

# New Zealand Greens posture as “socialist” with alternative budget

Tom Peters  
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The New Zealand Green Party, a key ally of the opposition Labour Party, last week released a 40-page alternative budget ahead of the current right-wing coalition government’s austerity budget, which will be announced on May 22.

Greens co-leaders Marama Davidson and Chlöe Swarbrick told a media conference that the party’s proposals would “end poverty” while protecting the environment. The Green Budget calls for a guaranteed minimum income, free doctor’s visits and dental care, free early childhood education and increased public housing, funded with modest increases in tax on the very rich.

Swarbrick declared that Prime Minister Christopher Luxon “would prefer to keep tens of thousands of kids in poverty than to fairly tax multi-millionaires.” The Greens, she said, stood for a country that “belongs to and works for regular New Zealanders, not just the wealthy few.”

The Green Budget was denounced in hysterical terms by the three governing parties—the conservative National Party, and the far-right ACT and New Zealand First—which are preparing a budget that will intensify the brutal assault on public healthcare, education and other services, while diverting billions of dollars to the military.

National’s finance minister Nicola Willis declared that “Labour and the Greens are hellbent on confiscating wealth and income from hardworking Kiwis.” ACT leader David Seymour said the Greens’ proposals were driven by “envy” of the rich.

NZ First leader Winston Peters, the deputy prime minister, said the Green Budget was a “pink, Marxist plan” that would turn New Zealand into “Venezuela or Myanmar tomorrow.”

ACT and NZ First have repeatedly railed against “Marxism” and “woke ideology,” in language similar to that of the Trump administration in the US, which is seeking to criminalise left-wing and anti-war positions. Like Trump, the NZ government has sought to demonise transgender people and to whip up racial divisions, to divert anger over worsening social inequality and the running down of public services.

The real target of these far-right denunciations is not the Greens, but the working class and young people, who are moving to the left in response to soaring social inequality, and the threat of fascism and world war, and are increasingly attracted to socialist and Marxist ideas.

Like the Green parties in Australia and Europe, the New Zealand Greens are a capitalist party, supported by sections of the upper middle class and business moguls. In recent years the party has received substantial donations from Hollywood film-maker James Cameron (a NZ resident); Peter Kraus, a multi-millionaire shareholder in healthcare company Ebos; Phillip Mills, founder of the Les Mills

chain of gyms; and Bruce Copeland, who owns software development company Sandfield.

The Green Party plays a particular role within the political establishment of providing “left” cover for right-wing Labour governments. With the assistance of various pseudo-left organisations, like the International Socialist Organisation, the Greens divert leftward-moving youth and sections of the middle class into the arms of the political establishment by encouraging the illusion that a Labour-Greens coalition government can be pressured to adopt more progressive policies.

Asked by a journalist if the Green Budget was “socialism,” co-leader Swarbrick replied: “If socialism means looking after the people and the planet, let’s go!”

There is, however, nothing socialist about the Greens’ proposals. The party does not call to nationalise the banks and major industries which run the country, placing them in the ownership and under the democratic control of the working class. Instead the Greens put forward a series of very modest reforms that it knows will never be implemented, and even if they were, would not put a dent in the immense wealth and power of New Zealand’s ruling class.

The Green Budget calls for the top income tax rate to be raised from 39 to 45 percent for people earning more than \$180,000, and for an increase in company tax from 28 to 33 percent. This is still well below the tax rates that existed prior to the 1980s right-wing onslaught launched by the Labour government of Prime Minister David Lange.

The Lange government slashed the top marginal income tax rate from 66 to 33 percent, and cut company tax from 48 to 28 percent. It also introduced the regressive Goods and Services Tax (GST), in order to shift more of the tax burden onto working people. The Greens do not call for the removal of GST.

The Greens suggest a meagre 2.5 percent tax on individual net wealth over \$2 million, a 1.5 percent tax on private trusts, and a 33 percent tax on gifts or inheritances worth more than \$1 million (similar to a tax that exists in Ireland).

The notion that poverty can be ended through the Greens’ proposed \$395 weekly guaranteed minimum income (with \$140 extra for a sole parent) is laughable. The figure is only slightly higher than the current poverty-level unemployment payment of \$361 for a single person (\$505 for sole parents).

The most significant aspect of the Green Budget is what is omitted: there is no mention of defence policy or the current government’s plan to double military spending from 1 to 2 percent of gross domestic product, with an extra \$12 billion to be spent over the next four years.

This is not an oversight. The Greens do not fundamentally disagree with the military build-up, which has been endorsed by the Labour

Party, and which will be funded at the expense of healthcare, education and other public services.

The Greens still use pacifist rhetoric and sometimes call for an end to New Zealand's alliance with the US. Green MPs have appeared at numerous rallies against the genocide in Gaza, calling on the Luxon government to sanction Israel. Workers and young people, however, must judge the party not on its hypocritical statements but on its actual record.

During the Greens' press conference announcing its alternative budget, Swarbrick twice stated that the party's aim was to make New Zealand "a country worth fighting for." She repeated this nationalist slogan in an interview with TVNZ on May 18, without explaining against whom the population must prepare to fight and why.

This reflects deep concerns in the New Zealand ruling class about widespread anti-war sentiment, especially among young people. The Green Party has for years sought to overcome that hostility by providing "pacifist" propaganda to justify imperialist wars.

Like its counterparts in Germany and Australia, the New Zealand Greens have embraced imperialism. During the 2000s the party supported Helen Clark's Labour Party government, which sent troops to support the illegal US imperialist wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Greens sought to distance themselves, verbally, from the Iraq war, while fraudulently presenting the Afghanistan deployment as a "peacekeeping" operation.

The Green Party was part of Jacinda Ardern's Labour Party-led coalition government from 2017 to 2023, which included the NZ First Party from 2017-2020. The Ardern government strengthened the alliance with the US, including by sending NZ troops to Britain to train Ukrainian conscripts to serve as cannon fodder in the US-NATO war with Russia.

The Greens support NZ's participation in this ongoing imperialist bloodbath, which has nothing to do with defending "democracy" and is part of the developing global war. The US and European powers are using the far-right regime in Ukraine to weaken Russia and to reduce it to a semi-colonial status, so as to gain control over Ukraine's valuable mineral resources.

The Ardern government also supported a stronger US military presence in the Asia-Pacific region and pushed for New Zealand's integration into US war plans against China. The Greens collaborated with the far-right NZ First's defence minister Ron Mark to produce a plan for building up New Zealand's military capability in the Pacific, using the pretexts of providing humanitarian and disaster relief.

The Ardern government came to power in 2017 with promises similar to those contained in the Green Budget document. Ardern claimed she would end child poverty, bring back free tertiary education, and build tens of thousands of "affordable" houses—all of which proved to be a fraud. The Greens and NZ First, along with various pseudo-left organisations, repeated Ardern's empty rhetoric and claimed that the coalition would restore—in NZ First leader Peters' words—the "human face" of capitalism.

The Greens were more than happy to work with the NZ First Party, despite its long record of racist agitation against immigrants from China and the Middle East. The Greens' then co-leader James Shaw declared that the two parties had much in common and whitewashed NZ First's extreme right-wing program.

Only the Socialist Equality Group warned the working class that the Labour-Greens-NZ First government's pledges were lies, and that it would accelerate the attacks on living standards, the scapegoating of immigrants and the promotion of militarism.

The record of the Ardern government speaks for itself. Labour and the Greens agreed on strict spending limits going into the 2017 election to sell themselves as a "responsible" government to the financial elite. When the COVID-19 pandemic erupted in 2020, the government transferred tens of billions of dollars to the rich and big business, with the Greens' full support. Shaw noted that generations of New Zealanders—meaning working class people—would have to repay the cost of the bailouts.

The Labour Party lost the 2023 election in a landslide amid soaring living costs, deeply entrenched homelessness, and the uncontrolled spread of COVID-19. The government abandoned its zero COVID policy and dismantled all restrictions on the spread of the coronavirus in 2022, on the orders of big business and with the Greens' support.

The Luxon government is continuing and deepening the assault on the working class that was well underway during the Labour government. Both major parties are deeply unpopular and reliant on minor parties to prop them up. The Green Party increased its share of the vote from 7.9 percent in 2020 to 11.6 percent in 2023, at Labour's expense. If Labour is to return to office in 2026, it will almost certainly be in a coalition with the Greens.

For more than two decades the Greens have acted as a safety valve for popular discontent and steered young people, in particular, back towards illusions in a "progressive" Labour-Greens government. The Greens are hoping to repeat the charade of 2017's election, with its media-generated "Jacindamania," by making empty promises that will be discarded the instant the party gets into power.

Workers and youth who are looking for a socialist alternative must learn the political lessons of the last Labour-Greens government and the transformation of Green and social democratic parties around the world into right-wing, pro-imperialist organisations. The period in which capitalist parties could offer a few reforms to stave off the threat of revolution ended at least four decades ago. The capitalist system is in an historic crisis, which is producing extreme levels of social inequality, environmental disasters and—unless this system is overthrown by the international working class—fascist dictatorship and world war.

The only way to stop this descent into barbarism is to take up the fight for the revolutionary and internationalist program of the Trotskyist movement. We call on readers in New Zealand who agree with this perspective to join the Socialist Equality Group.



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