

Reject all capitalist parties in New Zealand's crisis election! Join the Socialist Equality Group!

Socialist Equality Group (New Zealand)
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The Socialist Equality Group (SEG) in New Zealand warns that whatever the outcome of tomorrow's election, the next government will carry out historic attacks on workers' living standards, slash spending on public services, and spend billions more on the police, prisons and the military.

For workers and young people, who are moving to the left and are increasingly hostile to capitalism, there is only one alternative in this election: reject all the parliamentary parties and take up the fight for socialism. This means joining the SEG, which is fighting to build a New Zealand section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the world party of socialist revolution.

In response to a historic crisis of global capitalism, the ruling class in every country is lurching to the right and embracing authoritarian methods as they prepare for a third world war and the suppression of the working class. The imperialist powers, led by the US, see no way to reverse their economic decline apart from the forcible redivision of the world's territory and resources, primarily at the expense of Russia and China.

The right-wing character of New Zealand's election campaign demonstrates that the country is not isolated from these developments. Far from it.

In the past week, Labour's prime minister Chris Hipkins and opposition National Party leader Christopher Luxon joined the US and other imperialist governments in endorsing the Israeli military's murderous assault on Gaza. Repeating the fraudulent mantra of "Israel's right to defend itself," New Zealand's political establishment is supporting the Netanyahu government's genocidal bombing campaign aimed at reducing Gaza to rubble.

Contrary to the official lies and misinformation, the uprising of the Palestinian masses is the result of 75 years of oppression and dispossession of their land by Israel. The actions of the oppressed against the oppressor have been met with brutal retaliation by the imperialist-backed Zionist regime.

The New Zealand establishment's defence of Israel's atrocities must be taken as a sharp warning of the agenda of militarism, war and attacks on the working class that is being prepared. New Zealand is deeply integrated into US war plans, which has not been discussed publicly during the election campaign because all parties are afraid of widespread anti-war sentiment in the working class. The Labour government, supported by the entire parliament, has sent troops to Britain to train Ukrainian conscripts for the US-NATO proxy war against Russia. In August, the Labour government's defence minister Andrew Little stated that the armed forces must be prepared to support a US war against China.

Boosting funding for the military will require the diversion of resources from hospitals, schools, and other public services which are already in a severe crisis. These deeply unpopular measures will be undertaken by a

government that will have no mass support—whether it is led by Labour or National.

The country's political leaders and the corporate media are nervous, and even showing signs of panic, as the depth of alienation and hostility in the working class towards all the established parties has become more and more clear. After decades of austerity measures and participation in the criminal US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, combined support for Labour and National has fallen to an all-time low.

The polls indicate that neither Labour nor National will be able to rule in its own right—a major crisis of rule for the NZ bourgeoisie. Whichever party comes to power would be in a coalition with one or other of the right-wing minor parties.

The Labour Party, which got 50 percent of the vote in the 2020 election, is now polling around 28 percent. The sudden resignation of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern in January threw the party into disarray and was followed by five more ministers resigning or being pushed out.

The Labour government used the COVID-19 pandemic to carry out an historic transfer of wealth to the rich, with tens of billions of dollars in subsidies and handouts to the banks and big business, inflating property prices and corporate profits.

Ardern's promises to solve the housing crisis and alleviate child poverty have proven to be an utter fraud. After six years of Labour, working people are facing an increasingly unbearable crisis. According to one analysis, the average household's costs have risen by \$240 a week in the past three years. Charities report soaring demand for food parcels. One in 100 people are homeless, and the waiting list for public housing has exploded from 5,000 to 24,000 since Labour first came to power in 2017.

Labour was re-elected in 2020 primarily for keeping COVID-19 out of New Zealand with an elimination strategy—adopted to pre-empt a potentially uncontrollable mass movement by healthcare workers. The Ardern government, however, will be remembered for ending the zero-COVID policy two years ago and unleashing the coronavirus on the country.

Hipkins—who contracted COVID-19 for the second time during the election campaign—shamelessly declared in last night's televised debate that Labour had "the best COVID response in the world." In fact, the policy of mass infection—imposed with the crucial assistance of the corporatist trade unions—has so far killed more than 3,400 people in New Zealand and led to tens of thousands of hospitalisations.

This has exacerbated the crisis in public hospitals, which have been starved of funds for decades. Tens of thousands of nurses, doctors and other healthcare workers have held nationwide strikes during the past six years, only to be sold out by the union bureaucracy which has imposed agreements that failed to keep pace with living costs or address the staffing shortage.

Labour's murderous "let it rip" COVID policy, and all its attacks on working people, have pushed the political establishment further to the right and emboldened extreme right-wing parties, which are setting the agenda for the next government.

The National Party, which is polling around 35 percent, would only be able to govern in an unstable coalition with the far-right ACT and New Zealand First. All three parties are promising to cut thousands of public sector jobs, attack welfare recipients, and impose "tough on crime" policies to increase the prison population.

In a last-ditch attempt to boost its support, the National Party has publicly warned that such a coalition would be unstable and might lead to a hung parliament and even a second election, if National and ACT cannot reach a coalition agreement with NZ First.

NZ First leader Winston Peters has run a Trump-style campaign, based on appeals to anti-vaccination pseudo-science, racist dog whistles against Māori, denial of climate change, and demonisation of transgender people. Peters has hysterically denounced Labour's allies the Greens and Te Pāti Māori as "communists" for proposing a modest wealth tax, and as "anti-semitic" for making pacifist appeals for an end to the fighting in Gaza.

The Labour Party's denunciations of National for being prepared to work with NZ First, however, are hypocritical in the extreme. If Peters is once again poised to play a major role in the next government, that is largely because Labour handed extraordinary power to NZ First in the 2017–2020 coalition government, which also included the Greens.

Ardern made NZ First leader Winston Peters both foreign minister and deputy prime minister, and made NZ First's Ron Mark defence minister, despite the party getting just 7.2 percent of the votes. This widely despised party, which never concealed its anti-Asian racism and xenophobia, was also embraced by the Greens, whose co-leader James Shaw declared following the 2017 election: "The Green Party shares many goals and values with Labour and NZ First."

In a desperate effort to revive illusions in Labour, the party's middle class supporters in the media and pseudo-left groups are promoting the Greens and Te Pāti Māori, fraudulently claiming that they would push a re-elected Labour-led government in a more progressive direction.

A recent article by the International Socialist Organisation (ISO), "Vote Green or Te Pāti Māori, and Build a Socialist Alternative," states that some Green MPs are "socialists" and having these "anti-capitalist voices in parliament will help to popularise socialist ideas."

This is a sham. The role of the Greens is not to "popularise socialism" but to provide a "more progressive" and "eco-friendly" veneer for a right-wing, imperialist government. Over the past six years, the Greens have supported Labour's budgets that increased military spending, including funding to send New Zealand troops to Britain to train Ukrainian conscripts. The ISO has no objection to this because, like pseudo-left groups in the US and Europe, it has aligned itself with US-NATO imperialism in the bloody war against Russia over Ukraine.

As well as bearing responsibility for all of Labour's anti-working-class policies, the Greens—which have held the climate ministry for six years—have failed to meaningfully reduce carbon emissions. This is because nothing can be done without a coordinated, international effort and the expropriation of the corporations that are responsible for catastrophic climate change. The Greens' capitalist program rules out any action that interferes with the ability of big business to make profits.

Te Pāti Māori (TPM) spent nine years as part of the right-wing National Party-led government of John Key, from 2008–2017, during which time it supported sweeping austerity measures including an increase to the goods and services tax (GST) and tens of thousands of public sector job cuts.

The claims by the ISO and the liberal *Daily Blog* that TPM has moved to the left, based on its election rhetoric, are completely false. In an interview with Radio NZ this week the party's co-leader Rawiri Waititi defended his predecessors who supported National, saying "they were

right for their time."

Moreover, TPM's central demand is for greater payments from the state to indigenous tribal businesses, through the Treaty of Waitangi settlements process. Decades of these multi-million dollar payments to the tribes, depicted as reparations for the crimes of colonisation, have created a wealthy layer of Māori committed to upholding capitalism, while doing nothing to alleviate poverty among Māori workers, who remain among the most oppressed. TPM, Labour and their supporters glorify the Treaty as a national founding document and denounce socialist opposition to Treaty settlements as racism, while the pseudo-lefts defend the settlements on the basis of racial identity politics.

If Labour succeeds in forming a government with the Greens and TPM after the election, these parties will quickly abandon their demagogic calls for increasing taxes on the rich and "redistributing" some scraps to workers. They will behave exactly as they have when in government before: loyally supporting deeper attacks on living conditions and the militarisation of society in line with the demands of the ruling class.

The next government, whoever leads it, will face a resurgent movement of the working class, which is being driven into struggle throughout the world against austerity, war, and the endless COVID pandemic. To succeed, however, this movement requires socialist leadership and perspective, and political independence from Labour and all its allies, including the pro-capitalist trade unions which the pseudo-lefts defend.

The unions are not workers' organisations, but bureaucratic apparatuses dedicated to the defence of corporate profits and capitalism. They have played the key role over the past six years in enforcing cuts to health, education and in private companies. They have herded workers back into factories and children back to school in unsafe conditions with COVID-19 spreading out of control. Whichever government comes to power, it will rely heavily on the unions to slash jobs and derail opposition from the working class.

The Council of Trade Unions is campaigning on behalf of Labour, highlighting the National Party's planned spending cuts and attacks on superannuation and welfare. The unions, however, openly support Labour's plan to slash public service budgets by up to 4 percent as "a prudent move to tighten the belt"—as Public Service Association leader Duane Leo put it in a Radio NZ interview on August 29.

The Socialist Equality Group calls on workers to rebel against the union bureaucracy and to take matters into their own hands by building rank-and-file committees in every workplace, controlled by workers themselves. This is the necessary precondition for the unification of workers across New Zealand and internationally in a real fight against austerity and to defend workers' health and lives from COVID-19 and other dangers.

The SEG is the only organisation which fights for the international unity of the working class, in opposition to all forms of racism, nationalism and identity politics, which are used to divide workers. The fundamental division in society is not race or gender, but the class gulf between workers and the super-rich, who have accumulated enormous profits during the pandemic.

Society's wealth, which is created by the working class, must be expropriated from the financial elite so that it can be used to put an end to poverty and inequality, address climate change, and implement a scientific policy to eliminate COVID-19 worldwide.

The SEG fights alongside the ICFI for the building of an international anti-war movement, which must be based on the fight for socialist revolution if it is not to end in defeat. Workers and young people should not be fooled by the hypocritical pacifist rhetoric of the Greens, TPM and their supporters, which serves to conceal the fact that capitalism and its division of the world into rival nation states is the source of war.

It was the Russian Revolution of October 1917, led by the Bolshevik Party, that ended World War I. Only the revolutionary action of workers throughout the world can prevent World War Three.

The Fourth International was founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938 to defend the Russian Revolution and to fight for its expansion internationally, in opposition to Stalin and the bureaucracy that usurped power from the working class in the Soviet Union. Since the ICFI was founded 70 years ago, it has defended the Fourth International's program of world revolution against every revisionist anti-Marxist tendency that has sought to subordinate the working class to nationalism, Stalinism and imperialism.

The ICFI's program and history provides the indispensable political foundation for building powerful revolutionary parties that will unite workers in New Zealand, throughout the Asia-Pacific region, and internationally, in the fight for world socialism.

We call on those who agree with this statement to share it widely, study our program and analysis on the *World Socialist Web Site*, and contact us today.



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