

Pseudo-left's phony "socialist" campaign in New Zealand by-election

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28 January 2017

A leader of the pseudo-left group Socialist Aotearoa (SA) has announced he will stand as a "socialist" in the February 25 by-election for the west Auckland seat of Mount Albert.

Joe Carolan, a senior organiser for the Unite trade union, is a fixture of Auckland's protest circuit, frequently appearing at rallies alongside bourgeois politicians from the Labour Party, the Greens and the Maori nationalist Mana Party.

In the 2014 general election, Carolan was the Mount Albert candidate for Mana, receiving 0.8 percent of the vote. Mana and its ally the Internet Party aimed to enter parliament in support of a Labour-led government, but failed to gain any seats. Both pro-business parties were supported by SA and two other pseudo-left groups, the International Socialist Organisation and Fightback.

Carolan told TV3 on December 20 that he is running this time as "an out-and-proud socialist," the timing being right "in the post-Bernie Sanders world." In a January 16 interview on the trade union-funded *Daily Blog*, Carolan praised British Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn as "explicitly socialist, very pro-union, pro-worker."

The invocation of Sanders and Corbyn, two pro-capitalist politicians, indicates Socialist Aotearoa's real political orientation. Far from fighting for a socialist solution to the capitalist crisis, SA, on behalf of the upper middle class layer it represents, is moving to establish new formations to derail the growing radicalisation of the working class and subordinate it to the existing political set-up.

Sanders' campaign for the US presidential nomination was aimed at corraling anti-capitalist sentiment and confining it to the Democratic Party, one of the two major big business parties in the US. For all his rhetoric against the "billionaire class," Sanders promoted reactionary nationalism and economic protectionism. He backed Hillary Clinton in the election and has since moved to

collaborate with President Donald Trump. Corbyn has similarly capitulated to the Labour Party's right-wing, betraying his pledges to oppose austerity and war.

Conditions similar to those that impelled Sanders' appeal to millions of workers and youth exist in New Zealand. The 2014 election saw more than a million people abstain, pointing to the widespread alienation and disgust with all the big business parties. Outraged over deteriorating social conditions and the growing danger of war, sections of the working class in every country are becoming sympathetic to socialism.

The conservative National Party government has, since the 2008 global financial crisis, imposed draconian austerity measures and is presiding over soaring social inequality. February's by-election will take place in the country's biggest city, where the average house price has sky-rocketed to over \$1 million. Thousands of people unable to afford rents are living in overcrowded housing, or even garages and cars.

The Mount Albert electorate is socially diverse and economically stratified, with pockets of affluence alongside significant poverty. Figures from 2013 show nearly one in four of the 63,000 inhabitants was born overseas, while 34.5 percent of the residents earn less than \$20,000 a year.

The seat was vacated following the resignation of David Shearer, the Labour Party's leader from 2011 to 2013, who is returning to work for the UN. Between 1981 and 2009, the seat was held by Helen Clark, Labour Prime Minister from 1999 to 2008. With a general election due later this year, National has declared it a "safe" Labour seat and will not contest the by-election.

Labour, however, is in deep crisis, underscored by Shearer's resignation. It is correctly seen by working people as no alternative to National and continues to languish below 30 percent in the polls. In 2014 it received 24.7 percent of votes, its worst result since 1922. Under

present leader Andrew Little, a former union leader, it has lurched further to the right, promoting law-and-order measures and immigration controls to address the social crisis and openly siding with Washington in its deepening confrontation with China.

Carolan told Newshub that he intends to “challenge Labour from the Left.” He released a list of policies, including free public transport, free education, rent controls, a public housing program and a “liveable universal basic income.” Far from establishing that none of these issues can be resolved without the working class overthrowing the profit system and taking power into its own hands, Carolan contends that they can be addressed through the unions and getting “people involved in movements.”

The social rights he mentions have been attacked ruthlessly over the past three decades by successive governments, including Labour, with the full collaboration of the unions. SA, along with Unite and Mana, has always endorsed Labour as the “lesser evil,” seeking to promote illusions that it can be pressured to adopt “progressive” policies.

Carolan told the *Daily Blog* he wanted to build “a movement of people outside parliament,” based around the trade unions. He said the purpose of such a movement would be “to start that discussion about a new party of the left.” The role of such a formation would be to divert the discontent back into the hands of the parliamentary establishment, as can be seen from Carolan’s record.

Carolan said he was “proud” to be a member of the Mana Party. He and other SA members joined Mana in 2011, and have fraudulently promoted it as “left wing” and even “revolutionary.” Mana represents the interests of a narrow layer of Maori business owners and tribal elites. The party discredited itself in the eyes of working people with its right-wing policies and alliance with the openly pro-business Internet Party. Mana is currently in negotiations to form a new alliance with the Maori Party, a partner in the ruling coalition government.

The SA leader also praised the Alliance Party, which served in coalition with the Labour government from 1999 to 2002. Carolan said the Alliance was “very left wing, it had a lot of the policies that we [SA] have in common.” He did not mention that all but one of the Alliance’s ten MPs voted with Labour to send troops to Afghanistan. The party collapsed shortly afterward.

Underscoring SA’s friendliness toward Labour, Carolan described its candidate for Mount Albert, Jacinda Ardern, as “a wonderful person” and said Shearer, the outgoing

MP, had done “some good work in Palestine” during his previous job with the UN. NZ Labour and the UN have always supported the Israeli state and its oppression of Palestinians. Labour also fully supports the current US-led wars in Iraq and Syria.

Carolan’s by-election statements do not mention SA’s foreign policy, which is closely aligned with Labour’s. The group has been at the forefront of whipping up support for US-led imperialist interventions in Syria. It has also falsely painted China as an “imperialist” power with designs on New Zealand, in order to justify Washington’s anti-China military build-up.

Carolan hypocritically criticised Labour and the Greens for “scapegoating” immigrants, saying: “I am explicitly internationalist, pro-migrant.” Yet Mana and Unite, with SA’s tacit support, have joined Labour and the right-wing NZ First Party in blaming immigrant workers for deteriorating wages and conditions. Unite cooperates with a government agency to vet applications by employers seeking to bring in overseas labour, while lobbying to crack down on the number of temporary work visas.

Socialist Aotearoa is not a socialist organisation. It represents better-off sections of the middle class, including the trade union bureaucracy, which are seeking to take a more direct role in the political establishment and improve their own positions under capitalism.

The pseudo-lefts are bitterly hostile to the perspective of Trotskyism: genuine revolutionary socialism, which fights to unite workers internationally, on the basis of their own independent program and party, to overthrow the profit system. In New Zealand that perspective is fought for by the Socialist Equality Group (SEG), which is aligned with the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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