

Oppose all capitalist parties in the New Zealand election! Fight against war and for world socialism! Build the Socialist Equality Group!

Socialist Equality Group (New Zealand)

14 September 2023

The New Zealand election on October 14 is being held amid an unprecedented global crisis. The capitalist system has entered a period of breakdown, triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, as profound as that which erupted in the First World War and led to the Second World War.

US imperialism, driven by its economic decline, seeks to use its military might to halt its historic decline and establish its global dominance. The escalating US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and far-advanced preparations for war against China are the opening stages of a Third World War. Unless it is stopped by the intervention of the working class, the world faces a devastating nuclear war that would surpass the barbarism of the two world wars of the 20th century.

Far from being isolated from these developments, New Zealand is integrated into the US war preparations. The election will resolve nothing. The life-and-death problems confronting working people—war, the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and mass impoverishment—cannot even begin to be tackled outside of the struggle for world socialism.

The Socialist Equality Group (SEG), the New Zealand supporters of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), is not in a position to stand candidates in this election. We are intervening, however, to expose the entire political establishment's right-wing agenda and fight to establish a revolutionary socialist and internationalist party. This is the urgent task facing the working class in NZ and every country.

The SEG opposes all the parliamentary parties: the incumbent Labour Party, its coalition partner, the Greens, the racist Te P?ti M?ori (M?ori Party), the opposition National Party, its far-right ally, the ACT Party, and the right-wing nationalist New Zealand First. Whichever parties form the next government will intensify the assault on workers' living standards and divert ever greater resources into the preparations for war.

The Labour-Green government is deeply unpopular after carrying out historic attacks on the working class over the past six years. After getting 50 percent of the votes in the 2020 election, Labour has plummeted to around 26 percent in recent polls and is wracked by inner turmoil. Following Jacinda Ardern's shock resignation as prime minister in January, five more ministers resigned or were removed from their roles.

There is no mass support for the opposition conservative National Party, which is only polling around 35 percent. It would need support from ACT, and possibly NZ First, to form a coalition government, which will be wracked by crisis from the outset.

Many workers and young people are disgusted and alienated from the entire political setup. Rejection of these capitalist parties is not enough; a revolutionary alternative must be built.

The SEG calls on workers to draw the necessary political lessons from their bitter experience with the Labour government. For nearly six years,

the media and "left" politicians around the world glorified Jacinda Ardern as the "kind" face of capitalism, whose "transformational" government was addressing homelessness, inequality and child poverty. This was all a fraud.

Ardern presided over historic levels of social inequality, a stronger alliance with US imperialism, and the decision in late 2021, at the behest of big business, to dismantle all public health measures against the spread of COVID-19. Ardern will be remembered for adopting the homicidal policy of mass infection that has killed more than 3,300 people in New Zealand.

This record is an indictment not only of Ardern and Labour but of all its pseudo-left and liberal supporters, who claimed that the Ardern government would implement "progressive" or "reformist" policies. Capitalism cannot be reformed, and there is no national solution to the crisis facing the working class.

The SEG fights alongside the parties of the ICFI to unify the working class in every country against imperialist war, against every form of nationalism, and for the overthrow of the capitalist and nation-state system that leads to war.

This is not a perspective for the distant future. The same objective conditions that produce war are leading to revolutionary upheavals. In every country, the class struggle is intensifying. Mass strikes and anti-government protests have erupted in France and Sri Lanka, and there is a developing strike wave across North America. New Zealand, which has seen mass strikes by healthcare workers and teachers, is not isolated from this tendency.

Workers everywhere confront the same entrenched obstacles: the trade union bureaucracy and the social democratic and pseudo-left parties that seek to chain them to one or another section of the bourgeoisie. To break the political stranglehold of these pro-capitalist organisations, the working class must build its own party capable of providing the necessary revolutionary leadership.

We call on socialist-minded workers and young people in New Zealand to study the program of the SEG and the ICFI and to join our fight to build the Socialist Equality Party as the New Zealand section of the Trotskyist movement, the world party of socialist revolution.

New Zealand imperialism prepares for war

The most urgent issue facing the working class—the bloody war in Ukraine and preparations for war against China—is not being discussed by any party in the election. Behind the backs of the working class, the ruling class and its political parties are conspiring to drag the country into the US-led plans for world war.

Defence Minister Andrew Little made this clear when he stated last

month: “If, for example, conflict does break out in the South China Sea, where \$20 billion of our exports flows through every year, we have a stake in that, and we may be called on to play a role should conflict break out. We need to be equipped for that and prepared for it.”

In other words, the country must be ready to support the US in a war with nuclear-armed China more than 8,000 kilometres away from New Zealand. Labour and National have not explained how many lives they are prepared to sacrifice to defend New Zealand capitalism’s “stake” in the profits extracted from Asia.

The Labour-Green government has already sent more than a hundred soldiers to Britain, where they are training Ukrainian conscripts to serve as cannon fodder in the proxy war against Russia. This has been accompanied by relentless propaganda falsifying the causes of the war. Speaking in February on the anniversary of Russia’s invasion, Prime Minister Chris Hipkins declared that Ukraine was fighting to defend “democracy... territorial integrity, freedom, fundamental human rights, and an international rules-based system.”

This is a pack of lies. The Russian invasion was Putin’s reactionary, nationalist response to the provocative encirclement of Russia by NATO, which includes the 2014 US-sponsored coup in Ukraine that installed a viciously anti-Russian and fascistic government. The war has its roots in the Stalinist bureaucracy’s dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, which established rival capitalist states ruled by right-wing oligarchs in Russia, Ukraine and throughout Eastern Europe.

Having deliberately provoked the Russian invasion and poured tens of billions of dollars into the war, Washington is demanding that it continue, in President Biden’s words, for “as long as it takes” to defeat Russia—regardless of how many hundreds of thousands, or millions, of people must die. The aim is to reduce Russia to a semi-colonial status and to plunder its resources as the necessary preparation for war against China, which Washington regards as the chief threat to its global hegemony.

Contrary to the prevailing national mythology, New Zealand has never been a peaceful country isolated from global conflicts. It is a minor imperialist power with its own neo-colonial sphere in the South Pacific. In World War I, about one in ten New Zealanders, 100,000 people, were sent to fight, and more than 18,000 perished. Since the first Labour government sent troops into World War II, where 11,000 died, successive governments have worked to ensure that New Zealand capitalism benefited from the post-war US-dominated “rules-based order.”

New Zealand’s military and spy agencies are so deeply integrated into the US war machine that the country would automatically be involved in a war with China. As a member of the US-led Five Eyes intelligence network, New Zealand carries out surveillance on behalf of the US throughout Asia, the Pacific and elsewhere. The Waihopai spy base at the top of the South Island plays a major role in these criminal operations of imperialism.

An anti-war movement can only be built based on socialist principles and in opposition to Labour, the Green Party, Te P?ti M?ori (TPM) and their pseudo-left allies.

Workers should not be fooled by the claims of the Greens and TPM that they favour a “non-violent” or “neutral” foreign policy. Both parties defend New Zealand capitalism, which rests on military force and imperialist alliances.

Green Party co-leader James Shaw declared in parliament last December that despite his party’s stated “fundamental commitment to non-violence,” he accepted that “Ukraine’s response to Russia’s violence will itself involve some violence.” Like their counterparts in Germany and Australia, the Greens are pacifists in times of peace and militarists in times of imperialist war.

TPM announced a policy of “military neutrality” in February 2023. Its co-leader Rawiri Waititi declared, “We will no longer be a political

football in the wars of imperial powers” and called for withdrawal from the Five Eyes. This posturing will be discarded the moment TPM gets back into a position of power: the party was a coalition partner in the 2008–2017 National Party government, which joined the neo-colonial US wars against Iraq and Afghanistan.

The COVID-19 pandemic

Anyone who thinks governments will pull back from the brink of war to avoid a massive loss of life is deluding themselves. In their response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ruling classes have shown that they will not hesitate to sacrifice tens of millions of lives for profit.

At the Labour Party’s election campaign launch, Hipkins sought to paint New Zealand as an exception, declaring: “We led one of the most successful COVID-19 responses in the world, and there are thousands of people alive today who might not be if we hadn’t as a country come together as a team to achieve that.”

This flies in the face of reality. The fact is that thousands of people are dead who would still be alive had the Labour Party not scrapped its zero-COVID policy.

New Zealand, China, and Australia proved early in the pandemic the potential for COVID-19 to be eliminated. Fearful of a nascent movement in the working class demanding a lockdown, the Ardern government implemented one of the world’s most effective elimination policies in March 2020.

In late 2021, however, Labour abandoned the policy, caving into the demands of big business. The unions played a critical role in enforcing the reopening of schools and unsafe workplaces while the virus raged out of control.

The result is an ongoing public health disaster. Deaths from COVID-19 sky-rocketed from just 30 in October 2021 to more than 3,300 two years later. About 31,000 people have been hospitalised, including over 4,000 children, and tens of thousands suffer from debilitating Long COVID.

Working people must fight back. The capitalists have declared that the necessary public health measures to stop the virus are too expensive, but the working class cannot “live with” endless deaths and millions of long-term illnesses from COVID. A vast expansion of resources is needed to end the crisis of the public health and hospital system.

The ICFI—and the SEG in New Zealand—is the only political organisation fighting for a globally coordinated, scientific strategy to eliminate COVID-19. We call for the political mobilisation of the working class in opposition to the policies of mass infection imposed in every country. This fight must be undertaken on an international scale since COVID-19 cannot be eliminated in a single country while it is allowed to spread unchecked everywhere else.

Catastrophic climate change

The Labour-Green government’s pledges to address the climate emergency have likewise proven to be completely hollow. It has taken no action to improve resilience to flooding and other disasters or to reduce greenhouse gas emissions meaningfully.

No less than the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change threatens the lives and livelihoods of billions of people. Global temperatures reached new record highs this year, fuelling devastating wildfires in Greece, North America and Hawaii and historic flooding across much of New Zealand’s North Island in January and February.

Shaw, who has served as climate change minister for six years, insists that action can only be taken by “working with the private sector to reduce costs—and risks—for industry,” that is, with the consent and collaboration of big business.

This argument is totally bankrupt. It is capitalism that has produced the global climate crisis. Drastic and globally planned action is urgently needed to switch to carbon-neutral energy sources and cease using fossil fuels. But this is impossible while the political system is controlled by giant corporations that profit from polluting the planet.

These corporations must be expropriated and placed under public ownership and the democratic control of the working class. In New Zealand, tens of billions of dollars must be allocated to rehouse those displaced by flooding and to strengthen infrastructure to minimise the impact of future disasters. Resources must also be provided for impoverished Pacific countries to strengthen their resilience to hurricanes and floods and to accommodate migrants and refugees from areas that are becoming uninhabitable.

Austerity

The election will be followed by a stepped-up assault on public services, with Labour and National both pledging to cut billions of dollars in spending. Hipkins declared on August 8: “there is not an infinite supply of money and so we’re going to have to be realistic... this should not be a big spending election campaign because the current economic circumstances do not support that.”

In fact, there is plenty of money, but it is concentrated in the hands of the super-rich. In response to the pandemic, the Labour-Green government handed over tens of billions of dollars to the banks and big business. As a result, social inequality has reached obscene levels: the country’s 311 wealthiest families control \$85 billion in assets, and the banking sector made a record profit of \$7.18 billion last year, while the poorest half of the population either has no assets or are in debt.

Workers’ incomes are falling behind inflation, which has averaged around 7 percent for more than a year, while food prices have increased by 12 percent. In the past two years, rents have gone up 14 percent; more than 100,000 people are homeless or living in severely overcrowded or rundown homes or in motels converted into “emergency housing.” The waiting list for public housing has increased fivefold since 2017, reaching nearly 25,000.

As the Labour Party lurches further and further to the right, it is relying heavily on the Greens, Te P?ti M?ori and the trade union bureaucracy, which tell workers they can “pressure” a re-elected Labour government to implement progressive “reforms” such as a modest wealth tax and better social welfare.

These claims are just as fraudulent in 2023 as they were in 2017 and 2020. As part of the government, the Greens have supported Labour’s austerity measures and bailouts of big business. TPM represents a layer of indigenous capitalists and the upper middle class, which wants a bigger slice of the profits extracted from the working class. TPM was an integral part of the right-wing National Party government from 2008 to 2017 and supported its anti-working class austerity measures, including an increase in GST, mass redundancies and the erosion of public services.

The pseudo-left apologists for Labour

The fight to break the working class from Labour and capitalist politics requires a political struggle not just against the Greens and TPM but against various pseudo-left tendencies, the most prominent of which is the International Socialist Organisation (ISO). The ISO—along with groups like Organise Aotearoa and Socialist Aotearoa—represents layers of the upper middle class in and around the trade unions, universities and various NGOs, whose aim is to improve their own position within capitalist society.

Like the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), Socialist Alternative in Australia and similar groups internationally, the ISO has nothing in common with socialism. It seeks to block a socialist, working class movement to abolish capitalism by promoting illusions in Labour and its allies.

Events have discredited all the claims made by the ISO about the Ardern-Hipkins government. When Labour formed a coalition government with the right-wing nationalist NZ First in 2017, the ISO ecstatically declared that its proposed “reforms” could “bring real benefits to the lives of working people.” In 2020, the group urged voters to re-elect Labour, claiming it was on a “reformist path” under conditions where the

government handed billions to corporations and strengthened ties with US imperialism.

The so-called “reforms”—Labour’s 2017 promise to build 100,000 “affordable” houses and to end child poverty—have evaporated into thin air.

The reality of soaring social inequality and collapsing living conditions has forced the ISO to change tack, but its position remains essentially the same. On September 6, the ISO admitted that the Labour-Green government is “holding down pay below inflation and letting public services become run down.” Still, it insisted, “In this election, socialists are in a bind where they have no choice but to vote for the ‘left’ bloc: Labour, Green or Te P?ti M?ori. It is a negative vote to keep the right out, not an endorsement.”

What a sham! By any objective measure, the Ardern-Hipkins Labour government has been the most right wing since David Lange’s Labour government in the 1980s, which launched a pro-market onslaught, preparing public services for privatisation, cutting taxes for the rich and sacking thousands of public sector workers.

The ISO backs Labour not to “keep the right out” but because it agrees with Labour’s anti-working class and pro-war agenda. Like pseudo-left groups internationally, the ISO has embraced the US-NATO imperialist war against Russia in Ukraine. The group’s 2022 statement on the war glorified the Zelensky regime and covered up its collaboration with fascists. It argued in support of Ukraine joining NATO, which would vastly expand the theatre of the war and immediately heighten the danger of nuclear war.

Whenever healthcare workers, teachers and university staff have sought to fight back against Labour’s austerity measures, the ISO has insisted that they subordinate all action to the trade union apparatus that continually imposes sellout agreements driving down wages. In line with the unions, the ISO has abandoned any criticism of Labour’s policy of mass COVID-19 infection.

Build the Socialist Equality Group

The Socialist Equality Group advances the only viable program for the working class, in opposition to the unions and the pro-imperialist pseudo-left.

For a socialist anti-war movement

Along with the ICFI, the SEG fights for workers and young people to build an anti-war movement based on the socialist strategy that guided the October 1917 Russian Revolution that put an end to the First World War. As was the case a century ago, the anti-war movement today must unite the working class internationally to abolish the source of war: the capitalist system itself.

In New Zealand, we call for an end to all military alliances and agreements, including with Australia, the United States and NATO. New Zealand troops must be withdrawn from Europe and all other overseas deployments.

The SEG also demands immediate withdrawal from the Five Eyes, the closure of the Waihopai spy base, and the dismantling of New Zealand’s intelligence agencies. The billions of dollars being squandered on the military and state surveillance must be redirected to address urgent social needs, including expanding healthcare and education and eliminating social inequality.

Against racism and identity politics

The fight to unify the working class means opposing every form of nationalism, racism and xenophobia, including the vicious discrimination and demonisation of immigrants by Labour and NZ First and the anti-immigrant politics of the trade union bureaucracy.

Workers should also reject identity politics based on race and gender, which serves to divide workers and to cover up the fundamental antagonism between the ruling elite and the working class. This is the stock-in-trade of the pseudo-left, which glorified Ardern and her

imperialist government based on its promotion of feminism and race-based policies. The creation of a separate Māori health authority and reserved Māori seats in local councils are policies that do nothing to alleviate the appalling conditions facing the Māori working class.

Build rank-and-file committees

For the working class to mount a real fight against social inequality, it must have organisations that are controlled by workers themselves, independent and opposed to the union bureaucracy. The unions represent a privileged upper middle class layer, which functions as a police force on behalf of government and big business. They insist that jobs and working conditions, including protection from COVID-19, must be “sacrificed” for the sake of the national economy, i.e., for profits. For the same reason, the union bureaucracy fully supports the Labour government, including its imperialist policy supporting the US war drive.

Over the past six years, the SEG intervened in the major strikes by teachers and healthcare workers, calling on workers to form rank-and-file committees. We support the ICFI’s campaign to build the International Workers’ Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) in order to provide the framework for coordinating workers’ struggles that are increasingly global in scope.

A key task of such committees will be to fight to stop the spread of COVID-19 in hospitals, schools, factories and other workplaces, with temporary shutdowns and other safety measures.

For socialist revolution

We repeat that the election will solve none of the burning problems facing the working class. The decisive question is to resolve the crisis of political leadership in the working class by building a party dedicated to the fight for world socialist revolution, in uncompromising opposition against every capitalist party and organisation and their pseudo-left defenders.

The outmoded nation-state system must be abolished, and workers’ governments established that will expropriate the wealth hoarded by the capitalist elite and place it under the democratic control of the working class. Only in this way can the world’s resources be used to address climate change, put an end to pandemics, and lift billions of people out of poverty instead of being used to enrich a tiny minority and squandered on weapons of war.

The SEG’s program and principles are based on the historical struggle of the Trotskyist movement. We urge workers and young people to study this history, which is the foundation for socialist strategy in the 21st century. The ICFI alone represents the continuity of the political fight for Trotskyism—that is, for the socialist and internationalist principles that have been fundamental to Marxism.

The Fourth International was founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938 to continue the fight for socialist internationalism against counter-revolutionary Stalinism. The Stalinist bureaucracy betrayed the 1917 Revolution, usurping power from the Soviet working class and replacing the program of world socialist revolution with the reactionary nationalist theory of “socialism in one country.” Its monstrous crimes and betrayals of the working class culminated in capitalist restoration throughout Eastern Europe, China and the former Soviet Union. This represented not the failure of socialism but the political bankruptcy of Stalinism.

The ICFI was established in 1953 to defend orthodox Trotskyism against an opportunist tendency led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel that abandoned the fight for the political independence of the working class. Pabloism sought to subordinate the Fourth International to all the political agencies of capitalism in the working class—Social Democracy and Laborism, bourgeois nationalism and above all Stalinism. All the revisionist tendencies that broke from the Fourth International have undergone a profound degeneration and no longer even claim to represent Trotskyism. These pseudo-left organisations have all emerged as the full-throated defenders of imperialist war. In power, as in the case of Syriza in

Greece, they have proven to be ruthless agents for implementing the austerity demanded by the banks and big business.

For workers and young people wanting the means to prevent the disasters being created by capitalism, you will find the necessary political weapons in the rich heritage of the International Committee of the Fourth International derived from decades of struggle for Trotskyism. We urge all those who want to fight for a socialist future for humanity to contact us today and join the struggle to build the New Zealand section of the ICFI.

Attend our public meeting in Wellington:

A socialist perspective against war and austerity in New Zealand’s crisis election

5.15 p.m. Wednesday, October 4

Room AM103 Alan MacDiarmid Building

Victoria University of Wellington (Kelburn campus)



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)