

New Zealand Green Party joins right-wing Labour government

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New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern yesterday announced the ministerial positions in her government, more than a fortnight after the Labour Party was returned to office in the national election with 49.1 percent of the votes.

The delay in announcing the government is extraordinary, given that Labour has at least 64 of the 120 seats in parliament. Despite this majority allowing it to govern alone, Labour spent two weeks negotiating a “cooperation agreement” with the Green Party, which gained 7.6 percent of the votes, giving it 10 seats in parliament.

The main opposition National Party suffered its second-worst defeat ever, with many of its wealthy and upper middle class supporters switching their votes to Labour. National has been systematically destabilised for years because its advocacy of stronger business links with China is opposed by New Zealand’s ally, the United States.

The Greens were part of the 2017-2020 Labour-led coalition government, which also included the right-wing nationalist and anti-Chinese NZ First Party. NZ First did not get enough votes to re-enter parliament.

Ardern told the media that the deal “commits the Greens to supporting the government in confidence and supply votes and supporting the government on procedural motions. This has the effect of strengthening the government’s stability and will ensure there is always a strong majority in parliament on the most important votes. As we accelerate our recovery from COVID, strong, stable government is essential to New Zealand.”

As these comments indicate, the Labour-Greens agreement points to considerable nervousness in the ruling establishment about political instability due to the economic and social crisis triggered by the pandemic. In country after country, workers are striking and protesting against unsafe working conditions, historic attacks on jobs

and living standards, police brutality and other anti-democratic measures.

The Ardern government’s pro-business policies will shatter illusions in Labour and bring about a resurgence of working class struggle. Although New Zealand has not suffered mass deaths from COVID-19, the government seized on the pandemic as a pretext to give tens of billions of dollars to the corporate and financial elite, while major companies sacked tens of thousands of workers.

Billions of dollars are also being given to the military to deepen its integration into US plans for war against Russia, China, and other countries—a spending program fully supported by the Greens.

The Greens’ role is to provide a “progressive” veneer for a pro-business and pro-war government. Underscoring Labour’s determination to bring the Greens into the government, Ardern released the text of the cooperation agreement publicly on Saturday before Green Party delegates had decided whether to accept it. Shortly afterwards, 114 out of 136 delegates voted in favour of the deal and co-leader Marama Davidson declared the party was “thrilled” to be in government.

The new agreement, like the last one, is not a formal coalition, but the difference is largely semantic. The Greens’ co-leaders have been given ministerial positions outside of cabinet: James Shaw will continue as minister of climate change and has an additional role as associate minister for the environment; Davidson picks up the new position of minister for the prevention of family and sexual violence and will also be the associate housing minister, with particular responsibility for homelessness.

The agreement identifies areas of cooperation including environmental issues and “improving child wellbeing and marginalised communities through action on homelessness, warmer homes, and child and youth mental health.” Davidson will join a ministerial group to discuss a “Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy.” Ardern retains

for herself the role of “Minister for Child Poverty Reduction.”

There are no actual policies to address the social crisis, which has dramatically worsened over the past three years. Ardern rejected Green Party proposals for a small wealth tax to fund increased welfare benefits. Median incomes have plummeted by at least 7.6 percent this year alone, with almost 12 percent of working age people now on welfare. Nearly one in four children still live in poverty and the situation is getting worse, despite Ardern’s false claims during the election campaign.

Homelessness, for which the Greens are being given responsibility, is deeply entrenched. House prices soared by 27 percent in the last three years, median rents have gone up 12.5 percent and the waiting list for public housing has more than trebled to over 20,000 families. The government’s flagship “KiwiBuild” policy in 2017, which promised to create 100,000 “affordable” houses was dumped by Ardern in 2019 with fewer than 500, or .5 percent of the promised total, actually constructed.

The utterly bogus nature of the much vaunted policy was exposed by the fact that all the 500 houses were sold at market rates, placing them out of reach for those who needed them most.

Some Green Party supporters in liberal and pseudo-left circles have expressed concern about the cooperation deal. Former Green MP Sue Bradford said the party would be “an ineffectual lapdog of Labour.” Former Green leader Russel Norman, who heads Greenpeace NZ, said the party would be “effectively gagged, so they can’t set the agenda on many issues but particularly core issues like climate change.” The Greens-backed “zero carbon” legislation, touted as its major achievement in the last three years, does nothing to enforce meaningful emissions reductions.

The trade union funded *Daily Blog*—which fraudulently promoted Labour and the Greens as “left wing” during the election—said the “cooperation agreement” would make the Greens “look complicit in Labour’s tepid progress.” These commentators, speaking for layers of the upper middle class, are concerned that the Greens will no longer be able to pose as a “left” alternative, in order to channel rising anger over social inequality and climate change back into support for the capitalist parliamentary system.

Alongside the deal with the Greens, Ardern’s other ministerial appointments, several of which came as a surprise, show an effort to cloak her government’s reactionary agenda by using the politics of racial and

gender identity. The media has hailed the “incredible diversity” of her 20-member cabinet, which includes eight women and five Maori ministers.

Poto Williams, who previously had the minor role of community and voluntary sector minister, has replaced Stuart Nash as police minister. Ardern responded to protests in New Zealand following the murder of George Floyd in the US by falsely claiming that police brutality, which is directed against working class people, can be addressed by appointing Maori to leading positions.

Maori politicians Nanaia Mahuta and Peeni Henare are the new foreign affairs and defence ministers, replacing NZ First leader Winston Peters and co-leader Ron Mark. The media is glorifying Mahuta as the country’s first female foreign minister. Both will continue to strengthen New Zealand’s alliance with the US, and NZ imperialism’s domination over Pacific countries like Tonga and Samoa.

The appointment of Henare is likely bound up with efforts to recruit Maori youth into the military. Henare boasted that his grandfather Sir James Henare was a commander of the Maori Battalion in World War II, which was glorified with a new museum opened earlier this year.

The corporate media is hailing finance minister Grant Robertson’s promotion to deputy prime minister, as first openly gay person to get the job. In fact, his appointment sends a clear signal of the government’s right-wing agenda. Robertson led the economic response to the pandemic, including the multi-billion dollar subsidies, tax concessions and handouts to business. He played a key role during the election campaign, appearing in social media advertisements appealing for support from the conservative National Party constituency by presenting Labour as the more stable capitalist party.



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