# The international significance of the SEG's campaign in the New Zealand election

**Socialist Equality Group (New Zealand)**
**27 November 2026**

The Socialist Equality Group's (SEG) campaign in the New Zealand election marked a milestone in the fight to build the New Zealand section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the world Trotskyist movement.

For the first time, the SEG stood a candidate: Tom Petterson in the Hutt South electorate. Petterson received 50 votes, each one a vote for a socialist program opposed to all other parties, despite considerable pressure on workers from the union bureaucracy and pseudo-left groups to vote for Labour and Green Party candidates. We exposed all the false claims that these opposition capitalist parties represented a progressive alternative or a lesser evil to the incumbent National Party and the far-right ACT and NZ First.

At the centre of the SEG's intervention was the fight to build the political leadership necessary to unite the working class in New Zealand with workers internationally in a revolution to overthrow capitalism and build a socialist society. This is the only way to stop the descent into world war, mass poverty and fascist barbarism.

We told workers the truth: that none of the parties in parliament offered any solution to their urgent problems. Whatever their tactical differences, Labour, National and all their allies agree that capitalism must be defended. This requires an intensified assault on workers' living standards, a vast increase in the military budget and New Zealand's integration into the unfolding world war led by US imperialism against Russia, Iran and China.

The austerity measures imposed by successive Labour- and National-led governments have already driven broad layers of workers and young people to the left. This is reflected in the outcome of the election on November 7, which produced no clear winner. Labour and National, the two parties the ruling class has relied upon for most of the past century, received their lowest-ever share of the vote: 58.2 percent combined. More significant still is the near-record low turnout: 1.15 million people, 28 percent of eligible adults, saw no reason to vote for anyone.

After the final vote count was confirmed yesterday, National, ACT and NZ First are expected to spend weeks in talks with the right-wing Opportunity Party to establish a coalition government, which will be highly unstable and unpopular.

New Zealand's political crisis is bound up with the accelerating breakdown of global capitalism. All the imperialist powers are seeking to counter their economic downturn by ramping up the exploitation of the working class, imposing authoritarian forms of rule, and launching devastating wars to seize raw materials and markets. This is fuelling a resurgence of working-class struggles, which confirms the ICFI's prognosis of the 2020s as the decade of socialist revolution.

The New Zealand election took place as millions of workers and youth across Europe held protests and strikes against the unbearable cost of living and war. In the US, there is mass opposition to the fascistic Trump administration and to the Democrats, who offer no real opposition to the assault on immigrants and democratic rights or to the criminal war against Iran.

Workers in New Zealand have also begun to move. In the lead-up to the election thousands of public servants, university and polytechnic staff and firefighters went on strike. There is also profound anti-war sentiment in New Zealand: 87 percent of people oppose any involvement in the Iran war, according to an Ipsos survey. This found no expression in the election campaigns of any of the established parties.

The emerging struggles of the working class must link up across national borders and become a conscious, international movement against capitalism and war. The main political obstacles to this are the social-democratic, liberal and pseudo-left parties, along with the trade union bureaucracy in every country.

In New Zealand, the strike by more than 100,000 teachers and healthcare workers in October 2025—the country's biggest strike in nearly 50 years—was followed by a series of wage-cutting agreements imposed by all the unions, which sought to channel workers' anger into support for Labour's election campaign.

Petterson explained at the SEG's November 1 election meeting that the worsening economic and political crisis creates the objective conditions for socialist revolution. But, he added, "in the last century there was no shortage of revolutionary opportunities that were missed or betrayed. Capitalism has survived not because of its inherent strength or because workers didn't fight, but rather, as Leon Trotsky explained, because the working class faced a 'crisis of revolutionary leadership.'"

The ICFI is leading the political fight to resolve this crisis. It is building the leadership that will unite workers of all countries based on their common class interests, in opposition to all the Stalinist and pseudo-left organisations, which utilise "left" rhetoric to chain workers to bourgeois nationalist and imperialist parties.

In the past decade the ICFI has founded new sections in France (2016), Türkiye (2025) and Canada (2026), and is working with the Socialist Equality Group in Brazil and the Young Guard of

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Bolshevik-Leninists in the former Soviet Union toward founding new sections. The work of the SEG in New Zealand is part of this international fight.

Our election campaign opposed the national exceptionalism that dominates official New Zealand politics, including its supposedly "left" currents. Labour, the Greens, the M?ori nationalist Te P?ti M?ori and the pseudo-lefts all promote the myth that NZ can shield itself, at least to some degree, from the turmoil engulfing other countries and provide a kinder, more egalitarian version of capitalism.

In reality, the economic and social crisis in New Zealand is a stark manifestation of the global crisis. The country's ruling class presides over some of the sharpest levels of inequality in the developed world—including a child poverty rate of about one-in-five and widespread food insecurity and homelessness.

New Zealand is a minor imperialist power, which, alongside Australia, has oppressed much of the Pacific region for more than a century. It is seeking to corral the Pacific island nations behind the US-led drive to war against China.

The SEG's election statement called for an end to all military spending and alliances and the withdrawal of NZ troops from overseas deployments, including in the Pacific. It also urged workers in New Zealand to unite with their counterparts across the Pacific, Asia and Australia against imperialist war and austerity, by building rank-and-file committees that are democratically controlled and independent of both the union apparatus and the capitalist parties. These committees must link workers in New Zealand across all industries with workers in Australia, Asia, the Pacific and around the world through the International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

The election underscored the vast gulf separating this revolutionary and internationalist program from the pro-imperialist, pseudo-left organisations in New Zealand, which represent layers of the affluent middle class. These groups, including the International Socialist Organisation and Socialist Aotearoa, campaigned for Labour, the Greens and Te P?ti M?ori.

A high vote for the Greens, the ISO claimed, would "help to put pressure on Chris Hipkins and Labour to adopt more progressive social, economic, and environmental policies."

This is refuted by the record of the 2017–2023 Labour-Greens government led by Jacinda Ardern and Hipkins, which also included the right-wing nationalist NZ First until 2020. Labour adopted NZ First's anti-immigrant policies to scapegoat foreigners for worsening inequality and homelessness. In 2022, Ardern ditched the initially successful COVID-19 elimination policy, allowing COVID to spread and kill thousands.

The Greens were complicit in the Ardern government's crimes. They backed Labour's budgets, which starved healthcare and education, and argued for greater military spending. The Labour-Greens government strengthened ties with US and European imperialism by deploying troops to Britain to train Ukrainian conscripts for the war against Russia. The ISO also supports the US-NATO imperialist war with Russia, echoing Washington's propaganda that it is a war for democracy and "sovereignty."

As Petterson explained at the SEG's November 1 meeting: "The Ardern government's record is the key to understanding how the current coalition government came to power. National and its far-right allies, ACT and NZ First, never had significant popular support; but in the absence of a socialist alternative to Labour, these parties benefited from the widespread disillusionment and anger."

Organisations like the ISO and SA represent sections of the middle class—in and around the unions, universities, parliamentary parties and state bureaucracy—that seek to advance their position within the existing system. These groups are descended from tendencies that broke from the Trotskyist movement during and after World War II and have lurched further and further to the right and into the camp of imperialism.

The ICFI was founded in 1953 to defend orthodox Trotskyism against the attempt to liquidate the Fourth International as an independent party by adapting it to the existing Stalinist, bourgeois nationalist or social-democratic parties. For 73 years it has waged an intransigent struggle to defend the Marxist program of world revolution against every form of petty-bourgeois nationalist politics that has passed as "left" for much of the past century, including the attempts to replace working-class politics with identity politics based on race, gender and sexuality.

The ICFI's defence of the continuity of Trotskyism is being vindicated by the present breakdown of capitalism as well as the right-wing trajectory of every reformist and pseudo-left organisation. Growing numbers of workers recognise that the crisis they face has no solution within the national state and the profit system.

The most conscious expression of this shift within New Zealand was the Socialist Equality Group's election campaign. The task of building the Trotskyist movement in NZ must now be taken forward. The working class is entering struggles that pose sharply the question of leadership, which can only be provided by a party armed with a Marxist understanding of all the revolutionary victories and defeats of the twentieth century.

We call on workers and young people who are serious about fighting to abolish capitalism and build a socialist society to study the history and program of the ICFI, and to join the SEG in laying the foundations for its New Zealand section.

Attend our online meeting, "After New Zealand's election—Build an international socialist movement!" on Sunday December 6, at 6:00 p.m. (NZ time).

**Register here to participate in this important discussion via Zoom.**

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