

Pseudo-lefts promote Corbyn as model for New Zealand Labour Party

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With parliamentary elections due on September 23, New Zealand's middle class pseudo-left groups, along with various pro-Labour commentators and union activists, are promoting British Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn as a model for the NZ Labour Party.

An outpouring of anti-Tory sentiment during the UK election saw Labour's vote share increase by 10 percent and come within 2 percentage points of the Conservatives' total. Among the younger generations, two-thirds of those aged 18–24 and more than half of those aged 25–34 voted Labour.

The pseudo-left Socialist Aotearoa group and Unite union enthused over British Labour's "socialist manifesto." Unite leader Mike Treen boasted in the *Daily Blog* about meeting Corbyn's shadow chancellor John McDonnell in London last year, hailing him as a "radical" leader of "the working class movement." The International Socialist Organisation (ISO) claimed Corbyn proved with his "genuine credentials," by fighting "on class lines," that an "alternative can be built."

This is all a complete fraud, involving a falsification of Corbyn's politics and those of the NZ and UK Labour Parties. There is no suggestion from the pseudo-lefts that the working class should break from Labour and its right-wing, pro-business agenda. Instead they are encouraging the illusion that Labour, under the influence of a "left" leader, can be transformed into a progressive alternative for workers.

The ISO advised: "For the NZ Labour-Green alliance to win a clear victory it must drop its conservatism and belief it must appeal to the middle ground."

The trade union-funded *Daily Blog* called for the "progressive political parties" to "actually stand for something" and "emulate what Corbyn did." *New Zealand Herald* liberal columnist Bryce Edwards lamented that "Corbyn's left-wing authenticity shows up the Labour Party here as being insipid, uninspired and opportunistic."

The promotion of Corbyn internationally stems from the needs of the ruling classes to block the development of genuine socialist and revolutionary consciousness. Labour and its pseudo-left allies are seeking new mechanisms to contain the growing opposition among workers and youth to austerity, attacks on democratic rights and the build-up to war.

The WSWWS has warned: "The greatest political danger is to identify the radicalisation of the masses with its initial and undeserving political beneficiaries such as Corbyn and the Labour Party."

Despite his campaign rhetoric, Corbyn is not a socialist and has already abandoned many of his supposed principles. UK Labour's election manifesto included the essential demands of the party's Blairite right-wing: a tight limit on government spending, immigration controls, as well as support for NATO and the Trident nuclear weapons system.

Corbyn's response to the terrorist atrocities in Manchester and London was to demand more police and extra funding for the army and secret services. Following the Grenfell Tower fire, he lined up behind the Conservative government's sham inquiry, which will cover up the responsibility of successive British governments for the catastrophe.

The 2017 election in New Zealand is being conducted under conditions of deepening social crisis and mass disaffection with official politics, similar to what exists in Britain. One in four children lives in poverty and tens of thousands of people are homeless, while a tiny wealthy elite is profiting from property market speculation.

A survey of 507 people by polling company Ipsos, published on July 3, found 56 percent of respondents believed "traditional parties and politicians don't care about people like them" and 64 percent agreed "the economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful."

In the past two elections around a million people have

either not registered or refused to vote, compared to just over three million who did vote. After decades of right-wing policies, the working class correctly views Labour as a big business party, which supports the National Party's austerity measures.

In the 1980s, the Labour government carried out sweeping privatisations and other pro-market "reforms," including slashing taxes for the rich, which resulted in tens of thousands of redundancies and a widening gulf between rich and poor. The party's membership and support collapsed as the working class abandoned it in disgust.

Having suffered three consecutive landslide election defeats since 2008, Labour is languishing at between 25 and 30 percent in the media polls.

Like its counterparts in the US and Europe, Labour is responding to the economic crisis with right-wing nationalism and protectionism. Its first major policy announcement for the election was a promise to slash migrant numbers by up to 30,000—almost half last year's intake of 72,000.

After the election, Labour intends to form a three-way coalition government with the Greens and NZ First. The latter has a long history of xenophobic agitation against Asian immigrants and has expressed sympathy for Trump's extreme nationalist agenda. Labour and NZ First have scapegoated Chinese people, in particular, for the housing shortage, unemployment and other symptoms of the social crisis.

Both parties have demanded greater military spending to integrate the armed forces into the US build-up to war against China, on top of the \$20 billion the government announced last year.

For socialists, the urgent task is to demolish illusions in Labour and its allies, including the trade unions, as part of the fight to build a new party based on uniting the working class internationally against the profit system. The pseudo-left groups are profoundly hostile to this perspective. They represent sections of the middle class, including academics and union bureaucrats, who do not want the overthrow of capitalism, but rather to improve their own positions within it.

In addition to hailing Corbyn and UK Labour, the New Zealand pseudo-lefts have promoted Syriza, the Greek pseudo-left party that won the 2015 election based on phony anti-austerity pledges. Once in power, Syriza worked with the European Union and the banks to deepen the assault on the Greek working class.

In the 2014 election the ISO, Fightback and Socialist

Aotearoa campaigned as members of the Mana Party and its ally the Internet Party—both openly capitalist parties that aimed to enter a coalition government with Labour and the Greens.

The ISO, along with the Unite union and others, fraudulently portrayed David Cunliffe, Labour's leader in 2013–2014, as a "left wing" figure, despite his support for austerity and the US wars in the Middle East. The ISO also praised NZ Labour's policy platform as the "strongest indicator" that the party was shifting leftward. In fact, the document called for an increase to the retirement age and participation in imperialist wars (see: "New Zealand pseudo-lefts promote new Labour leader").

The attempt to drum up support for Cunliffe failed to convince workers and youth. Labour received less than 25 percent of the vote, its worst result in 92 years. Mana, meanwhile, has lurched further to the right, recently calling for the reintroduction of the death penalty for Chinese drug smugglers.

The Socialist Equality Group (NZ) opposes all the efforts to subordinate the working class to Labour and its allies. Labour is not a "lesser evil" to National. If it leads the next government it will attack immigrants, deepen the assault on workers' living standards and ramp up the preparations for war.

The authors also recommend:

UK Labour leader Corbyn appoints opponents to cabinet as Blairite right wing continue to plot
[6 July 2017]

Mana Party leader calls for Chinese drug smugglers to be "executed"
[30 June 2011]

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