

New Zealand opposition MPs applaud criminalisation of abortion in the US

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The overturn of the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision has sparked mass protests across the United States and outrage throughout the world. As the WSWS stated: “For the first time in American history, the Supreme Court eliminated a fundamental constitutional right broadly recognized and supported by the overwhelming majority of the country’s population.”

A group of unelected, extreme right-wing Christian judges suddenly made abortion illegal for hundreds of millions of people. The ruling sets a precedent for further attacks on basic rights and freedoms, including access to contraception and protections for same-sex relationships.

The attack on these rights, while it is sharpest in the US, is by no means a purely American phenomenon. Internationally, the ruling class is promoting far-right forces in order to divide and suppress working people, who are beginning to fight back against the never-ending attacks on their living standards, the expanding imperialist war, and homicidal “let it rip” pandemic policies.

The US Supreme Court ruling threw New Zealand’s conservative National Party, the main parliamentary opposition, into something of a crisis. It lifted the lid on the anti-abortion views espoused by a majority of its members of parliament, including leader Christopher Luxon.

Soon after the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*, National MP Simon O’Connor posted on Facebook: “Today is a good day,” in large lettering surrounded by love hearts. Among those who “liked” the message were fellow party member Simeon Brown and far-right activist Chantelle Baker.

Destiny Church leader Brian Tamaki, notorious for anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim and anti-LGBT demagogic, applauded O’Connor’s stance and invited

him to join the church.

Several hours later, after Luxon spoke to O’Connor, the post was removed. The party went into damage control, with Luxon issuing a statement saying the post “was taken down because it was causing distress and does not represent the position of the National Party.” O’Connor later told the media he had deleted it because the comments were “getting worse and worse and it was very clear to me that people were distressed.”

Thousands of furious responses to O’Connor appeared on social media, including calls for his resignation. A typical comment in the r/newzealand Reddit forum, which received hundreds of upvotes, stated: “US politics and conservative religious views can f— right off. How can you honestly look at how they are treating women’s rights and think ‘yeah that’s pretty good ae.’”

Others wrote that notwithstanding Luxon’s assurances, the National Party cannot be trusted to keep abortion legal. Luxon, who is a fundamentalist Christian, was asked by Newshub last December whether he thought abortion was “tantamount to murder.” He replied in the affirmative: “That’s what a pro-life position is.”

Luxon could become the next prime minister if the National Party wins the 2023 election. A Roy Morgan poll published on June 7 found support for National at 40 percent, compared with just 31.5 percent for the ruling Labour Party. While this reflects the lack of popular support for both these parties of big business, National would be able to govern if it formed a coalition with the far-right ACT Party.

Abortion was only fully legalised in New Zealand in 2020. Prior to that, women had to gain approval for the procedure by declaring that the pregnancy posed a

danger to their mental or physical health, or on other grounds such as incest or foetal abnormality.

The 2020 Abortion Legalisation Bill was opposed by 51 out of 120 members of parliament (42.5 percent), including 35 of the National Party's 55 MPs at the time.

While the Labour Party-led government has criticised Luxon's anti-abortion views, in 2020 Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern allowed a conscience vote on the issue. Nine Labour MPs voted against legalising abortion, including Nanaia Mahuta, now the foreign affairs minister. Mahuta has tried to cover her tracks by hypocritically tweeting that the overturn of *Roe v. Wade* is "draconian and does not support the right of women to choose."

Seven members of the right-wing nationalist NZ First Party, which played a major role in the Labour-led coalition government at the time, also voted against the law change.

In contrast to parliament, popular sentiment is overwhelmingly in favour of abortion rights. The 2021 Gender Attitudes Survey, conducted by Research NZ, found that 74 percent agreed that "a woman should have the right to choose whether or not she has an abortion." This had increased from 66 percent in the 2016 survey, demonstrating that most people's views are becoming more progressive. This correlates with declining religious beliefs: in the 2018 Census, nearly half the population, 48.2 percent, recorded no religion, up from 41.9 percent in 2013.

The entire political establishment, however, is lurching to the right. Labour's support has plummeted from over 50 percent in the 2020 election, to just over 30 percent in recent polls, as its policies have produced a social and healthcare crisis for the working class.

The Labour-led government, which includes the Green Party, has used the pandemic to engineer an historic transfer of wealth to the rich, through bailouts, tax breaks and quantitative easing. Living costs are soaring as wages remain stagnant, leading to a reported 30 percent increase in demand for food banks. A speculative housing bubble has produced a windfall for investors and the banks, while pushing up rents.

Meanwhile, the government has implemented the demands of big business and the far-right, including Destiny Church and the New Conservatives, for the removal of vaccine mandates, mask mandates in

schools, and other public health measures. As a result, COVID-19 is out of control, killing more than 10 people each day and placing extreme pressure on the underfunded public health system.

The Ardern government is spending millions to integrate New Zealand into the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, and to prepare for war against China. It has sent NZ troops to Europe to train Ukrainian forces, and is helping to arm the country's military, in which far-right extremists play a major role.

A series of recent incidents show that right-wing extremists have been emboldened. In February a Russian church in Auckland and a Russian-owned shop in Christchurch were vandalised, and a suspected arson damaged the Contemporary China Research Centre at Victoria University of Wellington. This month, an LGBT community centre in Tauranga was destroyed by arson, and a gay church in Greymouth was defaced with homophobic and antisemitic graffiti.

The policies of war abroad, and record levels of social inequality and mass infection at home, are not compatible with democratic rights, in New Zealand any more than in the United States. The US Supreme Court ruling must serve as a warning to workers in every country that the defence of basic rights, including the right to abortion, requires a fight by the working class for the socialist reorganisation of society.



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