

# Green Party adopts fake “left” posture in New Zealand elections

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New Zealand’s establishment political parties have recently begun releasing their policy statements ahead of the September 23 election.

The campaign already features the same appeals to nationalism, economic protectionism and right-wing populism that animated the US presidential campaign of Donald Trump and “Brexit” campaign in the UK. The New Zealand ruling elite is moving rapidly to the right, preparing to unleash fresh attacks on living standards and democratic rights.

The working class is increasingly alienated from the entire political establishment. The last election saw about a million people refuse to vote, in a country of just 4.5 million. A survey 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.”

The opposition Labour Party is in terminal crisis. It has been polling around 26 percent for years and has had four different leaders since 2008. The latest preferred prime minister poll has Labour leader Andrew Little in fourth place, behind current Prime Minister Bill English, NZ First’s Winston Peters and Labour’s deputy leader Jacinda Ardern. Labour appears to be heading for a fourth landslide loss but it might still be able to form a government in a three-way coalition with NZ First and the Greens.

Labour has no significant differences with the National Party government. It has accepted austerity measures imposed following the 2008 crash, including cuts to public services, an increase in the Goods and Services Tax and the partial privatisation of power companies. Labour has criticised the government from the right, calling for a reduction in immigrant numbers by almost half and an increase in police numbers. It has

joined the right-wing NZ First in scapegoating Asian immigrants for homelessness and unemployment.

As in the 2014 election, the Green Party is campaigning in a close alliance with Labour and NZ First. However, with the working class shifting to the left, the Greens are attempting to distance themselves, verbally at least, from their more blatantly right-wing allies.

With NZ First edging ahead of the Greens in some polls, Green Party co-leader Metiria Turei declared in a TV 3 interview that NZ First was “on a roll” due to its “racist” immigration policies. The Greens previously promoted cuts to immigration but recently abandoned a policy to cap annual migrant numbers at one percent of the population.

NZ First has solidarised itself with Trump in the US and has repeatedly launched xenophobic attacks on Muslims, Chinese, Indians and Pacific Islanders. These attacks are combined with appeals for economic protectionism and increased support for the military.

NZ First leader Winston Peters dismissed the Greens’ accusation as “spurious” and threatened to sideline the party in post-election negotiations. Underscoring the Greens’ hypocrisy, Turei insisted she still regarded NZ First as a potential coalition partner, telling Radio NZ on July 10 that the Greens wanted “to moderate their worst excesses.” She has previously boasted about her good relationship with Peters and congratulated him on winning the 2015 by-election in Northland.

Several pro-Labour commentators initially criticised the Greens for threatening the viability of a Labour-Greens-NZ First government. Martyn Bradbury, editor of the trade union-funded *Daily Blog*, which supports NZ First’s attacks on immigrants, declared the Greens had “effectively handed the country back to the Nats [National] for another three years.”

Within days, however, the same commentators had turned 180 degrees, extolling the Greens for their “radicalism” and “courage.” The reversal was occasioned by the release of the Greens’ social policy, entitled “Mending the Safety Net,” which promised to increase welfare benefits by 20 percent. Writing in the *Guardian*, Turei claimed the policy “rolls back many of the benefit cuts and sanctions” imposed by successive governments.

Posturing as the voice of welfare beneficiaries, Turei also revealed that two decades ago, as a young sole parent, she had lied about the number of people in her household in order to receive a benefit. Like many others, she said, “I lied to survive.” The admission prompted the pseudo-left International Socialist Organisation (ISO) to call on students to “Stand with Metiria.” On Facebook, the ISO heaped praise on the Greens, saying Turei was “facing a barrage of bile for speaking truth to the reality of poverty in this country.”

The Greens’ stance is, in fact, utterly hypocritical. The party acted as a vital prop to the 1999-2008 Helen Clark-led government, which refused to increase benefits after they had been slashed by 17-25 percent by the previous National Party government.

Like their international counterparts, the Greens are an overtly pro-capitalist party representing “environmental” businesses, and oriented towards affluent sections of the upper middle class. James Shaw, who entered parliament in 2014, was elected co-leader just months later largely on the basis of his business credentials as a former consultant with PricewaterhouseCoopers and the HSBC bank.

In March the Greens formally agreed with Labour on a set of Budget Responsibility Rules, aimed at reassuring big business that in office they would deepen austerity measures against the working class. These rules, which expose the empty character of election-season promises of the Greens, include: delivering an operating surplus, reducing debt and maintaining core Crown expenditure at under 30 percent of GDP, roughly the same level as every government since the 1990s.

Even if they were implemented, the Greens’ proposals would leave welfare benefits, in real dollar terms, below what they were prior to National’s infamous 1991 “Mother of all Budgets,” which drove thousands of recipients into poverty. This is of a piece

with the Greens’ other very limited pledges, including an increase to the minimum wage of just \$2 an hour.

As in previous elections, the big unmentionable is the ever-increasing danger of war—although there is a steady stream of war propaganda surrounding the centenary of World War I, which the Greens have not objected to.

The nationalist and anti-immigrant outbursts by the Greens and its allies—NZ First, Labour, and the Mana Party—are feeding into the country’s incorporation into the US drive to war against China. The opposition parties agree with closer military and intelligence ties with the US.

Last year, after the government announced \$20 billion in military spending to increase interoperability with the US and other allies, Shaw said the Greens “recognise that defence spending is expensive and a lot of our equipment is outdated and we want to make sure our people have the best equipment they can and that they are as safe as possible.”

The Greens’ election feint to the “left” has a definite political purpose. It reflects the need of the ruling elite to establish new mechanisms to contain the growing opposition among workers and youth to austerity, attacks on democratic rights and the build-up to war.

Currently, there is no figure like Jeremy Corbyn in the UK or Bernie Sanders in the US, falsely proclaiming “socialism” to channel deepening opposition sentiment to the social crisis back into the parliamentary set-up. The Greens are seeking to position themselves, with the help of the middle class pseudo-left groups and the trade unions, to fill the void.



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