

New Zealand election: Workers speak with Socialist Equality Group on war and the social crisis

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Group (SEG) in New Zealand has held numerous discussions with many workers and young people over the past week, as part of its candidate Tom Petterson's campaign in the Hutt South electorate for the November 7 election.

SEG members and supporters are distributing thousands of copies of its election statement, which calls on workers to build a new party: the New Zealand section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution. It explains that the National Party, Labour, and all their support parties are complicit in the mounting attacks on living standards, the gutting of public services, and New Zealand's integration into US-led wars and war plans. None of them has anything to offer except deeper austerity cuts and militarism.

The SEG urges workers to register to attend its public election meeting on Sunday November 1, at 1:30 p.m., in the Dowse Art Museum, 45 Laings Road, Lower Hutt, to discuss these vital issues and the socialist alternative.

Sam, a young chemical manufacturing worker, attended a candidates meeting in the suburb of Epuni on October 18 where Petterson spoke about the SEG's policies and socialist perspective. He also read the SEG's election statement and described it as "profoundly powerful."

"It actually spoke to the concerns that I had, and I imagine many other working-class people have, about how the current parties just don't facilitate the needs of workers."

"The issues that face New Zealanders," Sam said, "including the housing crisis and the cost of living, are not things that can be fixed with a simple policy

reform." He identified the capitalist system as "pushing us in the direction towards war, towards tyranny, towards imperialism," and called for workers to organise against it.

"Regardless of how the vote goes," he said, "revolution could still occur. Support the SEG, support Tom. Beyond the election, there is more that we can do."

Jonathan, a professional gardener, said that New Zealand's contribution to "genocide and ethnic cleansing is my most pressing concern" in the election. "On top of that, and connected to that, is increased military spending. No political party is ever talking about severing ties with American hegemony."

He said recognition of the Palestinian state, which Labour is promising to do, is "pointless" if New Zealand does not also "completely sever ties with America, the Five Eyes [intelligence sharing network], AUKUS [the Australia-UK-US military pact against China]." He added that a nuclear war was "a real possibility."

On the high cost of living, he said the policies from Labour and National, such as proposals to break up the supermarket duopoly, were "just talk. Healthcare, GPs, prescriptions, public transport, school lunches, everything should be free, and there's no reason why it shouldn't." As a father, Jonathan said the future was "not looking good" for his young children. "I feel like I need to become radicalised in some capacity to give them a fighting chance."

Samuelu, a student at WelTec in Porirua, said "the cost of living has gone up, it's really affecting a lot of people in our community. I feel like every year is getting worse." He said it was not realistic to move out

of his parents' home and find his own place. Asked whether he saw any difference between Labour and National he said: "No, not really. Both have affected the cost of living. Nothing really changed with both."

Commenting on the plan by both parties to boost military spending for war, he said, "I don't understand that. All that money could go towards funding for apprenticeships, jobs. The money's not going to the right places."

Simon told the SEG that he had been unemployed for "over a decade" following the closure of a New Zealand Post sorting facility in Petone in 2015. Dozens of workers in Lower Hutt lost their jobs as part of mass redundancies and closures by the postal service.

"It's definitely hard to live," he said. "Everyday items are going up in cost." After paying "around 60 percent" of his benefit on rent and electricity, Simon said he is left with "hardly anything." He can only afford to live in a boarding house with 19 other people. It would cost him \$500 a week to rent a one-bedroom house, which is almost the same as his weekly benefit. He said the government should "lower the house prices and the rents" and stop "rich people buying up all the housing materials and hiking up the prices."

David, a retired worker, said the major issues in the election were health and homelessness. "Frankly, I don't know which way to vote. I'm still unsure about both National and Labour. I was a Labour voter, but not now." He was "annoyed" that every government blamed the previous one for increasing homelessness and other problems, saying they should "just do the job" to fix it.

Instead of spending money on war, he said governments should fund education, "because education's really important, and they're missing out." He said he worried that New Zealand political leaders were "too scared to say 'no' to Trump" if they are asked to join a war.

Referring to the mass protests by young people in France, David said the same thing should happen in New Zealand: "I can fully understand what they're going through in France, because we're going through it too," in terms of soaring inequality.

Kayden, a 17-year-old labourer, said: "Our family is having to cut corners in a lot of places. Things like the fuel crisis, the price of food and all that, it reflects in low economic households in terms of having to walk to

work or not buy butter one week, just because it's too expensive. It's just terrible. Even people who are middle class are having to cut corners. It's absolutely crazy."

"Everyone I know is struggling to get jobs. For me, it was hard to get a job. I've noticed that you just have to know somebody."

Kayden agreed that the war was behind the crisis, and yet no politicians were talking about it. "Oil products run the world. If oil products go up, everything goes up." He denounced Prime Minister Christopher Luxon for pretending that he had not supported the war against Iran, saying it "should be illegal" for politicians to lie.

He said Luxon and opposition leader Chris Hipkins "don't live in the same reality" as ordinary people. "I feel like a lot of political figures at the moment are just saying what they think people want to hear. Their actions are completely different. I haven't really noticed much of a difference between the National and Labour parties, growing up. Both the parties perpetuate each other's issues."

Kayden added that the social situation, including the housing crisis, had deteriorated "when COVID hit," under the previous Labour Party-led government. For a brief period he and his father had tried to get emergency accommodation after having to leave their home, but there was nothing available for weeks. "Ever since then it's just got worse and worse. You see homeless people everywhere, especially in Wellington CBD, it's terrible."

Kayden thanked the SEG for its campaign and said he would aim to attend its public meeting on November 1.

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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