

Fight against war and for international socialism! Reject all capitalist parties and support the Socialist Equality Group in New Zealand's election!

Socialist Equality Group (New Zealand)
13 October 2026

For the first time in history, the Trotskyist movement is standing a candidate in a New Zealand general election. The Socialist Equality Group (SEG) is fielding Tom Petterson because the working class confronts a crisis of historic proportions, and because no party contesting this election offers it any way forward.

Our campaign is not a bid for office within the existing order. It is an intervention to expose the bankruptcy of every party of the capitalist establishment, and to raise the necessity of a socialist and internationalist leadership of the working class.

We call on workers and young people to support this campaign, and to register to attend our public meeting on November 1, at 1:30 p.m. in the Dowse Art Museum (James Coe Centre), 45 Laings Road, Lower Hutt.

This election is taking place as world capitalism enters the most dangerous period since the Second World War. The economic crisis that erupted in 2008 was never resolved and has intensified following the COVID-19 pandemic. The ruling classes of every country have responded with a relentless assault on the living standards of working people, the promotion of far-right and fascist forces, and the drive to violently redivide the world.

The fronts of a third world war are opening before our eyes: the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, the genocide in Gaza, the criminal and expanding war against Iran, the seizure of Venezuelan oil and the militarisation of the entire Indo-Pacific in preparation for war against China. The danger of nuclear war is a real and present one.

At the same time, the working class is fighting back. Mass strikes and demonstrations by youth and school students have erupted in France, millions are protesting against the housing crisis in Spain, and strikes are unfolding across the United States and throughout the world.

New Zealand is no exception: Last October more than 100,000 teachers and healthcare workers took part in the country's biggest strike in nearly 50 years against the government's attacks on wages and conditions—a struggle which was strangled by the union apparatus.

What is lacking is not the capacity of the working class to fight, but a leadership with the program necessary to unify workers internationally against the source of austerity and war. The trade union bureaucracies, the social-democratic parties and the pseudo-left “socialist” groups all function to subordinate the class struggle to the interests of the bourgeoisie. The building of a new, revolutionary leadership is the central question of the epoch.

New Zealand: A minor imperialist power

New Zealand presents itself to the world as a kinder, gentler capitalism, a model of egalitarianism and decency. This is a fraud. New Zealand is a minor imperialist power, which, together with Australia, seeks to corral the Pacific Island nations behind the war drive of US imperialism against China. Successive Labour and National-led governments have called for the New Zealand military to be made “combat-ready” to join a US-led war far beyond its territory. Wellington and Canberra have agreed to uphold the ANZUS Treaty, which would automatically drag both countries into a US war against China. The Pacific, which experienced some of the most devastating battles of World War II, is again being turned into a staging ground for imperialist war.

Within New Zealand, the ruling class presides over some of the sharpest levels of inequality in the developed world. One in five children lives in poverty, 10 percent of people rely on foodbanks to survive and more than 112,000 people are homeless. While workers' real wages have plummeted by 6.4 percent since 2021, the number of billionaires has doubled in the past eight years and the size of their fortunes has grown enormously. The *National Business Review* Rich List now records more than \$129 billion in the hands of just 150 individuals and families—more than a quarter of the country's annual GDP. This is not an accident of policy. It is the product of the capitalist system itself, which can only enrich the few by impoverishing the many.

We say: No money for war!

- End all military spending and redirect billions of dollars to schools, hospitals and ending poverty.
- Withdraw from the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing network and close the Waihopai spy base. Abolish the intelligence agencies.
- Abolish the ANZUS Treaty and end all military alliances and agreements with the US, Australia, NATO and elsewhere.
- Withdraw all New Zealand troops from the Middle East, Europe and every overseas deployment.

Labour and National: Two parties of war and austerity

Governments led by National and Labour have supported US imperialism at every turn. The current National-led coalition has deployed military personnel to the Middle East to assist the US attacks in Yemen and in keeping supply lines open for Israel's war machine. The previous Labour-led government sent New Zealand troops to train Ukrainian conscripts in Britain to fight in Russia—a deployment that has since been

expanded to Poland as the war escalates and threatens the use of nuclear weapons.

Labour agrees with National that military spending must increase dramatically—from 1 to at least 2 percent of GDP—and that recruitment must expand. This will be funded by starving healthcare, education and other vital public services.

This election will resolve nothing. All the political parties contesting it—Labour, National, and all their support parties—are committed to defending capitalism, which requires a deepening assault on the working class and the integration of the country into US imperialism's war plans. The differences between the parties are minor and tactical. A vote for any of them is a vote for austerity and for war.

The previous Labour-led government, under Prime Ministers Jacinda Ardern and Chris Hipkins, is directly responsible for the coming to power in 2023 of the right-wing coalition of National, ACT and NZ First. In 2017 Ardern formed a coalition with the Greens and the right-wing nationalist NZ First, appointing its leader Winston Peters as deputy prime minister and foreign minister. It was the Ardern government's attacks on living standards, anti-immigrant measures and strengthening of military ties with Washington, which prepared the ground for the current right-wing government.

Ardern's promises in 2017 to address poverty and inequality were a fraud: Under her government, homelessness and the number of children living in material hardship increased. The working class turned against Labour, which lost the 2023 election in a landslide, as real wages plummeted and as the government dismantled public health protections against COVID-19, leading to a surge in hospitalisation and death.

The Labour Party ditched any attachment to reformist policies during the 1980s government of Prime Minister David Lange and Finance Minister Roger Douglas, which carried out a brutal assault on the working class, similar to that by Reagan in the US and Thatcher in Britain. It responded to the globalisation of production by privatising industries, removing state subsidies, sacking tens of thousands of workers, and slashing taxes for the rich. All these attacks were enforced by the Stalinist-led union bureaucracy. The result was soaring social inequality and unemployment—a social disaster that continues to this day.

After decades of right-wing attacks, Labour and National are both widely despised: Their combined support has fallen to less than 60 percent, the lowest level since the 1930s. This mirrors the collapse in support for social-democratic parties internationally, including in France, Britain and Spain, and represents a serious crisis of rule for the bourgeoisie that has relied on these parties to contain and suppress the class struggle.

To return to power, the Labour Party will have to form a coalition with two or three minor parties, and will rely heavily on the support of middle-class, pseudo-left groups.

To defend living standards, we call for:

- An immediate 20 percent pay increase for all workers, and a rise in all benefits, to reverse years of real wage cuts. Index all wages and benefits to the cost of living, with automatic monthly adjustments.
- A full-time, permanent job on decent wages for all who want one; a living income for those unable to work.
- Cancel student debt and restore free tertiary education.
- Free, universal healthcare; reverse the slashing of health and education workers' wages and the sacking of thousands of public servants.
- To carry out a real struggle against wage cuts, job losses and the militarisation of society, workers must rebel against the trade union bureaucracy. The unions ceased to be workers' organisations decades ago and now function as an industrial police force for the state and big business.

Workers must build rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled and independent of the union apparatus and the capitalist parties. These

committees must unite workers in New Zealand across all industries and with workers in Australia, Asia, the Pacific and throughout the world, through the International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

The Greens, Te P?ti M?ori and the Opportunity Party

The Green Party and the M?ori nationalist Te P?ti M?ori (TPM) are positioning themselves to provide a "progressive" veneer for a right-wing government led by Labour. Both parties will ditch their meagre reform proposals—including calls for the rich to pay more tax and for measures to improve "affordability"—the second they enter a coalition with Labour.

In the Ardern government, the Greens loyally backed Labour's budgets, which boosted military spending while starving education, healthcare and other services. TPM was part of the 2008–2017 National Party-led government which increased GST, slashed welfare entitlements and partially privatised electricity companies.

The Greens and TPM, along with the pseudo-lefts, promote reactionary forms of identity politics based on nationality, race and gender, which divides the working class and obscures the most important division in society: the gulf between workers and capitalists. TPM speaks for M?ori tribal-based capitalists seeking a greater share of the wealth extracted from the working class. Their interests are opposed to those of M?ori workers, who are among the most exploited in the country.

The Opportunity Party (TOP), which says it could work with either Labour or National, could hold the balance of power and choose which of the main parties leads the next government. TOP, which has not been in parliament before, claims to be "pragmatic" and "centrist." In fact it is a right-wing, pro-business party which, like the Greens, peddles the fraud that climate change, the housing crisis and soaring living costs can all be resolved within the capitalist market system.

Unite the working class

- Reject identity politics and the parties that peddle it. The fight against racism and all oppression requires the unity of workers across ethnic, gender and national divisions—not their subordination to competing sections of the capitalist elite.
- Defend immigrants—full citizenship rights for all; end the deportations and repeal all anti-immigrant measures.

The role of the pseudo-left

The pseudo-left groups, particularly the International Socialist Organisation (ISO) and Socialist Aotearoa (SA), play a key role in enabling Labour's betrayals. Both groups whitewashed the right-wing Ardern government as "reformist" and are again calling on workers and youth to vote for Labour or its allied parties, based on the lie that they are a "lesser evil" or even a progressive alternative to National.

In response to the war against Iran, SA and the ISO both called for an "anti-war" alliance with the pro-imperialist Labour and Green parties. The ISO and SA are not socialist organisations but nationalist groups operating within the political establishment and the union bureaucracy to disarm workers and subordinate them to parties of big business and war. The pseudo-lefts speak for affluent middle-class layers whose privileged position rests on New Zealand's role as a US-allied imperialist power.

A socialist program of action

The demands we have set out cannot be won through appeals to the capitalist state but pose the need for a political fight against it. Every one of them collides with the profit system and the parties that defend it. The fight for them therefore raises, at every point, the question of which class holds power.

The wealth of the country—including the \$129 billion in the hands of 150 families and the \$39.5 billion in bank profits between 2020 and 2025—was created by the working class and must be taken back. The banks and major corporations must be nationalised under the democratic control of the working class, and the wealth of the billionaires seized. This requires the working class to take political power—to break up the existing state machine and establish a workers' government that will reorganise society to meet human need.

What the working class lacks is not the capacity to fight, but a revolutionary leadership. The building of that leadership—the New Zealand section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution founded by Leon Trotsky—is the central task.

Tom Petterson is standing in this election to fight for this program—to build the independent political movement of the working class.

Vote for Tom Petterson in Hutt South. Attend our public meeting on November 1. Join the Socialist Equality Group—for the revolutionary unity of the working class in the Pacific, in Asia and throughout the world. For world socialism!

Authorised by Tom Petterson, sep.wellington@gmail.com



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact