

Socialist Equality Group holds webinar on the New Zealand election

Our reporter
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The Socialist Equality Group (SEG), the New Zealand supporters of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), held a public webinar last Saturday to discuss the forthcoming October 17 election. It was attended by an international audience including SEG supporters and readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* from New Zealand, Australia and Canada.

SEG member Matthew Carrington, who chaired the meeting, noted that the election is being held amid an unprecedented breakdown of capitalism, accelerated by the coronavirus pandemic, which has killed more than a million people worldwide. Despite the international media's glorification of New Zealand under Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's government, working class living standards are collapsing, while the rich have been bailed out with tens of billions of dollars.

The speakers noted that the webinar took place one day after the relaunch of the WSWWS, through which the ICFI is seeking to raise the political consciousness of large numbers of workers and young people who are increasingly attracted to socialism.

The first speaker, SEG member John Braddock, outlined the ICFI's analysis of the pandemic as a "trigger event" in world history, which has exacerbated the social crisis throughout the world, fuelling the class struggle as well as the ruling elites' preparations for war and dictatorship.

The crisis is centred in the United States, where President Donald Trump has threatened to stage a coup if he loses the November election. "However these developments ultimately play out," Braddock explained, "the crisis of democracy in Washington will transfer to the international stage. What is happening in the US is the sharpest expression of what is happening everywhere—including New Zealand."

Contrary to the media's portrayal of New Zealand as a haven of peace and tranquillity, it is a US ally and the Ardern has deepened its integration into the build-up for war against China. Braddock pointed out that Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's government "is itself a product of US intervention following the 2017 election."

During the protracted coalition talks, US ambassador Scott Brown publicly criticised the incumbent National Party for failing to fully support Trump's threats to "destroy" North Korea. Following this, the nationalist, anti-immigrant NZ First Party announced it was forming a coalition with the Labour Party instead of National, which received more votes. Labour and NZ First shared the same anti-immigrant and anti-Chinese political orientation, whereas the National Party represented factions of big business who were far more nervous about alienating New Zealand's largest trading partner, China.

Carolyn Kennett from the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) and the Committee for Public Education, addressed the webinar about the growing struggles of workers internationally, including school and university staff.

Kennett explained that governments, whose only concern was the profits of big business, were recklessly reopening schools before it was safe to do so in order for parents to be forced back into their workplaces. In the US and other countries, she said, teachers "are developing not just their class lessons but their will and testaments in preparation for their possible death with COVID-19."

She pointed to some of the struggles taking place in response to this homicidal policy, including the occupation of 700 schools by high school students in Greece, who are demanding safety precautions before

schools reopen.

Kennett explained that the trade union bureaucracy in Australian universities was collaborating fully with mass redundancies and wage cuts. The same process is underway in Britain, New Zealand and internationally.

The ICFI, she said, is “calling for the formation of rank and file committees independent of the unions to fight for a unified national struggle against the attacks on jobs, pay and conditions, and to ensure the health, safety and welfare of workers.

“Such committees have already been formed in cities in the United States, in Germany and the UK and in Australia. Many have been established by educators deeply concerned about the reopening of schools, but there are also a number of committees based in factories and other industries, such as the auto industry in the US and among bus drivers in London.”

In the final speech the Socialist Equality Group’s Tom Peters reviewed the right-wing record of the Ardern government and exposed its lies about having alleviated poverty and inequality. In the June quarter median incomes were 7.6 percent lower than the previous year. Nearly 80,000 people have lost their jobs since March. One in four children lives in poverty and demand at food banks has soared.

The speaker described the vicious anti-immigrant measures undertaken in response to the pandemic and the social crisis, including threats of deportation and barring migrant workers from accessing welfare. Peters pointed out that one of the world’s most brutal right-wing terrorist attacks, last year’s mass shooting in Christchurch, was not being discussed in the election campaign. This was because the shooter Brenton Tarrant’s fascist ideology had been fuelled by decades of war in Iraq and Afghanistan and the demonisation of Muslims and immigrants in which every major party in Australia and New Zealand is complicit.

Peters concluded: “This election will resolve none of the pressing issues facing working people. We are in a revolutionary period of history. The alternatives are: either the intensification of the present crisis—world war, dictatorship, uncontrolled pandemics and catastrophic climate change—or the revolutionary fight to abolish capitalism and build international socialism. There is no reformist alternative.”

He urged those in attendance to make the decision to join the fight to build the SEG into the New Zealand

section of the world Trotskyist movement.

The meeting received a warm response from listeners. One attendee, an immigrant who is one of thousands waiting to learn if they will be allowed to stay in New Zealand, wrote in the Facebook forum Migrants NZ praising the webinar. She encouraged people to read the WSWS including Tom Peters’ articles “relating to immigrants and our hardships... It’s people like him who is our voice when no one want to hear our pleas.”

The speeches were followed by several questions, including on the militarisation of the police under Ardern, the struggle of workers against job cuts, and the strategy needed to prevent a world war.

In response to a question about whether the SEG would consider allying with any existing party in the struggle for socialism, Braddock replied: “The answer is flatly no.” Every established party accepted that the working class would have to pay through austerity measures, he said. This included the pseudo-left organisations such as the International Socialist Organisation, Socialist Aotearoa and others which had spent years promoting the Labour Party and the Greens.

Cheryl Crisp, national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia), spoke at the conclusion of the discussion. She stressed the need for New Zealand workers to “turn towards an international party,” and to reject the Labour Party and the unions’ nationalist “fantasy” that the country had escaped the crisis—a conception also being promoted in Australia. New Zealand workers, she said, had “far more in common” with workers in other countries than with New Zealand capitalists and their political parties. On that basis she called on workers to join the SEG and the ICFI.



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