist Aotearoa, in a post-election article, declared that the IMP failed to win votes because “the conditions of austerity imposed elsewhere have been avoided” in New Zealand and the working class was not “desperate enough” to support Mana’s “anticapitalist programme.” The ISO similarly implied that the working class is either right-wing or apathetic. It declared that the National government had refrained from major attacks on the working class and “by and large, has succeeded” in portraying Prime Minister John Key as “competent, likeable and popular.”

In reality, Key’s government is reviled by the working class. The near-record abstention in the election demonstrated that there is widespread hostility toward every established party. National has carried out a series of attacks on living standards and public services, including at least 7,000 job cuts, cuts to healthcare, welfare and education and an increase in the consumption tax.

Claims that workers enjoy a comfortable living standard and have not suffered greatly from the economic crisis are false to the core. Throughout the country median incomes declined between 2006 and 2013; in working class South Auckland by over 16 percent. In Northland, part of the Te Tai Tokerau electorate, economist Shamubeel Eaqub has compared economic conditions to those in East Timor, one of the world’s poorest countries.

Despite the IMP’s well-funded and highly visible

campaign, and the enthusiastic support it received from the pseudo-lefts, the alliance failed to gain significant support because masses of workers saw it as no alternative to the political establishment. Far from being “anti-capitalist,” Mana represents the Maori bourgeoisie and upper-middle class, a layer that promotes xenophobia and racialist politics in order to divide the working class and advance its own interests. Mana’s alliance with the Internet Party, the creation of a multi-millionaire, was the clearest expression of its pro-business agenda.

The election result—the return of a government committed to austerity and militarism—demonstrates that anger and disgust with capitalist parties is not enough. The working class urgently needs its own party, based on a socialist and internationalist program, to organise the fight against war and for social equality. Building such a party requires a struggle against all those groups, including the ISO, Fightback and Socialist Aotearoa, who seek to shackle workers and youth to right-wing parties like the IMP.



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