
Mana movement

Mana Party foundation hui and Te Tai Tokerau by-election

Mike Kay, Workers Party Auckland and Mana Te Raki Paewhenua (North Shore) branch, July 4, 2011

Following Hone Harawira's election victory, Mana convened a foundation hui of activists in Whangarei on 26 June. I will summarise the proceedings of the hui conducted in English below, followed by an assessment of the by-election, and a political appraisal of the prospects for Mana.

In Whangarei Matt McCarten set the tone by stating: "We did not just win a by-election, we changed the nature of politics. There's a lot of people out there who are not sure what they want, but they know what they don't want. The entire political elite and establishment were against us - there were four anti-Hone editorials in the Herald. We represent danger because we cannot be bought."

Annette Sykes described Mana as "a Kaupapa Māori party that transcends race, whanau and hapū... also a party of the workers." She said Mana should work with unions and left activists. On Te

Tiriti, she proposed abolition of the 2014 deadline for settlements and opposed the Crown "deciding who our leaders are." On environmental issues, she opposed the Emissions Trading Scheme on the basis that it does not make the polluters pay. In Education, she proposed that Te Reo become a compulsory language. She talked of the need for Mana to embrace Pākehā as well, and oppose neo-liberal policies that "put profit before people, bankers before workers and privatisation before the Treaty."

Hilda Harawira spoke of the mamae (pain) and betrayal still felt by Te Tai Tokerau after its experience with the Māori Party. Talking of the effort put in by activists in the campaign, she said "the poorest gave more."

Hone Harawira announced that he would be embarking on a "Hikoi of Hope" across the country to help launch Mana as a national movement. The hui also made a number of other decisions:

Hone was endorsed as leader, Raewyn Harrison endorsed as interim Party Secretary and Matt McCarten endorsed as interim President. An interim Executive of six people was established, to be supplemented by representatives from each region. The following few weeks were designated as time for branches to discuss Mana's draft policy in advance of its first AGM on 6 August in Auckland. There was a consensus to hold out an olive branch to the Māori Party to see if an agreement on standing in the other Māori seats could be brokered within the next month. But most of the participants were realistic about its likely prospects. Most probably, Mana will stand against the Māori Party in those seats, and contest some general seats as well. Although McCarten said that candidates standing in the general seats would primarily seek the party vote for Mana.

What Mana lacked in resources and



Hone Harawira speaking at the launch of the Mana Party at the Mahurehure marae in Auckland, April 30th.



Mana Party leaders at Mahimara Marae in Kaitiaia, June 25, the polling day of the Te Tai Tokerau by-election

a fully worked out political programme for the by-election, it made up for in enthusiasm and commitment. Essentially, activists sought votes on Harawira's record, and Te Tai Tokerau responded by endorsing him and the Mana movement. As well as retaining the political advantages that being a party leader in parliament affords, Harawira has gained a mandate. Whilst the Labour candidate Kelvin Davis claimed to have made serious inroads, Mana still managed to win the polling stations at Kaitia Intermediate (where Davis was headmaster) and Hoani Waititi (Pita Sharples' marae).

It is not surprising that Harawira's majority was slashed standing as a Mana candidate, compared to standing as a Māori Party candidate. His former party, whilst splitting from Labour, remained a part of the political establishment, evidenced by the ease with which they allied with the Nats. Mana, however, represents a class break from the Māori party. Because of the low level of class consciousness, to say nothing of the class differentiation within Te Tai Tokerau, the appeal of Mana was always going to be limited. But the fact of its success means

that Mana can lead to a sharpening of class consciousness around the general election. Even without the intervention of leftist groups, many Mana activists instinctively grasp the reality that the party needs to differentiate itself from its political rivals most especially on class questions.

While some left wing commentators have pointed out flaws in Mana, including left nationalism, excessive identity politics and parliamentarianism, they overlook the fact that this is a party with a strong base amongst workers and oppressed and which includes many activists motivated by socialist ideas.

What is striking about Mana's activist base is that it is in large part female. These wāhine Māori have created a parallel women's movement based around struggles for Kōhanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Māori. It is also far more inclusive than many other would-be progressive movements, embracing young and old, straight and takatāpui.

In my short involvement in Mana, I have found it to be an open and democratic party. Anyone is welcome to raise their views, providing they do the hard yards in the campaign work.

Socialists who have misgivings or apprehensions about Mana would do well to engage with their local branch before writing the movement off so early in the day.

For a young movement starting out, the people involved in setting it up have a great influence in its subsequent development. As Lenin observed:

"To say, however, that ideologists (i.e., politically conscious leaders) cannot divert the movement from the path determined by the interaction of environment and elements is to ignore the simple truth that the conscious element participates in this interaction and in the determination of the path. Catholic and monarchist labour unions in Europe are also an inevitable result of the interaction of environment and elements, but it was the consciousness of priests and Zubatovs [Colonel of the Gendarmes] and not that of socialists that participated in this interaction". (Iskra, 6 December 1901)

In other words, if revolutionaries want to see Mana develop in a revolutionary direction, they will have to involve themselves in it.