

New Zealand Green Party co-leader resigns

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New Zealand Green Party co-leader Metiria Turei resigned on Wednesday amid a vicious right-wing media campaign over allegations of welfare and voter fraud more than 20 years ago. Turei blamed “unbearable” pressure on her family for her resignation.

Coming a week after Labour Party leader Andrew Little stepped aside to be replaced by his deputy, Jacinda Ardern, the resignation underlines the crisis wracking the political establishment. Heading into the September 23 election, all the parties are deeply unpopular, with no solution to the social disaster engulfing wide sections of the population or the looming threat of war.

At the Green Party AGM last month, Turei revealed that as a young single mother she had misreported the number of people in her household in order to receive a higher benefit to support her daughter. Like many others, she said, “I lied to survive.”

Her announcement accompanied the release of the Greens’ welfare policy, entitled “Mending the Safety Net,” which promised to increase benefits by 20 percent. Turei’s posturing was designed to establish her as the voice of beneficiaries and appeal to the growing numbers of workers and unemployed people who are sinking deeper into poverty.

The social media hashtag *#Iammetiria* immediately trended, with single mothers and beneficiaries describing the desperate means they used to survive on welfare. Endorsements came from the trade union-funded *Daily Blog*, extolling Turei’s “radicalism” and “courage.” Noting she was “facing a barrage of bile for speaking truth to the reality of poverty in this country,” the pseudo-left International Socialist Organisation (ISO) praised the Greens and called on students to “Stand with Metiria.”

When the Greens’ support in the polls rose by three points to 15 percent, there was a swift response from

the media and political establishment. On July 26, TV3 political reporter Patrick Gower denounced Turei, saying she was “trying to exploit the New Zealand public for political gain.” Gower declared: “It is all a tactic—the party wants to turn her into Aotearoa’s [New Zealand’s] Bernie Sanders or Jeremy Corbyn.”

Turei’s critics branded her a “criminal” and unfit for public office. The Labour Party, with which the Greens have a formal electoral agreement, quickly moved to distance itself. Ardern, a self-described “progressive,” said Turei would not be offered a cabinet seat in any Labour-Green coalition government.

Ardern’s action was a signal to the ruling elite of her own reliability. Whatever Labour’s paltry election promises, it remains committed to imposing the deepening austerity measures required by big business.

Ardern was rewarded with intensive favourable media coverage. In a week she jumped from 17.6 to 26.3 percent in the media’s “preferred prime minister” stakes. This made her level-pegging with the incumbent prime minister, the National Party’s Bill English. Labour’s figures surged from 23 to 33 percent. Such polls are structured and presented for political purposes.

On August 3, TV3 published further allegations about Turei’s “living situation.” Electoral roll information apparently showed Turei listed at the same address as her estranged partner in 1993 and 1994. Turei said she was enrolled to vote at the address because a friend was running as a candidate and she wished to vote for her friend, despite living in another electorate.

It may be illegal to vote in an electorate outside one’s place of residence, but is not an uncommon practice, particularly among young people and students. Police have confirmed they do not pursue such cases.

Following Turei’s admissions, two Green MPs, Kennedy Graham and David Clendon, announced on Monday they would resign at the election, declaring they would no longer campaign or work under her.

Turei and fellow party co-leader James Shaw said the remaining 12 members of caucus, and the wider party membership, wanted her to remain in her post.

Then came swirling rumours that further questions regarding Turei's private life would be tabled in parliament, and a precipitous drop in the Greens' media polling from 15 percent to 8.3 percent, below the right-wing populist NZ First Party on 9.2. Turei announced she would quit parliament after the election, ending her political career.

The assault on Turei is a sharp warning that the capitalist establishment will brook no wavering, by any government, over the ongoing assault on working class living standards. There is real nervousness in ruling circles that alienation and opposition to deepening homelessness, youth suicide rates, the soaring cost of living and a severely underfunded health system will find a political voice.

The Greens' posturing over the poor is a complete fraud. The Greens have formally agreed with Labour on Budget Responsibility Rules, aimed at reassuring big business that in office they would intensify austerity measures. Even if the Greens' welfare proposals were implemented, they would leave benefits, in real terms, below what they were before National's infamous 1991 "Mother of all Budgets," which drove thousands of recipients into poverty.

The Greens' other pledges include a minimum wage increase of just \$2 an hour.

Like their international counterparts, the Greens are a capitalist party representing "environmental" businesses. Turei herself has been instrumental in the party's turn toward affluent sections of the upper middle class. She entered parliament in 2002, having worked as a commercial lawyer, and was elected Greens co-leader in 2009 by defeating the so-called "left" candidate Sue Bradford, a former Maoist, who soon quit the party.

Since then the Greens, above all, have established themselves at the forefront of the build-up to war. Repeated nationalist and anti-immigrant outbursts by the Greens and their allies—NZ First, Labour and the Mana Party—have fed into the country's incorporation into the US drive to war against China. Last year, the Greens supported a \$20 billion increase in military spending to upgrade the armed forces' interoperability with the US.

Despite the role played by Ardern in sealing Turei's fate, the pseudo-left groups continue to promote illusions in a Labour-Green government. The ISO criticised Ardern for her attack on Turei, but on August 1 declared: "Labour's popularity with the electorate matters." The ISO lived "in hope" that Labour "might learn some obvious lessons" from Little's failure to lift the party's stocks.

Socialist Aotearoa similarly claimed Ardern's elevation to the leadership as "definitely an opportunity for Labour to step away from its current conservative incrementalism." It praised Turei for her "boldness" in championing "socially progressive policies," falsely depicting the Greens' welfare policy as the first substantive attempt "to roll back the social warfare attacks of the 1990s."

In fact, the bitter affair demonstrates the utter subservience of all the establishment parties, including Labor and the Greens, to the demands of big business. Whichever combination of parties takes office after the election, the assault on jobs and living standards will continue unabated.



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