New Zealand election: Opportunity Party's fraudulent "alternative"

John Braddock
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The New Zealand election on November 7 produced no clear winner and a historic collapse in support for the two main bourgeois parties.

In the preliminary results, the incumbent National Party and its far-right allies, ACT and NZ First, have the edge with 67 out of 131 seats in parliament. National with 29.2 percent of votes has 42 seats, more than Labour on 36 seats, but Labour received slightly more votes at 29.36 percent.

Final results will not be announced until November 27 after the counting of 399,365 special votes, cast mainly by people voting outside their electorate, about 14 percent of the total. Formal negotiations would then begin to try and form a coalition government of three or more parties.

The deadlock points to mass hostility and alienation from the entire political establishment. About 1.2 million people, nearly one-third of eligible adults, did not vote. 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 escalating class struggles.

A key role in forming the next government could fall to the Opportunity Party (TOP), which emerged with 5.96 percent of the preliminary vote and seven seats, putting it in a potentially "kingmaker" position.

TOP was founded in 2016 by multimillionaire economist Gareth Morgan. This is the first time it has exceeded the 5 percent vote threshold needed to enter parliament.

The party has received considerable media promotion as a supposed "alternative" to the discredited major parties. Leader Qiulae Wong, a former KPMG consultant, presented TOP as "centrist," neither left- nor right-wing and against "ideology and tribal allegiance."

In fact, it is a right-wing party, funded by tech entrepreneurs and supported by layers of the upper-middle class. Wong has repeatedly stated that TOP is prepared to enter a coalition with either of the main parties of big business and imperialist war, Labour or National.

Following the election, National's Prime Minister Christopher Luxon held a meeting with Wong, despite having previously ruled out working with TOP. He described it as a "very constructive conversation."

Soon afterwards, Labour leader Chris Hipkins and Greens' Chloe Swarbrick also met with Wong. A campaign is under way to persuade TOP to join a Labour-led coalition.

Swarbrick told TVNZ that TOP had "the greatest policy alignment, and I believe the greatest values alignment" with the Greens and Labour, and urged it to "choose positivity and optimism for the future of our country."

Martyn Bradbury, editor of the pro-Labour *Daily Blog*, called on Labour and its allies to "consider what they could offer TOP" in the way of policy "wins." Bradbury is promoting TOP as either "a brake pedal to the most extreme elements of ACT and [NZ First] or they open the door to a Government that could be as transformative as Savage." Michael Joseph Savage, Labour's first prime minister, enacted major reforms to defend NZ capitalism from the threat of revolution amid the 1930s depression.

The comparison is absurd. None of the establishment parties is offering anything resembling social reforms. The wooing of TOP reflects the right-wing politics of Labour and the Greens, which have no fundamental differences with National. Labour made clear during the election campaign that it will continue to slash public services, while supporting National's plan to double the military budget.

The last Labour-Greens government, from 2017-2023, starved hospitals and schools of funding and oversaw a severe housing crisis and worsening real wages. It strengthened ties with US imperialism, including by deploying NZ troops to assist in training Ukrainian conscripts for the war against Russia.

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TOP's five policy "bottom lines" for any coalition deal could be accommodated by Labour or National. They include vague calls to address "anti-competitive businesses" supposedly to bring down prices, and for a 10-year, cross-party plan for healthcare. TOP also wants to cap political donations, phase out bottom trawling in the fishing industry and "recommit" to NZ's obligations under the Paris climate agreement. Like the Greens, TOP peddles the fraud that the climate crisis cannot be resolved through appeals to the capitalist governments that created it.

Not included in TOP's "bottom lines" are its main economic policies, including a pitifully low universal basic income (below current benefit levels), funded by a 1.75 percent annual land value tax. This policy would have placed heavier burdens on all home owners, while imposing relatively few costs on businesses, which TOP said should receive more research and innovation tax credits. Nevertheless, the party has dropped the policy, which was anathema to both Labour and National, both of which have encouraged speculation in the property market.

Along with every other capitalist party, TOP has suppressed the issue of the developing world war. Its website has no defence or foreign policy statement. It has made no criticism of the integration of New Zealand into advanced US-led war preparations against China.

Speaking with 95bFM on October 28, Wong said that New Zealand should "take a leadership role here in the Pacific" by "supporting our neighbours when it comes to economic issues, climate change issues, and also defence." What this actually means is that New Zealand should strengthen its role as an imperialist power in the Pacific, a region that is being heavily militarised by the US, Australia and NZ as part of the anti-China build-up.

TOP issued a single brief statement on March 3 condemning the US-Israeli attack on Iran, but it does not call for ending NZ's alliance with US imperialism. An evasive statement last year "on the situation in Gaza," whitewashed Israel's genocide. It absurdly appealed to Israel to "protect civilian lives" and said there should be "meaningful dialogue and a commitment to justice and human rights on both sides."

If it is part of the next government, TOP will support the militarisation of New Zealand society. In an article published in the *New Zealand Herald* on April 9, 2019, Daniel Eb, who is now TOP's deputy leader, glorified compulsory military service in Israel and Singapore as "two examples of proactive, social cohesion policy making."

Eb, who spent several years in the Army Territorial Reserve, said young Israelis' military service allowed them to "develop a variety of skills, practice initiative [and] responsibility and fast-track their careers through military-to-business networks." He proposed that New Zealand introduce "a year of national service" for young people, only adding it need not be military service.

Sections of the media, including the *Herald* itself and the Daily Blog, have also recently called for a return to compulsory military service.

The class position of TOP is confirmed by the wealthy individuals backing it. They include Phillip Mills, a member of the *National Business Review*'s Rich List who has given the party $50,000. TOP's primary backer is tech entrepreneur Alan Wilderland whose total donations exceed $280,000. Wilderland serves on the party's board and participated in selecting Wong as party leader.

According to an analysis by *Stuff*, TOP "powered" into parliament through strong support in upper middle class areas in the inner cities, particularly in the capital Wellington and in central Auckland. TOP's worst-performing electorates were in the M?ori electorates and in working class suburbs of South Auckland including Manurewa, ?t?huhu and M?ngere.

Far from representing a departure from "politics as usual," as it claims, TOP is a creation of the business elite. Its purpose is to provide a further prop for the increasingly discredited major parties and to help shift the entire political establishment further to the right.



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