

# The election in Hutt South and New Zealand's social crisis

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The Socialist Equality Group NZ (SEG) is standing Tom Petterson as its candidate for the seat of Hutt South, near the capital city Wellington, in the general election on November 7. It is the first time the Trotskyist movement has contested an election in New Zealand.

The Hutt Valley region, population 162,000, is a major working-class centre with a history dating back more than a century. Today, it is a microcosm of the intensifying social crisis confronting the entire working class. The electorate is just 15 minutes' drive from parliament, the centre of a decades-long assault on the social position of working people by Labour, National and all other capitalist parties.

Hutt South has for decades been dominated by the Labour Party. Formed in 1996 from two existing electorates, the seat was held by senior Labour MP Trevor Mallard from 1993 until 2017, when Labour's Ginny Andersen took over. Amid widespread hostility to the Ardern Labour-led government, the party suffered a disastrous defeat in the 2023 election, sinking to just 26.9 percent support nationwide. Hutt South swung to National Party MP Chris Bishop.

The area was devastated by the ruthless economic restructuring launched in earnest by the 1984–1990 Labour government of David Lange and Roger Douglas, which was deepened by subsequent governments. The removal of subsidies and national trade barriers, and the privatisation of state-owned industries resulted in mass redundancies and factory closures.

Lower Hutt suburbs like Petone, Seaview, Gracefield and Wainuiomata have all been impacted.

Thousands of manufacturing jobs disappeared from the Hutt Valley during the early 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. Nationwide, according to NZ encyclopedia *Te*

*Ara*, over 84,000 jobs were lost in manufacturing from 1987–1992 alone. They were all axed with the collusion of the trade union bureaucracy, led until the early 1990s by the Stalinist Socialist Unity Party.

The shutdown of car assembly and vehicle manufacturing included the closure of New Zealand Motor Bodies (Petone) in 1978, General Motors (Petone) in 1984, Austin Motors (Petone) in 1983, Ford Motors (Seaview) in 1988, General Motors (Trentham), closed in 1990 and South Pacific Tyres/Dunlop (Upper Hutt), a joint venture closed in 2006.

In the food and consumer goods sector, the Gear Meat Works in Petone closed in 1981. In 2007, the Colgate-Palmolive factory in Lower Hutt closed after 68 years in operation. Griffin's Biscuits in Gracefield closed in 2008 after 70 years, and Unilever shut its Petone factory in 2015.

Other closures included Thorobred Wools (Wainuiomata) in 1997; Feltex Carpets/Woolen Mills (Gracefield), shut down by owner Godfrey Hirst in 2006; Pilkington Glass (Taita) was closed in 2003. The Stuff Group, which produces the *Post* daily newspaper, will close its Petone printing plant in 2027.

Amid the current global economic crisis, the New Zealand ruling class is transferring new burdens onto working people. Nationally, up to one in three households struggles to afford food. Some 17 percent of people suffer from severe food insecurity, and one in ten are reliant on food banks. Real wages have been driven down by more than 6.4 percent since 2021, as wealth has been sucked upwards by a thin layer of billionaires: 150 families now hold a record \$129 billion.

The Hutt Valley suburbs of Naenae, Taita, Wainuiomata along with parts of Upper Hutt, rate within the top deciles for social deprivation, measured

by the NZ Index of Deprivation.

The Ministry of Education's Equity Index (EQI) provides a picture of a school's surrounding community. EQI scores between 494 and 569 represent the greatest level of socioeconomic barriers faced by students. Naenae College has an EQI of 500, Wainuiomata High School 509, and Taita College 512, ranking them among the worst off in the country.

Consistent with national trends, unemployment in Lower Hutt is 5.3 percent, up from 4.6 percent a year ago. Nationally, the underutilisation rate for young people aged 15 to 24 has reached 37 percent, up from 33.6 percent in 2025. Unemployment for 15–19 year-olds is 25.3 percent and 12 percent among 20–24 year-olds.

The Hutt City Council's Homeless and Housing Dashboard says that homelessness and severe housing deprivation remain "a growing challenge," driven by high rental costs, rising public housing waiting lists, and a shortage of affordable homes. About 2,100 people in Lower Hutt, 2 percent of the population, are "severely housing deprived," i.e. living in overcrowded, temporary or "uninhabitable" accommodation.

The average cost of a house in Lower Hutt is nearly \$700,000, which is out of reach for the vast majority of working people. According to Census data, median personal income in Lower Hutt is just \$47,800 per year while average weekly rent ranges between \$565 and \$620 per week—up to two-thirds of the average weekly income.

The council admits that a "significant portion" of local people live in overcrowded conditions or in vehicles. Radio NZ reported late last year on the growing number of working-poor individuals and families living in cars and campervans along the Petone foreshore. Many, including tradespeople and service workers, are employed full or part-time, yet cannot afford standard rental housing or mortgages.

A SEG campaign team last week met Simon who has been unemployed for over a decade following the closure of two NZ Post facilities in Petone in 2015, which eliminated over 100 jobs. SEG members campaigned against the closures, holding an important public meeting in Lower Hutt, one of many it has held over the past two decades, fighting for socialist policies against the unfolding crisis.

Public services in the valley are now disintegrating. Hutt Hospital, a major regional health facility, is too small, grossly understaffed, and the buildings are leaking. In August in the union journal *Kaitaki*, a nurse said "almost every single day there are no beds available. We're struggling not only every winter, but every summer now" with patients "being kept in the hallways of ED for up to 10 hours sometimes."

The Hutt Central Fire Station closed in 2021 after black mould was discovered, with no plan as yet for its rebuilding. The valley's western areas are at risk if there is a fire, since trucks have to travel from the more distant Avalon or Seaview fire stations.

Under Labour-aligned Mayor Ken Laban, the council has identified almost \$61 million in savings over the last three years. Under the National government's plan to cap rate increases at 4 percent, it now needs to find an additional \$10 million in annual savings by 2030 to cut 6 percent of the operating budget. The council said in February that "Lower Hutt is over-served for both pools and library/hub facilities," foreshadowing the services facing the chop.

The intensifying social crisis, mirrored in working class areas across New Zealand and the world, underscores the importance of the SEG's campaign. Its election statement advances a socialist program to reorganise society to meet the pressing social needs of the working class, the vast majority, not the private profits of the super-rich.

This requires an independent political struggle against Labour, the unions and the entire capitalist political establishment. The SEG appeals to all workers in Hutt South to vote for Tom Petterson, and attend our public election meeting on Sunday November 1, at 1:30 p.m. in the Dowse Art Museum. Join the fight to build the new revolutionary party of the working class.

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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