

New Zealand: Pseudo-left International Socialist Organisation backs Labour, Greens in election

By John Braddock
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The New Zealand wing of the pseudo-left International Socialist Organisation (ISO) published a statement on its web site on July 22 presenting its “perspectives and approach” for the country’s September 23 parliamentary election.

The statement, headed “Kick National out!—Build a Socialist Alternative, Reject Racism—the Left must welcome immigrants,” was reportedly agreed at a special conference on July 8–9 attended by about 25 members. From beginning to end it underscores the fact that the ISO is in no sense socialist, but is a nationalist, middle-class group operating within the political establishment.

The ISO asserts that the election must “see the end” of the National Party government, to be replaced by a Labour-Greens coalition, supported by the trade unions. According to the ISO, the election promises of these two capitalist parties, which will be quickly ditched after the election, “would make a material difference in workers’ lives.”

This is a lie. Labour and the Greens are not a “lesser evil” compared to National. During the election campaign, Labour has attacked National from the right, calling for greater cuts to immigration, more police and increased military spending. It is widely despised in the working class, who correctly see it as no alternative to National. Both “opposition” parties have agreed to a set of Budget Responsibility Rules, reassuring big business they would deepen the austerity agenda and maintain the same expenditure cap as every government since the 1990s.

Labour is in sharp historic decline. On August 1, party leader Andrew Little stepped down to make way for his deputy Jacinda Ardern. The resignation came after six weeks of deepening unpopularity and polls that placed the party’s support at just 23 percent—its worst result since

1995. Adern is now Labour’s fifth leader since 2008.

The 2017 election is taking place under conditions of global economic slump and rising geo-political tensions. Around the world, governments are attacking the democratic rights and destroying the living standards of the working class in order to boost the profits of a handful of billionaires.

The most urgent danger facing the international working class is the drive to war. As US imperialism seeks to utilise its military might to offset economic decline, it is engaged in ever-more reckless ventures in every corner of the globe, threatening to spark a nuclear conflagration. Every party of the New Zealand ruling elite has committed to Washington’s intensifying military provocations in Asia, the Middle East and Europe.

The struggle for socialism is not a distant question but the immediate task posed by the objective situation and emerging class struggles. A hundred years after the Russian Revolution, the working class is again faced with the task of mobilising on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program to prevent a capitalist war.

The dangers and tasks facing workers find no reflection in the ISO statement, which centres on petty calculations of how to “put pressure on the government of the day” within the national parliamentary set-up.

The ISO’s only mention of war is a call to “stop imperialist wars,” without further explanation. In reality, the group is part of an international tendency that promotes the pro-war agenda of the US imperialism.

The ISO has singled out and falsely branded China and Russia as imperialist powers. Last year the group led protests outside the Russian embassy in Wellington blaming Moscow, not Washington, for the destruction and carnage in Syria. It works closely with a Syrian Solidarity group that demands military intervention by the

UN and the US in support of Islamist, anti-Assad militias.

The ISO parades its supposed opposition to racism and the anti-immigrant policies of the major parties, but its record speaks otherwise.

All the pseudo-left groups—the ISO, Fightback and Socialist Aotearoa—embedded themselves in the Maori nationalist Mana Party and campaigned for it in the 2011 and 2014 elections, promoting it as “anti-racist,” “pro-poor” and “anti-capitalist.” These claims were always a sham. Mana represents sections of the Maori upper-middle class and elite. It has echoed calls by Labour and NZ First to cut immigration and denounced “people of Asian descent” for owning “too many homes.”

The ISO quit Mana on a purely pragmatic basis after Mana failed to win any seats in the 2014 election. The lack of any principled differences was highlighted by the ISO’s declaration it would still be “proud to work alongside” Mana.

It was further underlined this June when Mana leader Hone Harawira demanded that Chinese people involved in the illegal methamphetamine trade should be “executed.” The ISO has not denounced this racist, draconian call to bring back the death penalty, nor explained why it glorified Harawira for years, describing him in 2013 as “the only principled MP in parliament.”

The pseudo-lefts share Harawira’s nationalist and pro-capitalist politics. They joined Mana hoping to advance their own position within the political establishment. All of them are steeped in identity politics, which elevates race and gender above the fundamental division in society of class, and is one of the main political mechanisms for sections of the middle class to advance their careers in politics, academia, the trade unions and business.

The ISO has joined the efforts by the media and political establishment to prevent the Labour Party’s collapse. It welcomed Ardern’s elevation to the leadership, declaring she was “no left-winger,” but if her leadership “helps get some momentum—any momentum—into Labour kicking National out then so much the better.”

The installation of Ardern as Labour’s second female leader, alongside Kelvin Davis, the party’s first Maori deputy leader, has not altered the party’s pro-corporate and imperialist agenda. It was a calculated appeal to upper-middle class layers on the basis of gender and racial identity politics and thus fits with the ISO’s own political preoccupations.

The ISO characterises Labour and the Greens not as capitalist parties, but as “opportunist”—in other words, as parties of the “left” that can be pressured in the “right direction” from outside parliament by protests and strikes. The ISO holds up Jeremy Corbyn’s “stunning success” in Britain as an example of how workers can be won to a supposed “left wing program.”

This is a complete fraud. Corbyn in the UK, like Bernie Sanders in the US, is the undeserving and temporary beneficiary of a leftward movement among workers and youth. Despite his campaign rhetoric, Corbyn is not a socialist and had already abandoned many of his purported principles in the course of the UK election. UK Labour’s election manifesto contained many demands of the party’s Blairite right-wing, including a tight limit on government spending as well as support for NATO and the Trident nuclear weapons system.

Corbyn, moreover, is just as nationalist and anti-immigrant as his NZ Labour counterparts. He declared in June that the “wholesale importation of underpaid workers” from the European Union was used to “destroy” the conditions of British workers, and demanded new restrictions.

The promotion of Corbyn by the ISO and pseudo-left outfits internationally stems from the needs of the ruling classes to block the development of revolutionary consciousness in working class. The Socialist Equality Group in New Zealand exposes the role of the ISO and other pseudo-left groups in order to build an independent political movement of the working class against war, social inequality and attacks on democratic rights on the basis of genuine socialist internationalism.

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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