Pseudo-lefts campaign for Labour, Greens in New Zealand election

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As New Zealand approaches an election on November 7, there is widespread hostility among workers and young people to both the National Party, which leads the current coalition government, and the main opposition Labour Party. Combined support for the two major parties has fallen below 60 percent, a historic collapse. Neither will be able to form a government without relying on two or three other parties.

Labour and National, as well as their support parties, share the same basic agenda: to drive down spending on public services and impose the cost of the economic crisis on working people, while sharply increasing military spending and recruitment and integrating New Zealand into US-led imperialist wars.

Workers and young people in New Zealand, as is the case internationally, are being radicalized and looking for a means to oppose war and austerity. The Socialist Equality Group's election campaign in the Hutt South electorate—where SEG leader Tom Petterson is standing as a candidate—has found growing anti-capitalist sentiment and support for socialist ideas.

The political establishment is deeply alarmed by these developments. National's far-right coalition partners, ACT and NZ First, have repeatedly railed against Marxism and "communism," echoing the rhetoric of US President Trump.

Meanwhile, the trade union bureaucracy and various middle-class, pseudo-left organisations—including the International Socialist Organisation (ISO) and Socialist Aotearoa (SA)—are seeking to steer left-wing and anti-war sentiment back into the arms of Labour and its allies, the Greens and Te P?ti M?ori (TPM).

The aim of these groups is to prevent the development of a socialist leadership in the working class, independent and opposed to all capitalist organisations. The pseudo-lefts deny that capitalism has entered a historic crisis and portray socialist revolution as a distant future prospect. They insist that what must be done now is to elect a Labour-led government and pressure it for reforms.

For several months, since the US and Israel launched their criminal war against Iran, the ISO and SA have been dressing up Labour, a right-wing, imperialist party, as an ally in the movement against war.

In March, SA held a public meeting to promote Labour and the Greens as "anti-war." SA leader Joe Carolan later told a rally in Auckland against the war: "If we want to get rid of this right-wing government, we're going to need Labour."

A statement by the ISO in May called for "building coalitions that include trade unions … and reformist organisations like Greens and Labour parties" to oppose the Iran war.

The pseudo-lefts covered up Labour's long record of supporting US-led imperialist wars, which have killed millions. In 2001 a Labour-led coalition government, which included the fake left Alliance Party, sent troops to join the US-led invasion of Afghanistan. Labour also sent soldiers to take part in the war in Iraq in 2003.

The last Labour-led government of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, which included the Greens, sent troops to Britain to train Ukrainian conscripts for the US-NATO war against Russia. The ISO openly supports the war, echoing the US and European imperialist powers' propaganda that it is aimed at defending "democracy" and "independence." In fact, Russia's invasion in 2022 was deliberately provoked by the NATO powers, whose objective is to gain full control over Ukraine, Eastern Europe and Russia itself.

The wars in the Middle East and against Russia are part of a developing world war, whose main target is China. The election statements published by the ISO and SA do not even mention China, despite the critical role played by Australia and New Zealand as US allies in the militarisation of the Pacific region against China.

SA's October 1 article "Election 2026—The Socialist Way Forward" includes the demand: "No to any US alliance or military spending," while simultaneously calling for "maximum unity" with Labour to defeat the National-led government. It does not mention Labour's support for the alliance with Washington, including New Zealand's membership in the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing network, which is playing a significant role in war planning against China.

On domestic policy, the pseudo-lefts promote the fraud that a Labour-led government will improve conditions for workers. An editorial by the ISO on September 30 ("Vote Out the Government—Build a Socialist Alternative") stated that Labour would lead "a centrist government which sees workers as at least part of their political base, and will occasionally act to appease that base … we ought to take any action that can shift our line forward, however modest."

In a November 1 article the ISO describes the Green Party's co-leader Chlöe Swarbrick as a "*reformist* eco-socialist" and states that "a high party vote for the Greens will help to put pressure on Chris Hipkins and Labour to adopt more progressive social, economic, and environmental policies than Labour would otherwise."

The ISO has peddled this fraud for many years. In 2017, it reacted with euphoria to the Labour's formation of a coalition government with the Greens and the right-wing nationalist NZ First Party. The ISO claimed that Jacinda Ardern's government was offering "real reforms" that were "better than [we] dared hope possible."

In fact, as the SEG alone warned, Ardern led a right-wing government that suppressed pay for healthcare workers and teachers, strengthened ties with US imperialism and oversaw an increase in homelessness and child poverty. Labour adopted many of NZ First's

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anti-immigrant positions to scapegoat migrants for unemployment, low wages and crumbling infrastructure.

The government's main response to the COVID pandemic was to hand out tens of billions of dollars in subsidies to big business, leading to soaring prices and inequality. In 2022, Ardern ended the initially successful COVID elimination policy, leading to thousands of deaths and severe illnesses.

The Greens facilitated these attacks. For six years the Greens voted for the Ardern government's budgets, which funnelled more money to the military and starved public services. The party joined hands with NZ First to openly argue for greater military spending, and backed NZ's role in the Ukraine war against Russia. In the current election, the Greens are seeking to whitewash the imperialist war in Afghanistan by standing former SAS commando Josh Jacobsen in the North Shore electorate.

It was the social devastation created by Labour and its allies, including the Greens, that opened the door for the current government to come to power in 2023. The National Party and its far-right allies, ACT and NZ First, had no significant popular support, but benefited from the disillusionment with Labour, which received under 27 percent of the vote.

The pseudo-lefts are not simply mistaken. They speak for definite layers of the upper-middle class, in the universities, the trade unions and the parliamentary establishment, whose aim is not the overthrow of capitalism but to create a more comfortable existence for themselves. Their privileged position depends on the prosperity of NZ capitalism, which in turn rests on the imperialist alliances with the US and Australia, and the suppression of working-class struggles.

The ISO and SA have responded to the increasing industrial actions and strikes—such as the joint strike by 100,000 teachers and healthcare workers last October—by glorifying the union bureaucracy. The unions, which act as an industrial police force, have pushed through one sellout deal after another, helping to drive down real wages by 6.4 percent over the past five years. The pseudo-lefts are intensely hostile to the SEG's call for workers to build rank-and-file committees, independent of the union apparatus and all capitalist parties, to wage a real fight against austerity and war.

Throughout the world, pseudo-left organisations act as the left-wing of the capitalist political establishment, seeking to steer leftward-moving youth and workers away from a revolutionary and internationalist perspective.

An article of faith for all such groups is that revolution is impossible for the foreseeable future because capitalism is stable. The ISO's initial election statement asserted that "The capitalist state is not currently facing any meaningful crisis of political legitimacy, and it is mere wishful thinking to attempt to argue this crisis into being."

In reality, capitalism has entered a period of breakdown that is driving the imperialist powers in the US and Europe into world war to conquer new markets and resources. The same crisis is driving millions of workers into struggle. In France, Spain, Germany and other European countries, young people and workers are engaged in mass protests and strikes against austerity and the threats of conscription and fascism. Dock workers at 113 ports in 22 countries recently struck against the shipment of weapons for war.

The more explosive this global crisis becomes, the more vehemently the pseudo-lefts insist that nothing can be done except to "pressure" right-wing governments for reforms. In France, the "left populist" Jean-Luc Mélenchon, along with the French union leaders, says that President Macron should offer token reforms—even as his government unleashes police violence against young people and is preparing for dictatorship.

The Democratic Socialists of America's (DSA) New York mayor Zohran Mamdani—who is glorified by SA in New Zealand—claims that it is possible to collaborate with the fascist and war criminal Donald Trump to make life more affordable.

In Australia, the Victorian Socialists (VS) are standing in the state election with a program of very limited reforms, similar to that of the Greens, which the organisation claims can be extracted by getting into parliament and putting pressure on Labor governments. VS and its national arm, the recently formed Australian Socialist Party (ASP), are hailed by the ISO, which says "a New Zealand equivalent … is sorely needed," even while admitting that the ASP is "not revolutionary."

Like the ASP and the DSA, the New Zealand pseudo-lefts trace their origins to tendencies which broke from the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement, during the last century and adapted themselves to nationalism and reformism. They have since lurched further to the right and transformed into openly pro-imperialist appendages of the union bureaucracy and the established parties.

The insistence by the ISO and Socialist Aotearoa that Labour and the Greens can be made to serve the working class is a 21st-century version of the Stalinist Popular Front policy, which Trotsky fought against in the 1930s. The Popular Fronts subordinated the workers of France and Spain to alliances with capitalist parties and governments, betraying revolutionary movements and paving the way for fascism.

The Socialist Equality Group's intervention in the 2026 election is directed against all these tendencies. Its campaign in Hutt South is not a bid for a seat in parliament to "pressure" a future Labour government. Its focus is on the most urgent political task: to build a new party based on the whole heritage of the struggle for Marxism and Trotskyism and the lessons of all the victories and defeats of the working class.

The Fourth International was founded on the understanding that the crisis of humanity is a crisis of revolutionary leadership in the working class. Building that revolutionary leadership today requires a relentless political struggle to expose every capitalist party, the union bureaucracy and their pseudo-left defenders.

We urge workers and young people to support our campaign, vote for the SEG's candidate Tom Petterson in Hutt South, but most importantly to join the SEG and fight to build the New Zealand section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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