Major parties' support collapses, no clear winner in New Zealand election

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The New Zealand election last Saturday has produced a crisis for the ruling elite, with neither the incumbent National Party nor the opposition Labour Party able to declare victory.

Support for the two capitalist parties that have dominated politics for most of the past century collapsed. National received 29.21 percent, a major drop from 38 percent in the last election, while Labour got just 29.36 percent. Their combined result, less than 59 percent, is the lowest it has ever been. More than 4 out of 10 votes went to one of the smaller parties.

Whether either side is able to form a coalition government will not be clear for weeks or even months. An estimated 399,365 special votes cast overseas, or by people voting outside their electorate, or who enrolled after the electoral roll was published, about 14 percent of the total, will not be counted until November 27. This could eliminate the National-led bloc's current two-seat majority.

Media commentators are expressing nervousness about the uncertainty and the likely instability of the next government. The *Post*'s Josie Pagani wrote: "Whether National or Labour now provide the PM, that PM will be politically weak" and predicted that a government would not be formed before Christmas.

Turnout, estimated at 74.6 percent of enrolled voters, is the second-lowest in New Zealand's history. Factoring in 6.3 percent of eligible people who did not enrol, turnout falls to just 69.9 percent. More than 1.2 million people, nearly one-third of eligible adults, did not vote.

This points to mass hostility and alienation from the entire political establishment. As is the case internationally, the economic crisis, soaring living costs and the developing world war are driving workers and young people to the left and into struggles. The lead-up to the election saw nationwide strikes by university and polytechnic workers, retail workers, firefighters and public servants.

The National Party has led a right-wing coalition government for the past three years that imposed brutal austerity measures. It slashed thousands of jobs from the public sector, increased student fees, kicked thousands of unemployed youth off welfare, and cut wages for teachers and healthcare workers.

The Labour Party, however, had no fundamental differences with any of this. It promised during the election campaign to continue cutting spending, while supporting National's plan to double the military budget.

This bipartisan agenda, decided behind the backs of the working class, is the reason why the election campaign was so empty. The urgent issues facing workers were buried by the media and the established parties. There was no discussion about New Zealand's integration into the unfolding world war targeting Russia, Iran and China. Nor did any party offer any solutions to plummeting wages, soaring unemployment and the vast increase in the cost of living facing workers.

In the preliminary results, the National Party and its far-right allies, ACT and NZ First, have 67 out of 131 seats in parliament. Incumbent Prime Minister Christopher Luxon declared on election night, "we have a pathway to forming the next government," but added that "it is too close to call."

The National Party has 42 seats compared with Labour's 36, despite getting fewer party votes than Labour. This is because the Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) voting system allows people to vote for both an electorate MP and a party.

The billionaire Mowbray family—New Zealand's richest family—ran a campaign encouraging right-wing voters to "split your vote" by voting for National's electorate candidates and giving their party vote to ACT or NZ First. National appears to have won seven more seats than what it would be entitled to based on its party vote.

National has lost senior MPs who were not standing in electorates, including Finance Minister Nicola Willis, Attorney-General Chris Bishop, Justice Minister Paul Goldsmith and Speaker Gerry Brownlee. Its far-right partners, meanwhile, have grown stronger, giving them more sway in the coalition. The ACT Party, which advocates for a drastic reduction in the size of government and a three-year freeze on the minimum wage, increased its vote share from 8.6 percent in 2023 to 10.9 percent. The racist, anti-immigrant NZ First Party got 9.78 percent, up from 6.08 percent in the last election.

These results do not reflect a shift to the right among workers. Combined support for National, ACT and NZ First has fallen from 52.7 percent three years ago to just 49.9 percent. Even if this does not drop further when special votes are counted, it means that just 34.8 percent of the eligible population voted to re-elect the coalition.

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A re-elected National-led government will have no significant popular support and will come into direct conflict with the working class. There is already mass hostility to its austerity measures, soaring living costs and its support for the criminal US-Israeli war against Iran. The country is in a profound social crisis: more than one in five children lives in poverty, one in 10 people rely on food banks, and 112,000 people are "severely housing deprived."

The Labour Party, however, did not benefit from this. Despite the efforts of the pseudo-left groups and the trade union bureaucracy to portray Labour as a progressive alternative, its vote share increased only slightly from its crushing defeat in 2023, when it got 26.9 percent. If National and its allies are in a position to return to power, it is because of the bitter anger among workers towards Labour.

The 2017-2023 Labour-led government, which included the Greens and (until 2020) NZ First, was responsible for widening social inequality, homelessness and child poverty. It starved healthcare and education and, in 2022, scrapped the initially successful COVID-19 elimination policy, leading to thousands of deaths and severe illnesses.

For the past three years Labour has worked with the union bureaucracy to suppress opposition to the National-led government's attacks. The unions systematically isolated and betrayed mass struggles, including the October 2025 strike by 100,000 teachers and healthcare workers, pushing through real wage cuts and telling workers to place their hopes on the election.

If Labour is able to stitch together a coalition government, it will be a highly unstable alliance of four parties, which will be tasked with imposing the same ruthless agenda of war and austerity. Labour leader Chris Hipkins used his election-night address to signal a further shift to the right, declaring that the next parliament would "require all of us to compromise, to work together and to find a common ground."

The Green Party got 13.3 percent in this election, its highest result ever, largely at Labour's expense. The Greens' campaign postured against the "super-rich" but promoted a very modest wealth tax, which will be ditched if the Greens join a Labour-led coalition government.

During the 2017-2023 government, the Greens supported Labour's budgets which starved public services and boosted military spending. In 2026 the Greens signalled their pro-imperialist credentials by standing a former SAS member who fought in Afghanistan as a candidate.

The Opportunity Party (TOP) gained 5.96 percent of the votes and will enter parliament for the first time with 7 seats. TOP is a pro-business party, funded by multimillionaire tech entrepreneurs and with an upper middle class supporter base. Like the Greens, it promotes the fraud that the problems of affordability, climate change and the housing crisis can all be solved within capitalism. It has said that it could join either a National- or Labour-led coalition, and could soon be in a position to choose which party will lead the next government.

Members of the M?ori nationalist Te P?ti M?ori (TPM) won 5 of the 7 special M?ori electorate seats (Labour candidates won the other two). This is down from 6 seats that TPM gained in the last election. One academic told Radio NZ that the margins of victory for TPM's leading members had "decreased hugely."

The party, which hopes to enter a Labour-led coalition government, represents indigenous business interests and was part of a National-led coalition from 2008 to 2017. Last year it descended into chaos after an internal power struggle between rival representatives of the M?ori bourgeoisie, resulting in the expulsion of two MPs.

In opposition to all these parties, the Socialist Equality Group intervened in the election and stood a candidate, Tom Petterson, in the Hutt South electorate. This was the first time the Trotskyist movement has stood in a New Zealand election. In the preliminary results, Petterson gained 42 votes, all of which would have been highly conscious votes for a socialist alternative.

Moreover, the SEG's campaign was not aimed primarily at getting votes. It warned the working class that nothing would be resolved by the election or through parliament.

The SEG is fighting to give the emerging anti-capitalist and anti-war sentiment among workers a conscious, socialist and internationalist perspective. SEG members and supporters spoke with hundreds of workers, distributed thousands of copies of the group's election statement, and held an important public meeting, raising the fundamental class issues buried by the entire political establishment.

It explained that whatever unstable coalition government is formed in the coming weeks and months, the working class will face immense struggles against imperialist war and the assault on social programs and living standards. Workers will come into conflict with the entire political establishment and the trade union apparatus, which serves to facilitate wage cuts, mass redundancies and other attacks demanded by big business and the state.

The critical task is to build the necessary socialist and internationalist leadership to unite workers in New Zealand with those in Australia, the Pacific and internationally to put an end to the capitalist system and establish a socialist society. We call on workers and young people to join the SEG and fight to build the New Zealand section of the Trotskyist movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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