

SEG and IYSSE hold public meeting ahead of New Zealand election

Our reporter
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The Socialist Equality Group (SEG) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) in New Zealand held a public meeting at Victoria University of Wellington on October 4, titled “A socialist perspective against war and austerity in New Zealand’s crisis election.”

An audience of students and workers took part in a discussion about the socialist and internationalist alternative to Labour, the opposition National Party, and the minor parties—the Greens, Te P?ti M?ori, New Zealand First and ACT.

SEG member Chris Ross, who chaired the event, pointed to the collapse in support for the Labour government and noted that whatever the outcome of the October 14 election, the next government will accelerate the assault on living standards and the integration of New Zealand into US imperialist wars.

The SEG, he said, fights in solidarity with the International Committee of the Fourth International for the mobilisation of the international working class to bring about a socialist revolution. This is the only way “to end the pandemic and oppose the threats of world war and the endless attacks on the living standards and working conditions of workers.”

Ross explained the measures taken at the meeting to reduce the risk posed by COVID-19, including the use of masks, HEPA air filters and Far-UVC technology. The necessity of these measures was highlighted by Prime Minister Chris Hipkins’ recent infection with COVID, which broke through the political establishment’s conspiracy of silence surrounding the ongoing pandemic. Since Labour abandoned its COVID elimination strategy in 2021, over 3,300 people have died from the virus, 31,000 people have been hospitalised, including 4,000 children, and tens of thousands are suffering from Long COVID.

Max Boddy, assistant national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Australia, delivered a report on the referendum for the Labor government’s proposed indigenous Voice to Parliament, which takes place on the same day as the New Zealand election.

Boddy explained why the SEP is campaigning for an

active boycott of the referendum, which he described as “anti-democratic and a political sham.” The Voice—which would be an unelected advisory body to the Australian parliament—is falsely presented by Labor and its supporters as the means to end the extreme poverty and oppression of Aboriginal people.

“Labor is using the Voice to provide a progressive veneer for its thoroughly pro-business right-wing agenda, as it has carried out massive attacks on social conditions, while funnelling billions into the war budget,” Boddy explained.

Meanwhile, the official No campaign was using “racist dog-whistling to advocate for the status quo, covering over the horrors of the history of Australian capitalism.”

Boddy outlined how, behind the backs of the population, the Albanese government had transformed Australia “into a staging ground for US war against China,” including through the AUKUS military pact and “arrangements to house six nuclear-capable B-52 bombers, as well as the establishment of an American military command centre in Darwin.”

The main speaker, leading SEG member Tom Peters, began by pointing to the international context of war and capitalist breakdown in which the NZ election was taking place.

“What we are witnessing in Ukraine is not a local conflict but the opening stages of a Third World War for the redivision of the world’s resources. That requires the rewriting of history, including the relativisation of the crimes committed in World War II, in order to prepare for new crimes on an even greater scale,” Peters said. “Preparing a society for war always entails the promotion of toxic, far-right political forces at home.”

Peters highlighted the recent standing ovation by the entire Canadian parliament for a member of the Nazi Waffen SS for fighting against Russia in World War II. “The message being sent here by Canada and all the imperialist powers is that they will stop at nothing in the war to defeat Russia,” he said.

In New Zealand, the two main parties are promising severe

austerity measures and increased funding for the military. New Zealand soldiers are already in Britain training Ukrainian conscripts for the escalating war against Russia, but the political establishment, conscious of widespread anti-war sentiment, was determined not to discuss the war during the election campaign.

Both Hipkins and National Party leader Christopher Luxon have said they want to avoid a war between the US and China, but Peters pointed out that in August Labour's Defence Minister Andrew Little stated that New Zealand's armed forces had to be "prepared" in case they were "called on" to join such a war.

Having presided over six years of widening social inequality, a healthcare crisis and soaring homelessness, Labour is deeply discredited in the working class. As the election date approaches, Labour is desperately attacking National for being prepared to form a coalition government with the far-right New Zealand First Party.

Peters explained that NZ First was "running a particularly bigoted Trump-style campaign, with dog whistles against M?ori, demonisation of transgender people, denial of climate change, and anti-vax demagoguery." Labour's campaign, however, was based on "sheer hypocrisy." Labour, under Jacinda Ardern's leadership, and the Greens, formed a coalition government with this right-wing, racist party from 2017–2020.

Labour gave NZ First extraordinary power, making the party's leader Winston Peters both deputy prime minister and foreign minister. NZ First's Ron Mark was the defence minister. The pro-Labour Party *Daily Blog* and the pseudo-left International Socialist Organisation applauded the Labour-NZ First coalition deal and falsely portrayed the Ardern government as progressive—even as it strengthened ties with US imperialism and attacked immigrants.

The reports were followed by about an hour of discussion. One attendee asked the SEG to comment on claims that Russia was an imperialist power seeking to revive the Soviet Union. Peters explained that Russia could not seriously be considered an imperialist power. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the restoration of capitalism had left Russia in a weakened position, ultimately subordinate to the US and other imperialist powers.

He added that the Putin regime was viciously hostile to the Soviet Union and had repeatedly denounced the 1917 Russian Revolution, which had liberated Ukraine and the other Soviet republics from Tsarist oppression, and provided self-determination within the context of the Soviet system. The rights of the nationalities were later suppressed by the Stalinist bureaucracy, as part of its nationalist betrayal of the revolution.

A supporter of Te P?ti M?ori (TPM)—a M?ori nationalist

party that aims to support a Labour-led coalition government—objected to the SEG's characterisation of the party as right-wing and racist.

In his report, Peters explained that TPM was part of a National-led coalition government from 2008 to 2017, which sent troops to the imperialist wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and carried out major attacks on the working class. He also noted that TPM co-leader Rawiri Waititi recently claimed that M?ori are a genetically superior race.

SEG member John Braddock explained that TPM falsely claims to speak on behalf of all M?ori, on the basis of racial identity politics. "The fundamental question here is: What's the basic division in society?" It was not race, as TPM insists, but class. "M?ori businesses now own \$70 billion worth of assets in this country... built on the exploitation of workers of all races." Braddock said it was not "whites" that colonised NZ, "it was capitalism, the private profit system."

The TPM supporter became incensed by this class analysis. Unable to respond, she stormed out of the meeting, shouting obscenities.

Following this provocative outburst, the discussion continued. Boddy explained that neither M?ori nor indigenous Australians were homogenous groups and that there was a vast gulf between working-class Aboriginal people and the elites who profit from corporate and government ties.

Peters referred those in attendance to the SEG's analysis of the Treaty of Waitangi, which has served to divide the working class while providing the basis for the creation of a bourgeois layer, represented in parliament by TPM.

A part-M?ori member of the IYSSE underscored the essential point that workers had to understand: "I have more in common with the white working class, the Asian working class, the Arab working class... than I have with the M?ori elites," who were part of the bourgeoisie.



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