

New Zealand: Workers and youth speak on election, social crisis and war

Our correspondents
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Members of the Socialist Equality Group (SEG) in New Zealand spoke to workers, pensioners and students in Wellington following Saturday's inconclusive election result.

The incumbent National Party and the main opposition Labour Party are both unable to form a government and are competing with each other to reach a coalition agreement with the anti-Chinese and anti-immigrant New Zealand First Party. No deal may be announced until after October 7, when the remaining 15 percent of votes from late enrolments and overseas voters are counted.

The SEG is holding a public meeting on Sunday in Lower Hutt to discuss the election outcome and the urgent need for a socialist movement of the working class against war and austerity, in opposition to all the established parties.

Many people expressed deep concern about the social crisis in New Zealand, as well as US President Donald Trump's threats of nuclear war against North Korea.

Like many young people, **Amy**, who works at a motorcycle shop, had not voted for anyone. She said she had briefly considered voting for either Labour or the recently-formed Opportunities Party. "Generally I agree with what Labour are trying to do, but they're always very vague about it," she said. "There's no concrete plan in place as to how they're going to end child poverty in New Zealand, there's just no way they're going to do it."

Amy was concerned that Labour is courting NZ First and disagreed with immigrants being scapegoated for the housing crisis. "The problem is the housing bubble," she said. "You walk through the Hutt Valley and you see so many foreclosed houses and condemned houses, and they're being built into these fancy upscale apartments that nobody who used to live there is going

to be able to afford.

"I lived in Wainuiomata [one of the poorest suburbs on the outskirts of Wellington] for six-and-a-half years and people are desperate over there. Why isn't anything being done for them?

"Mental health statistics are in the bin. I have friends who attempted and committed suicide. There's so little help. It took one of my friends a year and a half to find the right medication."

New Zealand has the highest teen suicide rate in the OECD, twice as high as the US.

Asked about the danger of war, Amy said: "At the moment, there's a whole lot of words being thrown around, but words can very quickly turn into actions. Something's going to happen. Trump's anger and bravado is only serving to piss off the people you really shouldn't piss off, so I'm worried." She said New Zealand politicians were "side-stepping" the issue "and avoiding questions as politicians do so well."

Irene, a biomedicine student at Victoria University of Wellington, said she voted for Labour because of its promises to address inequality and environmental degradation. "I come from a small town, Riverton, in Southland," she said. "I knew that regardless of the outcome, my family's financial status would be fine, but I was more thinking about the lower class and poverty, schooling, education, public health—having that a lot more accessible.

"I've seen kids being dropped off at school in the morning at 7:30 so they can get a free breakfast. There's now families who have got two parents working full-time and they're still in poverty. Obviously there wouldn't be huge changes from a change in government, but I think taking the focus away from the top 10 percent is really important."

Irene, who works part-time, spoke about the soaring

cost of housing: “When my brother was flatting for uni about four or five years ago I think his rent was about \$110 and now I’m looking at flats for at least \$180. Why has buying a house become so hard? And they’re selling off state houses.”

Secondary school student **Molly**, 17, said she wanted to vote against the government but was not old enough. “One of my biggest issues with National right now is that they ignore the massive teen suicide rates,” she said. “They’re ridiculously high for a developed country. And they’re doing almost nothing for the homeless.”

Molly added, however, that “all the other parties made a lot of promises, but who knows how much they’re actually going to do if they get in.”

A Hutt Valley high school student, **Connor**, declared: “I would never vote, I see no point in it. Everything they say just never happens. I completely ignored the election. All I see is signs being put up and no difference.”

Connor was concerned about social inequality, especially in the impoverished far north of the country, where his father works. “There is nothing going on there, no one my age is working. The drugs situation is ridiculous, you can get them anywhere, especially in the far north. I’ve seen it myself.”

Glenn, a pensioner in Lower Hutt, said she voted for Labour, hoping that recently-installed leader Jacinda Ardern would make a difference. She said that “the National Party seems to have kept finances on an even keel, but their insight and sympathy into social issues is sadly lacking.”

Glenn said the biggest issue was homelessness, which was worse than she had ever seen. “I know people in Wellington who are searching for accommodation and can’t find it. One is a part-time worker, two of them had head injuries through motor accidents so they’re disabled. There are very few properties and some are huge ripoffs for shoebox apartments. I think the election reflects a whole lot of people who are very uncomfortable about that. For the National Party to say there is no crisis, I disapprove of that.”

Glenn said she had noticed during the election campaign that “New Zealand’s alliance with the US was quietly covered over. The two leaders were asked about their attitudes to North Korea and their attitude to Donald Trump and they both shied away from making

direct comments.”

National Party leader Bill English has stated that his government would “consider” joining a US war and Labour’s Ardern has not ruled out doing so.

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