

Expanded election issue

The SPARK

For workers' power and international socialism

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Editorial

Jared Phillips

This month we present an expanded issue of *The Spark* which puts forward a socialist position on the upcoming general elections.*This starts with an assessment of the Mana Party project from a socialist point of view. In the following pages we have an assessment of other major parties which attempts to capture their current direction and articulate correct socialist strategies towards each of them. These are followed by a reprinted article from an earlier issue of *The Spark* which puts forward a pro-MMP position for the upcoming election. We also include material from both national days of

student action against fee increases, cuts to courses, and voluntary student membership. In regards to issues of internationalism we cover some of the issues for international students, take a look at the plight of a group of fishermen who were stranded in New Zealand, and report on the struggle against redundancy by a group of Kiribati workers north of Auckland.

*The September issue of *The Spark* was foregone in order to prepare for this expanded issue which we will continue to circulate throughout the general elections.

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The Spark magazine is now in its 20th year as we continue the long-term fight for socialism. Readers and supporters may consider remembering us in their will with assets or money that will help the struggle in the long-term. If this is you please put in your will 'Workers Party, PO Box 10-282, Dominion Road, Auckland' as well as what you would like to leave to us.

Mana Party pushes working class issues this election

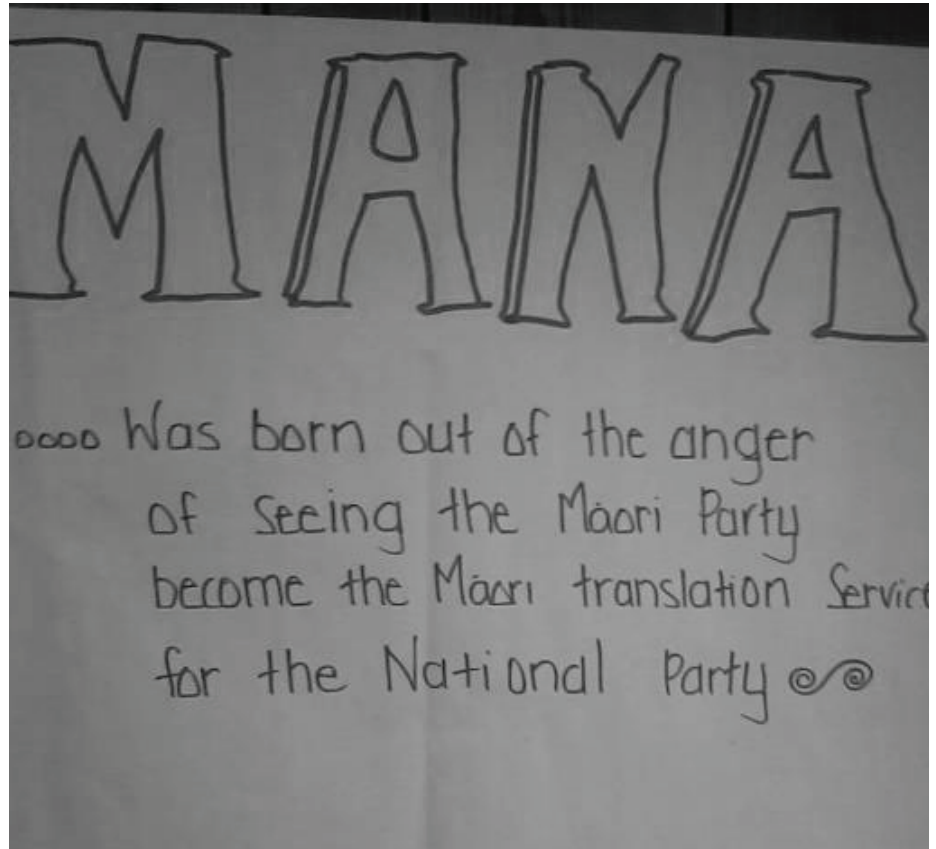
Drawn from our experiences in Mana this article by Jared Phillips puts forward a socialist appraisal of the party so far.

Formation of the Mana Party

The Maori Party, after going into government with the National and Act parties fell into line and became supportive of anti-working class policies such as increasing GST (a consumer tax). As Maori Party MP for Te Tai Tokerau (the Northern-most Maori electorate) Hone Harawira opposed this and he wrote publically against the direction of the Maori Party. This is one example of how Hone stood out by not conforming to political pressure. It led to an internal dispute within the Maori Party in which Hone – in parliamentary terms – was in a minority.

Essentially the Maori Party was a cross-class party, meaning it had no defined orientation to the working class and little orientation to working class or poor Maori in contrast to layers of Maori bourgeoisie. Our own socialist group was clear about this in relation to the Maori Party. However, we lacked the long-term political foresight to see that the class differences in the Maori Party would likely result in a rupture on class and social justice lines.

A further important catalyst for the formation of the Mana Party was the introduction of the Marine and Coastal (Takutai Moana) Act 2011 by the National/Act/Maori parliamentary majority. The Takutai Moana Act repealed Labour's Foreshore and Seabed Act 2004 (F&S Act). Labour's F&S Act had dispossessed Maori of the right to take a case regarding title over foreshore and seabed areas to the Maori Land Court, a right which had been won in a Court of Appeal case. Whilst the F&S Act brought all such areas under Crown ownership (aside from areas with private title), the Takutaimoana Act brings such areas under 'common ownership' meaning such areas cannot be owned. Therefore there is still no right for Maori to claim title over such areas, although there is a right to make claims for protected custody rights. Maori-led



criticism of the Act is also based on the extraordinarily high threshold of proof showing customary use dating back to 1840 that is required in order to acquire protected custody under the Act. This led to a significant support and membership departure from the Maori Party to the Mana Party and to a more forceful insistence on Treaty-based rights.

Separate to the above-described process, and on a smaller scale, another process had been taking place since October 2010 involving leftists. There were some discussions amongst leftists – of both the far-left and of left-social democratic persuasion – about the idea of forming a new left party. There were media rumours about a new party being formed by Sue Bradford and Matt McCarten. The most formal of these discussions took place at a left dialogue meeting at the end of Unite Union's first national conference in November 2011.

Generally there was an apprehension about the formation of a new left party because of the low level of class struggle in New Zealand. Matt McCarten of Unite and Joe Carolan of Socialist Aotearoa were amongst the strongest in favour of proceeding with such a project.

When the contradiction between the Maori Party and Harawira came to a conclusion, many of those who had participated in the 'new left party' discussion, and others from active left tendencies, took an open approach to Mana and most soon decided to participate, help build, and make a contribution to shape the Mana Party.

Socialist involvement

As Mike Kay wrote in a Workers Party internal document:

For Marxists relating to broader

Election analysis

movements, policy is indeed important, and something we spend a lot of energy trying to influence. But it is not all-determining. I think the major determinants of the viability of working in such a movement are (i) its class composition and (ii) the amount of democratic space within it.

Mana is not a socialist party, but it is a genuinely progressive party. As well as its combative approach to Maori injustice, what makes Mana an important progressive force is the interface of its class composition, its leadership, its policy, its democratic space, and the class/community outlook of the non-socialist activists involved, who are the majority of the party membership.

The main active socialist groups – Socialist Aotearoa, Workers Party, Socialist Worker, and the International Socialist Organisation have contributed to Mana work. So to have activists from other formations such as Citizens Against Privatisation and Rotorua Peoples' Centre.

Class composition

Because Mana is a new organisation there is no statistical data available on its class composition. Largely the members we have met are manual and professional workers, unemployed, students, and the retired, as well as some academics and self-employed with small businesses. It is reasonable to say that the membership is comprised of basic masses and holds little attraction for capitalists or the rich. Many of the established activists have valuable experience in both activism and party-building which socialists can learn from. New layers of activists are coming up through quickly growing Rangatahi (youth) branches. Further, a national Mana Kaimahi network has been formed for trade union progressives.

Democratic space

The most primary organisational formation within Mana is the branch. All sorts of branches have been formed, with encouragement from the leadership, and this is why members like to define Mana

more broadly as a movement. Branches participate within wider rohe, which is an organisational unit covering each Maori electorate. Each rohe is comprised of the members residing in it and has a committee comprised of elected chair, elected secretary, and elected treasurer. Additionally each branch with 20-plus members gains representation on the rohe committee. In cases in which branches build membership of over 100 members those branches are able to have two representatives on their rohe committee. Rohe are then represented in national decision-making. This means that gaining representation is achievable for forces that are prepared to help build and that wish to contribute to decision-making.

Leadership

Important class-fighters in the leadership of Mana include John Minto, Matt McCarten, Mike Treen, and Gerard Hehir who have consistently fought for the interests of the lowest paid workers in the country for the past



John Minto is contesting the Manakau East electorate. Pictured is his campaign launch at Otara town center, September 21.

six years in Unite, each bringing decades of working class campaigning experience. Mike Treen and Syd Keepa (National Distribution Union) have initiated the Mana Kaimahi Workers Network. Beneficiary advocate-then-Green MP Sue Bradford, who took responsibility for the parliamentary aspect of the struggle to end youth rates, made a left break from the Green Party (whilst still an MP) and has now been announced as a general seat candidate. She will be standing against Paula Bennett, National's Minister of Social Development. Bennett is the government's chief beneficiary-basher against those who rely on welfare.

Others in the national leadership who stand in Maori justice traditions are doing so in good class terms. In a recent Otago University-sponsored interview the interviewer Bryce Edwards asked Hone about his standing alongside class warriors. Hone replied that he's always been committed to those issues, standing on picket lines with them. Annette Sykes in 2010 delivered her Politics of the Brown Table lecture which challenged those Maori entities which she said, "are all harnessing Maori to a global capitalism that impoverishes the mass of working class Maori making them dependent on its survival". Annette, along with John Minto, is a co-vice-

president of Mana.

Relationship to non-socialists in the Mana movement

As well as fighting against injustice for Maori, Mana's activists mostly have allegiance with basic pro-working class positions on issues such as - for example - cost of living, employment, health, and education. Whilst socialists are a minority in Mana, and Marxian socialists may be an even smaller minority, an even smaller minority would probably be Mana supporters who are uncomfortable about working alongside socialists (and/or pakeha for that matter). In any such case it would be up to the genuine left to prove it is up to the challenge of distinguishing itself in practice from the establishment left which has sold out Maori and fails to champion the working class.

Policy

The Mana Party is putting forward policies which include a range of radical measures in health, education, cost of living, employment, and social well-being, that are pro-worker, pro-poor, and which would benefit the majority of Maori, as they would the working class, instead of empowering and enriching

'the brown table'. Mana policy, much of it still in draft form is available for viewing at mana.net.nz. Immigration is one area in which Socialists have put forward formal remits. This is in regard to a policy which stated that public sector and Iwi corporate entities should face penalties for not employing New Zealand citizens. Although it was not the intention, the policy could potentially be seen as anti-immigrant.

Conclusion

Mana is largely comprised of a working class base, it has a high level of both formal and real democracy, it has a leadership of genuine working class activists and Maori sovereignty activists who are pro-working class, and it has radical pro-working class measures in its policy. To generalise, there are three reasons as to why it is important for socialists to participate in Mana. The first is that it will strengthen relationships with other activists and masses. Secondly, Mana can play a role in rebuilding constituency and solidarity amongst workers, oppressed, and marginalised sections of Aotearoa. The third reason is that Mana has the potential to play a significant role in re-starting critical public-level discussion around Maori, class, and social issues in Aotearoa.

What are WP members doing in Mana?

- In mid-June we passed a national resolution stating that "We welcome the formation of a Maori-led class-based party and intend to engage with it in a constructive manner."
- In the Te Tai Tokerau electorate Workers Party member Mike Kay is elected as vice-chair of the North Shore branch and was active in the successful by-election in June.
- In Hauraki-Waikato electorate we have established the Mana Waikato Workers Branch with enough members to have an additional representative on the Rohe (area of Maori electorate) committee. A branch member who is a railway delegate, is nominated for the Mana candidacy in the Hamilton West seat. Workers Party member Rebecca Broad is elected secretary of the Rohe Committee and is elected to represent the Rohe in national executive meetings.
- Another of our members - Heleyni Pratley - has been elected to represent a Rangitahi branch in Wellington.
- In mid-September 2011 we carried a national resolution to continue our participation in Mana as according to regional decision-making by our members.

The nature of National

This article by Jared Phillips and Josh Glue is concerned with characterising the type of National Party that is in government today.

In a 2007 Agenda interview with then-new National Party leader John Key, Lisa Owen asked him about the difference in leadership style between himself and his predecessor, now-Act leader, Don Brash. Key's reply was:

Well I think leadership's always a very personal thing, it's the way that you approach the issues, the image that you put off, the things that maybe you want to discuss, I mean fundamentally Don and I share the same view which is that we think New Zealand under-performs and we think that the future can be much brighter with a National government with the policies that we want to invoke, so I don't think our fundamental aim was different, we may choose to focus on - in the very short term some different issues and you've possibly seen that in my approach since I've taken over as the leader.

This is an interesting reply as it draws out one of the key issues surrounding the nature of the National Party. Is National fundamentally a neo-liberal party, playing a strong public relations (PR) game, with the Act party playing a role as its most neo-liberal flank? Or is National a centrist party eager not to alienate its apparent support from echelons of the working class?

National's post-election appearance At the time of its 2008 election there was some anticipation from parts of the left – including members of the Workers Party at the time – that the National Party was going to refrain from carrying out serious attacks on the working class because of the centrist nature of its campaign and the level of broad cross-class support which it enjoyed in the lead-up to the election. Soon after the election the new government put parliament under urgency and fired the first shot against working people by introducing 90-day probationary employment to take effect in small workplaces. This was a serious attack, in that it was so obviously the thin end of the wedge for further anti-worker laws.

After the election, and in response to the recession which resulted from the

global financial crisis, John Key called national and regional economic summits which offered a place of dialogue for the Council of Trade Unions, other union leaders, and other non-business entities. On one hand this could be portrayed as political centrism but on the other hand the holding of such economic summits is not a new tactic for governments embarking on attacking the working class. The Labour Party used exactly this tactic in the 1980s when it carried out the first wave of the neo-liberal assault on working people. Further, such summits are used to put any potential opposition groups under the spotlight and on best (conservative) behavior rather than to share any power with them.

Industrial relations

To manage the financial crisis and recession, the government has worked to further erode the power of unions and drive up the rate of exploitation at work. It has brought in the 90-Day "fire at will" law, allowing employers to sack new employees in the first 3 months of employment without reason or right to unfair dismissal claims. This law is particularly onerous for the already vulnerable, namely immigrants, women, younger and older people and Maori, as these groups were already disadvantaged in the labour market, being more concentrated in less secure employment in harder-to-organise sectors. Other changes have made it more difficult for unions to enter worksites. Even in cases whereby justified dismissal has been accepted reinstatement has been downgraded from being the primary remedy. The Holidays Act has been changed so that individual workers' fourth week of holiday can be sold, which increases productivity to the detriment of workers quality of life. The Holidays Act has also been changed so that the employer may require a medical certificate for only one day of sickness. The cumulative impact of all this policy is that productivity is driven up for the



Maori Party co-leader Pita Sharples and Prime Minister John Key

employers and it is far easier for the entire capitalist class to maintain and increase discipline over the workforce.

In the public sector, understaffed ministries are struggling to cover increasing workloads with new-hirings far below requirements and government spending on the non-productive economy has fallen further below demand for public services. The 2011 Budget only allows enough money for public service to tick over, not taking into account cost increases or the need for more staff to deal with higher unemployment and underemployment and their effects.

Taxation

One of the key messages of the left in the lead-up to the last election was to abolish GST, reduce it, or limit the items to which it applied. Typically the far-left called for the abolition of GST and the centrist or social democratic left called for a reduction or limitation. Important for the purposes of this article is the fact that a GST reduction of some kind was called for universally by all workers organisations and a significant number of progressive and community organisations. In 2010 the government legislated a 2.5% increase in GST (to 15%) despite GST-reduction being a core demand amongst above-mentioned organisations. GST-reduction, including abolition, was called for because the cost of living for ordinary working people – and especially the poor – needed

to be relieved. Massive increases in reliance on food grants and food banks amid minimum wage rises lower than inflation are one sign that many people are struggling to make ends meet. The government, far from taking a centrist position, acted in direct contradiction to this most basic demand.

In fact, the government rearranged taxation in such a way that working people carry even more of the tax burden by shouldering a GST increase in order to help pay for tax cuts which disproportionately advantaged (if tax cuts are considered an advantage) the already rich. For example, the 12% of tax payers in the \$70,000 + per annum bracket received a saving of \$1625.51 million, whilst the 31% of taxpayers in the \$20,000 - \$50,000 per annum bracket received a saving of \$987.21 million. In other words the wealthiest 12% saved nearly twice as much from the reduction in tax outlay than did those 31% who earn between \$20,000 and 50,000 per year (see the table below).

Here the nature of the current National Party comes into stark contrast with its middle-of-the-road rhetoric. These tax cuts for the wealthy and super-rich were sold to the average working person as a tax cut for them, despite the fact that even the modest gains the new tax regime affords those earning less than \$70,000 will be eaten up by the rising cost of living and the GST hike which only rubs salt in the wound, punishing the working class, who spend a higher proportion of their income on goods and services than do the wealthy.

Other cuts

The prospect of cuts to unemployment benefits is also on horizon, again veiled in talk of 'fixing' the benefit system

and 'helping people back to work'. In fact tightening of criteria for receipt of benefits has already taken place. Cuts to Early Childhood Education will see the centres with the most qualified staff forced to make layoffs, and the overall quality of early childhood education decrease at the same time as prices for service rise. Government subsidies for adult education programmes have been cut, as has funding to community law centres and some domestic violence agencies.

The changes to industrial law and the tax regime are sufficient to show that the government is not following a centrist path or a path determined by any minor interest group. It is following a straight-up-and-down continuation of the assault on working people that has been carried out by capitalist governments for the last 30 years.

National's PR machine

Recent polls place support for National at around 56%, while Labour's support is tanking at around 30%, sometimes lower. The public relations machinery is very effective, especially so given the low levels of class consciousness and class fight-back (for example, in the year to December 2010 work stoppages were at their lowest number in two decades) which are required to repel and break the government's current popularity. Included amongst National's PR arsenal are issues such as its eventual anti-mining position with regard to the Coromandel, its accommodation with the Maori Party, and its apparent preference for public-private partnerships over privatisation.

However, in matters like this, the appearances are deceptive. The Coromandel may have been saved or delayed from being mined, due to public

pressure, but oil exploration has started off the East Cape. National's relationship with the Maori party doesn't reveal a willingness to progress Maori issues or class issues for the majority of Maori, but rather reflects a relationship with some upper-echelons of Maoridom, and a large number of Maori have broken from that process. Public-private partnerships allow the government to make claim that they are not privatising, but that it is exactly what they are doing at the pace available to them and to the extent that such options are available.

Gaining an advantage from the spotlight during large public tragedy events (Pyke River Mine and the Christchurch earthquakes), and taking advantage of planned public events (such as the Rugby World Cup), competently in both scenarios, has also helped along Key and National's populism.

Conclusion

National could not be led - and its particular form of continued reform on behalf of the ruling class could not be carried out - by a Brash-styled party of the type that would publically argue for a decline in actual wages, would publically argue against Maori rights, etc. However, National has been able to leverage off Act to advance its agenda while maintaining some public distance from its more extreme neo-liberal aspects. The placement of Rodney Hyde as Minister of Local Government for the creation of the Auckland Supercity, VSM, and the role of the Act party in sharpening-up the anti-worker laws evidence this. As we come into a likely second-term of National-led government, it is worthwhile for any leftist who views this government as a centrist one to reexamine their view.

| Who benefits from National's tax cuts? | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------|--|--|--|---|--------------------|------------|
| Income range | % of taxpayers | benefit from cut to bottom rate (\$ million) | Benefit from cut to lower middle rate (\$ million) | Benefit from cut to middle rate (\$ million) | Benefit from cut in top rate (\$ million) | Total (\$ million) | % of total |
| \$0 - \$20K | 45% | 268.62 | 51.45 | | | 320.07 | 9% |
| \$20K - 50K | 31% | 299.32 | 506.70 | 1.53 | | 807.55 | 22% |
| \$50K - \$70K | 12% | 115.36 | 490.28 | 271.92 | 109.65 | 987.21 | 26% |
| \$70K+ | 12% | 105.56 | 448.63 | 248.82 | 822.50 | 1625.51 | 43% |
| | | | | | | 3740.34 | 100% |

(Source: <http://norightturn.blogspot.com/2010/05/who-benefits-from-nationals-tax-cuts.html>)

The Maori Party under pressure

Mike Kay, Workers Party, Auckland

The Māori Party has not had a good year. While it may have breathed a collective sigh of relief when it parted ways with its only dissident, Hone Harawira, the euphoria must have been short-lived. It now faces intense pressure on its left flank since the formation of Mana. Seven years on from its inauguration, the Party will now struggle to continue to present itself as the authentic political voice of all Māori. In order to restore some of its radical credentials after three years of coalition with National and ACT, the Māori Party has recently been very vocal over the passage of the Policing (Storage of Youth Identifying Particulars) Amendment Bill.

The Party's police spokesperson Rahui Katene rightly described the Bill as a "travesty" that would stigmatise Māori youth. The Bill, passed under urgency, enables the Police to keep the photographs and fingerprints of young people who are arrested but discharged without conviction. It also retrospectively validates the keeping of records collected since 1 October 2008, in breach of the law at the time.

So, obviously, a law worth opposing. However, civil liberties is one of the few policy areas where the Māori Party is able to differentiate itself from its right wing coalition partners, and even then, only insofar as it impacts on Māori.

Current polls point to National being able to govern on its own this November. But if the Māori Party has a role in a future National-led government, it is likely to be along the lines of recent comments made by Tukoroirangi Morgan of Waikato Tainui. Morgan wants to form a consortium of iwi, land trusts and incorporations to buy stakes in any state-owned enterprises that may be part-privatised in the event of a second term for National. He is proposing the formation of a consortium to buy a serious stake in Mighty River Power or Genesis Energy.

Mark Solomon, who was a member of Māori Affairs Minister Pita Sharples' Māori economic taskforce, stated: "My view is iwi are the Crown's perfect partner. We're never going to leave the



Mark Solomon, above left, who was a member of the Maori economic taskforce

country. Everything we earn stays in the country and what we do earn we reinvest in our own community. It's a win win for everybody."

The Māori Party can thus become the vehicle to help National sell the politically unpopular policy of asset sales to the public. The notion that the problem with the policy is foreign ownership, rather than privatisation per se, is unfortunately widespread. Iwi corporates would be able to cash in on the sell off, pushing the populist line that ownership will not go offshore.

For workers in privatised industries, the effect is the same, whether the bosses are New Zealander or foreign, Māori or Pākehā. Job cuts and attacks on pay and conditions are the inevitable result. Consumers face even higher energy prices. Asset sales since the Rogernomics

era have helped send poverty rates for the majority of Māori rocketing. Iwi corporate ownership of police stations, courts and prisons lends legitimacy to the machinery of state oppression.

Privatisation reveals the class polarisation within the Māori population with utter clarity. The tiny minority seated at the "Brown Table" will further enrich themselves, whilst the working class majority will continue to suffer. Socialists and Mana activists need to clearly distance themselves from the "foreign control" distraction and oppose privatisation purely on the basis of dispossession of public property. Otherwise we risk disorientating the working class and giving quarter to the unquestionably pro-capitalist Māori Party.

New Zealand's Green Party: contradictions and lessons

Ian Anderson, member of Workers Party and *The Spark* editorial board

Recently Nick Maryatt, Green Party candidate for Hamilton East, suggested in a blog post that Labour voters were switching to the Greens because they are the “real opposition” to attacks by National. Maryatt is aligned with workers movement issues and has participated in the Hamilton Left Initiative, a non-sectarian left group which also involves members of the Workers Party. Radicals must develop a clear analysis of the Greens, given both their relationship to ruling-class parties, and with the left.

The Green Party of New Zealand first entered parliament in 1996 as a part of the Alliance, at that time a coalition of parties opposed to neo-liberalism. Green Party ideology was informed by international green politics, described in its most conservative parliamentary form by the recent slogan “some things are bigger than politics.” This means they would work with a range of forces, including ruling class parties, to achieve environmental reform.

Opposing neoliberal excesses, they drew both members and supporters from the radical left. In 1999 they independently won seven seats in parliament, including former Socialist Action League member Keith Locke and Workers Communist League member Sue Bradford. While Alliance went directly into coalition with the Labour Party, the Greens agreed to support this government. This set a precedent of orientation to the ruling class Labour Party.

Like many third parties, the Greens were easily caricatured as a strange mix. Rastafarian Nandor Tanczos, unemployed rights advocate Sue Bradford, anti-imperialist activist Keith Locke, united by a sometimes catastrophist, sometimes corporate, sometimes holistically social-democratic program. Their extensive industrial relations policy has long stayed to the left of the Labour Party, but in reality their impact depends both on their

relationship to the major parties and what policies their MPs chose to push.

Certain Green MPs act as parliamentary allies to left movements on the ground. Sue Bradford was instrumental in abolishing youth rates, and supported the Supersizemypay campaign which took the minimum wage to \$12/hr, both campaigns run at street level by Unite Union with involvement from the radical left. Keith Locke acts as the acceptable parliamentary face of the anti-war and anti-imperialist movement.

However by forging alliances with ruling class organisations, the Green Party leadership are increasingly incapable of confronting corporate abuses. The Emissions Trading Scheme, a market measure which has internationally failed to curb emissions, also excludes major companies such as the New Zealand Refining Company. Under the Labour government the Refining Company signed a get-out clause excluding them from Kyoto regulations. Monopoly capital hinders environmental reform at every step; given their current involvement in the corporate Pure Advantage campaign, the Green Party leadership is not poised to challenge this.

Instead, the leadership became increasingly willing to punish working people for environmental abuses. In 1999, at the peak of the movement against water metering in Auckland, Green MPs

such as Jeanette Fitzsimons joined the ranks of those opposing privatisation of water. However Fitzsimons does support charges on residential water, a corporate strategy guaranteed to punish families on low incomes. Similarly the Greens support petrol taxes and other consumer-focused strategies.

As the leadership moves rightwards, signalling willingness to work with National to achieve environmental reforms, MPs are forced to shape up or ship out. Locke couches his criticism of imperialism in legality and appeals to the UN, even legitimising the role of “peacekeepers” in Afghanistan. Sue Bradford finally chose to shrug off the Sisyphean rock and leave parliament; it is telling that she reserved open acknowledgement of the problem for her valedictory speech, with the words “capitalism is not giving us the answers we need.”

As the majority of left groups gear up for another parliamentary experiment in supporting Mana, we must learn from this trajectory. It's important to have allies and work with Green MPs and supporters on areas of common interest. However partnership with ruling-class bodies, including Labour and National, threatens to kill the revolution long before it starts.



Green Party leaders Metiria Turei and Russell Norman

Breaking with the Labour Party

Ian Anderson

As leftists call for an end to the oppressive National Party government, we must also understand what the alternatives are. A Labour-led government remains the most immediate possibility. This leads us to consider the opportunities and threats a Labour government would pose for the left, and what other roads we might take.

The Labour Party is committed to maintaining the capitalist order. While in their early days they made reference to socialism, their history since their first election is one of antagonism with the militant sections of the working class, especially at junctures where class contradictions are sharpened; the repression of watersiders in the 1930s, through to the devastating application of Rogernomics. This history is well and accurately detailed in pamphlet *The Truth About Labour*. This article will aim to describe the Labour Party in its current form.

Under Phil Goff, Labour is a decidedly liberal party at odds with the needs of the working class and at odds with the demands being placed by the leading sections of workers movement. As Minister for Education under the Lange government, Goff was instrumental in privatising education. Since then, mass membership in the Labour Party has declined, and low-income voters do not show the strong preference for Labour that they used to. Some advocate a reshuffle, given Goff's banal politics and decided lack of 'opposition.' However the problem is more institutional - Annette King, initially tipped as a successor to Helen Clark, shares Goff's right-wing record.

Currently the most glaring manifestation of the Labour Party's anti-working class agenda is their refusal of overtures by Mana, the only major parliamentary party with real ties to really progressive or radical aspects of the working-class movement. Mana expresses openness to working with the Greens, Maori or Labour Party. However Phil Goff has ruled out working with Mana.



Phil Goff, Labour Party leader.

In his weekly column for the Herald, Mana president Matt McCarten recently asserted that Phil Goff had "come clean on the class war." However, rather than Goff admitting to his role in implementing class war against the working class through Rogernomics, this referred to a speech Goff made to an audience of trade unionists, at which he endorsed a range of pro-working class policies. This included the demand for a \$15 minimum-wage, introduced by Unite Union and ignored by Labour while it was in office.

Labour has pulled this act before, using slogans like "tax the rich" to get elected in 1999, then failing to implement any major reforms while in government. In fact during the last three terms of Labour government, the rich list shot up while the minimum wage at times didn't even keep up with inflation. Policies such as the \$12 minimum wage rise were pushed by Alliance and the Greens, and in the last Labour-led term the Greens passed 3 successful bills without going into coalition with Labour.

In a 2008 Listener article Labour was defined by former president Andrew Little not even as a centre-left party, but one which he said was competing

with National to manage the centre.

This is probably the most accurate self-description of the Labour Party available.

National has introduced a raft of anti-union and anti-worker laws since coming to government and this is likely to continue. In purely industrial relations terms Labour is clearly a lesser-evil. However we don't assess parties purely on economic terms, but on their overall politics such as their record on other matters such as treatment of oppressed groups and international questions. Further, Labour does not put forward an industrial relations regime which gives power and agency to workers, such as removing restrictions on the legal right to take industrial action.

The necessity for working class movements to break from the Labour Party remains critical. We must find a path out of the two-party system, still maintained in a moderated form under MMP. While the two-party system exists, the left can only play an oppositional role - inside and outside of parliament - to win reforms without sacrificing the political independence needed over the long term to rebuild the genuine left.

The ACT Party – Threat or joke?

Byron Clark, Workers Party Christchurch branch organiser



Act Party leader Don Brash

A common view of political parties in New Zealand's parliament holds that ACT is the worst of the lot, followed by National, Labour as the "lesser evil" with The Greens as not-perfect but essentially good. This approach ignores the question of what power and influence these parties hold (or lack there of). There is almost insignificant support for ACT in both the general population and the ruling class. While ACT may present its plans for New Zealand as a free-market paradise for capitalists, the number of donations from corporations and wealthy individuals received by ACT pales in comparison to those received by National and Labour.

Low polling

The latest Roy Morgan Research poll puts support for ACT on 2%, slightly

above the margin of error. If John Banks wins the seat of Epsom (the country's wealthiest electorate with the lowest number of Maori voters) he might bring in one extra MP with him. A pair of free market zealots is hardly going to sway the next government. While National are buoyed by recent polling and are speaking openly about the attacks on workers and beneficiaries they will make if reelected in November, their strategy is still to appear to voters as moderate centrists, Key continues to distance himself from ACT and the relationship National has formed with the Maori Party shows that it sees a "centrist" coalition partner as more useful for its appearance than a far right appendage.

"A Party for men, and women who think like men"

Neo-liberalism has never been a popular ideology with the electorate, and

ACT have in recent times down-played their economic policies in favour of social conservatism on issues such as crime and race relations. Both have backfired - their celebrity candidate last election, Sensible Sentencing Trust lawyer David Garrett was shown to be hypocritical beyond belief, holding an assault conviction and another for obtaining a fake passport with the birth certificate of a dead infant (not to mention his sexual harassment of a parliamentary staffer and drunked homophobic rant on national television). John Ansell's newspaper ad campaign around the theme "stopping the Maorification of everything" may have appealed to a small number of Pakeha, but was universally mocked with few even seeing it worth a proper critique.

Ansell soon parted ways with the party after and gave a New Zealand Herald interview where he stated that "white cowards" were scared to "tell the truth about this Maori issue". The effort to distance themselves from Ansell hit a bump in the road when leaked emails showed Don Brash had supported even more racist ad ideas designed by Ansell that others in the party saw as too extreme. In his Herald interview Ansell also described ACT as "a party for men and women who think like men" that statement fits with a Horizon poll back in May that found ACT's support among women to be zero.

Out of control youth wing

ACT's youth wing, ACT on Campus (AoC) has always pushed the envelope. After the criminalisation of BZP, AoC gave out pills containing BZP as a publicity stunt on university clubs days. Another activity of the group was disrupting Earth Hour events by shining electric lights around (because apparently being a jerk is a great way to win political support). In an interview on Sunrise about this, then AoC president Rick Giles spoke about his disbelief in the scientific theory of anthropogenic climate change, and when asked for evidence supporting his view stated that

Election analysis

his “argument is so powerful it’s not necessary to talk about it”. Youtube clips of the interview went viral and the quote soon appeared on t-shirts. Events like Earth Hour do not provide a solution for climate change, but for a brief period Giles was an even bigger joke than the “always blow on the pie” cop.

While that episode was laughable, something more sinister happened recently. Cameron Browne, AoC Auckland vice-president, told a young woman he was arguing with to “get raped”. While Giles was rolled as president for his live TV gaff, new president Peter McCaffrey was quick to make excuses for Browne’s comment. “The fact that members such as McCaffrey have been quick to defend his comments as being ‘in the heat of the moment’ and ‘not really serious’ just go to show what little sensitivity they have around the realities of rape and sexual abuse in this country” said Nicole Skews, Coordinator of the Wellington Young Feminists Collective. ACT’s near non-existent support among women suddenly makes a lot more sense.

Junk science for cash

To return to the point of Rick Giles’ climate change skepticism, it was not this view that saw him rolled as president, indeed a distrust of climate scientists has been a long standing ACT policy. At least since they started getting donations from prominent climate change skeptic Alan Gibbs. When Gibbs supplied ACT with \$100,000 he was able to buy significant policy change. “Within weeks, the party’s new climate denial line was being pushed to the press.” wrote Gareth Renowen, author of *Hot Topic: Global Warming and the Future of New Zealand* “back in May 2008, Hide — while adopting an overtly sceptical, do-as-little-as-possible stance — was prepared to at least acknowledge the IPCC reports as a starting point for discussion. Within months, however, he was ready to declare in a speech to ACT’s southern region conference: ‘I remain sceptical that greenhouse gases are the cause of a global warming.’”

There will always be a (hopefully shrinking) constituency for ACT, the groups of Pakeha men who think that

political correctness has gone mad, that Maori and women have too much privilege, and climate change theory is a left-wing conspiracy. Meanwhile, Alisdair Thompson is rolled as president of the Employers and Manufacturers Association after saying that gender pay inequality is a result of women menstruating, and large group of business people launch the ‘Pure Advantage’ campaign to profit from environmentalism. The vast majority of New Zealand society does not hold the views expressed by the ACT party.

If Don Brash and John Banks take two of the seats in parliament after the election they are not going to be exerting influence over the National caucus, more likely they will be a pair of ‘useful idiots’ to help Key form a majority government. Of course, many are expecting ACT to disappear from the political landscape all together this year. The Facebook event “ACT Party Funeral” is notable for having more people ‘attending’ than there are people ‘liking’ the official ACT Facebook page.

Workers Party not standing in any electorates in 2011 election

In the last few elections the Workers Party has stood candidates in a number of electorates. In the 2008 election we became a registered party after signing up over 500 members and we were therefore able to stand a party list. The intention of standing in the elections was to try and raise the profile of both socialist ideas and our own organisation. The 2008 election gave quite clear evidence that this strategy wasn’t working with not only an extremely low vote but also the fact that the campaign did not win people over to our politics. This opinion was universal within the organisation prior to January this year. The party has no policy against standing in local or general elections under different circumstances such as increased class activity or increased support for the organisation or individual members who may find good opportunities to stand as candidates.



Indonesian fishing crew seek redress in New Zealand

The following article by Byron Clark was written in August and follows on from an earlier article published in *The Spark*.

The 32 member fishing crew of the Korean vessel Oyang 75 jumped ship in Lyttelton in June and are currently staying in Christchurch as they pursue a civil case against their employer, South Korean corporation Sajo Oyang. While government policy mandates that the same terms and conditions be given to workers on foreign charter vessels in New Zealand waters as to local citizens, members of the Oyang 75 crew were receiving annual incomes of between \$6,700 and \$11,600 well below the minimum wage and a fraction of \$60-80,000 workers earn on New Zealand flagged ships.

As well as unpaid wages the crew allege mistreatment including physical abuse. Their stories fit with the findings of an Auckland University study of charter fishing vessels (FCVs) operating in New Zealand's exclusive economic zone punished last month (August). Senior lecturer Dr Christina Stringer, PhD candidate Glenn Simmons and fisheries consultant and former skipper Daren Coulston interviewed crews and families in two Asian countries. The study quotes one fisherman as saying "Officers are vicious bastards ... factory

manager just rapped this 12 kg stainless steel pan over his head, splits the top of his head, blood pissing out everywhere...", and a New Zealand official as referring to a boat as "a floating freezer [with] absolutely appalling conditions just like a slum ... there are definitely human rights abuses out there, they are slave ships."

The Indonesian workers in Christchurch have been helped by the Anglican Diocese, the Canterbury Indonesian Society and others in the community. The food bank 0800 HUNGRY has been providing food and in exchange the crew have been volunteering in their warehouse. The crew have long been facing deportation, though they have recently been able to appeal thanks to an anonymous donation of \$10,000. While Immigration New Zealand insists their legal case can continue with the men back in Indonesia by they don't want to leave the country until they have received back pay.

Foreign charter vessels in New Zealand

Under treaty settlements made in the 1990's fishing quotas were allocated to the various iwi, but unable to afford their

own boats many iwi contracted out their quotas to overseas companies. One of the biggest benefactors of this contracting out has been South Korean corporation Sajo Oyang, owner of the Oyang 75 and the Oyang 70, which sank last year with the loss of six lives. The captain of the New Zealand fishing boat that rescued the remaining crew told TV3's Hamish Clark "The vessel lent over to one side - the factory filled up with water and the engine room filled up with water. There were no alarms, no lighting, nothing".

These tragic events are just the most recent chapters in a long history of human rights violations aboard "seaborne sweatshops" in New Zealand's waters. Back in the Service and Food Workers Union (SFWU) began a petition campaign calling on parliament to conduct an inquiry into the local Fishing Industry's relationship with foreign fishing companies, foreign crewing of Joint Ventures, chartered and New Zealand fishing vessels, and its effects on sustainable fishing practices and employment. The inquiry began in July. The Maritime Union described the inquiry as "long overdue".



Crew members of the Oyang 75, in accomodation in Christchurch

Defend MMP in the 2011 referendum

This article by Jared Phillips first appeared in the June 2011 issue of *The Spark*.

This year New Zealand electors will vote in a national referendum, held as part of the general elections, asking them firstly to indicate whether they want to change from MMP, and secondly to indicate their preferred electoral system. The other options are First Past the Post (FPP), Preferential Voting (PV), Single Transferable Vote (STV), and Supplementary Member (SM). If a majority votes in favour of retaining MMP that decision will be binding. However, if a majority votes against retaining MMP, there will be a further referendum in 2014 whereby electors will decide between MMP and whichever alternative procedure gains the most support in the 2011 referendum. If a new system is selected in 2014 it will come into effect at the 2017 election.

Real advanced democracy can only be imposed and administered by the majority of working people through a workers' government. In the current period though, in which the working class has clearly not yet recovered organisationally or politically from the onslaught of neo-liberalism, it is important to ensure that the electoral system offering the most democratic electoral procedure prevails. From this point of view it is in the best interests of the working people and oppressed groups to retain MMP.

The capitalist state and elections

Marxists refer to 'bourgeois democracy' to describe the current form of state rule in advanced capitalist countries such as New Zealand. Marxist theory accepts that capitalism allows a form of national political democracy, and it is labelled bourgeois democracy because it is the sort of democracy which was given birth by the development of capitalism and operates in the interests of the capitalist class (the bourgeoisie).

In Europe bourgeois democracy was established by revolutions, led politically by the emerging capitalist class against

feudalism and the accompanying rule by monarchy. In other cases bourgeois democracy was transferred by colonial forces (i.e., Australia, New Zealand), or brought into being by the monarchy itself so as to remove barriers to the development of a capitalist economy (Japan).

The emergence of the capitalist system brought about bourgeois democracy by introducing constitutions and parliaments to limit or overthrow the political monopoly maintained by monarchies. Just as monarchical rule was attached to feudal relations of property and production, bourgeois democracy arose from the development of capitalist property relations and capitalist production.

Outside of advanced capitalist countries, in semi-colonial countries, the development of bourgeois democracy is restricted by the interference of imperialist countries which operate against the interests of local democracy and against the accumulation of local capital. This is not to say that local capitalists play a progressive role in semi-colonial countries, but rather that the development of bourgeois democracy in such countries has become impossible after the development of monopoly capitalism / imperialism in the countries of advanced capitalism.

New Zealand is an advanced capitalist country with a comparably entrenched bourgeois democracy. This was established by British colonial forces from the mid-1800s. Capitalist property relations and capitalist production were transplanted into Aotearoa / New Zealand, predominantly by settlers and the British Crown. The political form of this democracy is the Westminster system which is a representative democracy, within which people (at first excluding women and Maori) can vote for Members of Parliament (MPs) who then have the power to make and administer law. This form of government was placed into New Zealand with great

dedication by the British Crown, as this institution and its laws were used to further smash up Maori custom and property relations.

Within New Zealand's representative democracy, the voting procedure from 1853 when the first parliament was elected through to 1993 had been First-Past-the-Post (FPP).

Consequences beyond vote-counts

As is well known to voters who replaced FPP with MMP by referendum in 1992, FPP produced parliaments that were not representative of the proportion of votes attributed to candidates by party and yet parliament was completely dominated by party politics, which were the politics of National and Labour. When National was elected in 1951 it was the last FPP election at which the party whose candidates collectively gained more votes than candidates of another party came to power.

While FPP distorted the majority vote for and between the two major parties, it also ensured that smaller parties, whose candidates throughout the country may have achieved a reasonable percentage collectively, could not gain corresponding representation in parliament and were marginalised. In 1981 for example, Social Credit Party candidates drew over 20% of the vote nationally but were only able to win two electorates and therefore two seats in parliament.

The type of electoral procedure used has wider implications than how the votes count up and distribute MPs. The electoral procedure also impacts on the way parliament is able to pass legislation. Under FPP New Zealand was known as an executive paradise because of the way in which cabinet – comprised solely of one party – was able to dominate policy by keeping its MPs beholden to it through party discipline.

Within the fourth Labour government, the cabinet dominated by

Richard Prebble, Roger Douglas and David Lange (though Lange tried to distance himself from its actions), and backed by powerful business interests, was able to enact sweeping neo-liberal changes, sold large parts of the state sector and started the deregulation of the labour market. It did so through undemocratic measures afforded to cabinet; skipping Select Committees, allowing debate on only minor details, keeping proposals in-house to cabinet, and generally isolating the rest of parliament.



Mural of former Prime Minister David Lange

Roger Douglas

The shift to a neo-liberal regime was of course based on the requirement of capitalism to restore profitability, and was socially possible because of union-alignment to a traditional bourgeois workers party (Labour) and activist focus on non-economic reforms often to the exclusion of economic concerns. However, the experience of the fourth Labour government shows how a party could completely capture policy under FPP. The Labour Party's rank-and-file membership declined rapidly as a result of the changes carried out by its cabinet, changes that only a tiny minority of New Zealand's electors supported.

As well as increasing the ability of electors to vote ideologically (through party votes) and abating the marginalisation of small parties, the introduction of MMP has also enabled a degree of constraint against one-party capture of cabinet (the negative impact

of such capture made obvious under the fourth Labour government). Under MMP it is likely that governments can only be formed through coalitions. This usually leads to a multi-party cabinet, meaning that cabinet supremacy is restricted and cabinet secrecy broken down.

Left strategy and alternative vote procedures offered in 2011

Political alternatives of the left are currently being put forward from a position of weakness. Therefore the left needs to argue for the maintenance of a vote procedure that can accommodate both a) drawing upon ideological support for left alternatives through nationwide party voting, and b) drawing upon support from supporters and progressive voters in local electorates where left alternatives are able to be established on the grounds of genuine working class and community leadership in practice.

If PV is to be introduced parliament will remain the same size and there will be 120 electorates. In each electorate voters will rank the candidates in order of preference. The candidate with over 50% of votes is elected. If there is no such candidate then first preference votes for the last-ranked candidate are recounted with the second ranked candidate as first preference. This is repeated until a candidate holds more than 50% of the vote. All things being equal (i.e. that there is no structural political or social change between now and such an election) this system would be likely to return strength to the two-party system. Minor party candidates with strong electorate constituency support can still be elected, but that is already the case with electorate voting under MMP.

A change from MMP to SM would produce a decline in the share of seats gained through party votes and reduce the proportionality established by MMP. Essentially the number of seats derived from party votes would reduce from 50 down to 30 and increase the number of electorate votes (parliament would still consist of 120 seats). Overall, this procedure would also tend towards restrengthening the two-party system.

STV would have the effect of limiting the ability of electors to cast a vote on ideological grounds. There would be no

party vote through which electors could express pure political preference. The number of MPs would stay the same but each would be an electorate MP, and there would be multiple MPs per electorate. While the use of STV would avoid disproportionate correspondence of votes and seats, and would likely result in coalitions and not reinforce a two-party system, the danger is – all things being equal – that it could also influence electors to vote for likely winners and scale down voting (or at least high preference voting) for alternative politics.

The workers' movement and democracy

At the present time and at first glance independent participation in general elections and preferences of electoral system do not appear to be the burning questions for the far-left in New Zealand. Moreover, the far-left does not uphold bourgeois democracy / representative democracy as a source of change in favour of the working class. The New Zealand parliament is the machinery of the ruling class and, upon any electoral success, the left would be required to treat it as such.

There are two reasons as to why the far-left needs to be clear in its position on the electoral system. Firstly, any section of the far-left embarking on rebuilding a workers party and the radical workers movement needs to take a tactical view. Of the electoral systems available, MMP is the one that offers more scope for future initiation of electoral interventions or campaigns of the far-left.

Second, socialists need to make explicit the connection between socialism and democracy. Openly struggling for democracy is essential for rebuilding fighting unions, for short-term building of far-left organisations, for forging any organisation that will ever be capable of properly challenging capitalist power and establishing workers' democracy. Championing democracy is also necessary for rearticulating the ideas of genuine socialism in contrast to Stalinist methods. As well as articulating a view of post-capitalism, the far-left has to support the electoral system which offers the most democratic space.

Union activism

Kiribati workers, members of Northern AWUNZ, fight redundancies and racism in Warkworth

The press release below was issued on September 7th by the Northern Amalgamated Workers Union which is in a redundancy dispute with Southern Paprika Limited. We note that the RSE policy is external to the union.

Media Release: Kiribati workers fight horticulture redundancies in Warkworth. For immediate publication.

Workers at capsicum grower Southern Paprika Limited in Warkworth are being threatened with 13 redundancies, announced by the Company on Monday 5 September. The union on site, the Northern Amalgamated Workers Union has called for all the redundancies to be scrapped on the basis that no compelling justification has been put forward by SPL.

The Company admits that it is profitable, and that there is no financial case for the job cuts, citing instead “efficiencies”.

“At the same time as scrapping production jobs, the Company is proposing to create an additional HR position,” states union organiser Mike Kyriazopoulos. “How can getting rid of the people who pick, grade and pack the fruit, while making the company more top-heavy lead to greater efficiency? Nearly all the workers come from

Kiribati and Tuvalu, have put down roots in the local community, and will struggle to find alternative employment in the Warkworth area. The Company are proposing to bring in 16 temporary migrant workers under the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme in October.

“If a position is made redundant, only to be filled by an RSE worker, the Company risks violating its Agreement to Recruit under the RSE scheme,” says



Above and left, meetings of the Warkworth Kiribati community, union members, and their supporters. Left, members of the MANA Te Raki Pae Whenua show support for the dispute, Hone Harawira speaking.

Kyriazopoulos. "Under RSE, they are required to 'take all reasonable steps to recruit and train New Zealanders for available positions before trying to recruit non-New Zealand citizen or non resident workers.' We will be taking this up at a political level.

"SPL claims that it is 'carrying' too many employees. But in the 12 years of its existence, the company has grown from 2.5 hectares to 14 hectares today, thanks to the efforts of its staff. It is the workers who have carried SPL on their shoulders."

Notes:

- The union has challenged the ability of the company to run a fair process for redundancy after the manner in which it dealt with an incident involving a racist text on a company phone earlier in the year. A former Cadet Manager at SPL described the content of the text as being: "The best Christmas present I could have would be a black man swinging from a tree".

No-one responsible for the text message was disciplined in the subsequent investigation by the company. However, two union members were disciplined for trying to conduct their own investigation into the incident. The union has referred the matter to the Human Rights Commission.

For further information, contact Mike Kyriazopoulos on 021 288 5601 or michael@awunz.org.nz

Dispute outcome

The following report was written on September 28th

Today SPL (Warkworth) and AWUNZ Union signed an agreement brokered through the Department of Labour to settle their dispute over the 13 workers made redundant on 4 October. All 13 of the workers made redundant will receive offers of permanent seasonal employment of 5-9 months per year starting on 7 November. This offer is in addition to the affected workers being given 2 weeks pay in lieu of notice, and redundancy pay of 4 weeks for the first year of service, plus 2 weeks for each subsequent year of service. The Labour Dept was satisfied that the outcome meant that the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) workers were no longer displacing Permanent Resident workers.

The deal was unanimously endorsed at a meeting of the affected workers, and the union considers the outcome to be the best one achievable in the circumstances. The union understands that all of its affected members will

be taking up the Company's offer of permanent seasonal employment in November. The RSE workers will also benefit: the union was told by the company that the small increase above the minimum wage it negotiated in April will also be paid to the RSE workers who arrive next month.

The Union and the local Kiribati community had launched a lively campaign in response to the redundancies. A meeting attended by about 40 I-Kiribati workers was held in Warkworth on 14 September. Mana leader Hone Harawiri spoke, urging the workers and Kiribati community to push forward the struggle themselves. Harawira had also done a lot of work behind the scenes to get the Dept of Labour along to the meeting and getting them to force the company to participate in mediation. The star of the show was Mana activist Jesse Pene, who turned up, complete with a ceremonial fighting

staff, and proceeded to give a rousing speech about how he was part of a militant struggle against redundancies by construction workers at the Aotea centre back in the day. He urged the workers to take strike action to defeat the redundancies and finished by appealing to those workers with residency to party vote Mana. His korero was greeted by rapturous applause by the I-Kiribati.

The negotiated deal represents a partial victory for the workers, considering the odds they were up against (i.e. workers from one of the poorest countries on earth versus a boss who is personal friends with John Key and Lockwood Smith). Union Organiser Mike Kyriazopoulos commented: "This proves that if you do nothing, you get nothing; but if you put up a fight – as we did – you can win something for the workers."



Other People's Wars: Real journalism exposing NZ imperialism

Joel Cosgrove, Workers Party, Wellington branch

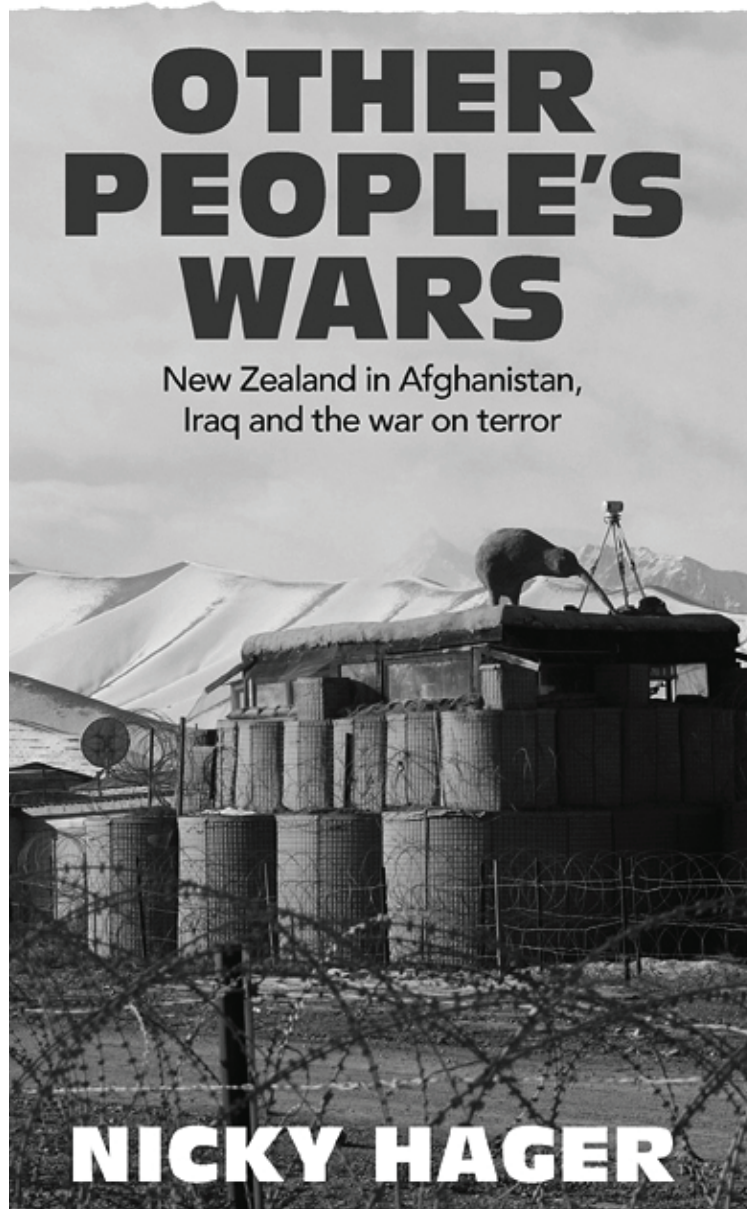
Anyone who reads the book will know more about New Zealand military and what it did in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Gulf than any politician in parliament - Nicky Hager.

With his latest book Nicky Hager has blown away the tightly controlled political and military cover for New Zealand's involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq. The book itself was published on Thursday and once it has been read and analysed The Spark will publish a wider analysis drawn from Hager's explosive scoop.

With his previous books 'Secret Power', 'Secrets and Lies', 'Seeds of Distrust', 'The Hollow Men' and now 'Other People's Wars' Hager has cemented his place as one of the most important journalists New Zealand has ever produced.

The following is a summary of the key points that Hager makes in his book:

- One of the major themes running throughout the book is the control the military have exerted over the media through public relations methods. Leaked documents show the strategies hatched by the military leadership to keep key events and information from parliament, the media, and the public.
- Right from New Zealand's first involvement in Afghanistan, confidential critical reports have circulated amongst the defence force concerning the lack of strategy regarding New Zealand involvement in imperialist wars, as well as tactical deficiencies with regard to the New Zealand deployments.



- Primarily New Zealand's involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq has been motivated by diplomatic, defence, and trade concerns.
- New Zealand's involvement in the wars has been driven and led by defence staff, with a strong focus on rebuilding what is in effect the ANZUS alliance in all but name.
- Officials and military staff developed a close and tight reign on any negative information coming out of the

warzones, they resorted to misleading or outright lying to get a good story.

- New Zealand troops have regularly engaged in combat activity or combat support. This activity was not confined to the SAS.

• New Zealand Navy frigates and Air Force Orions' were actively involved in supporting the US/UK invasion of Iraq.

- New Zealand's 'reconstruction' efforts in Bamiyan province were at best a fig-leaf and at worst an outright sham. Reconstruction projects were started afresh every 6 months and then left on the wayside with the end of each deployment. The successes hyped up in New Zealand were extremely over-exaggerated or downright lies.

• There were undeclared US intelligence officers in the Kiwi base at Bamiyan who would often debrief New Zealand soldiers directly. New Zealand media were aware of their presence but as a whole, did not report on it, due to the perceived 'irrelevance' of raising it.

- Hager has described this as the biggest leak in New Zealand history.

The response to this at Hager's press conference and afterwards by the media and senior politicians has been illustrative. Guyon Espiner (TVONE political editor) stated that he was not surprised that U.S. intelligence officers were present in the New Zealand Provincial Reconstruction Team base and that he even ate meals with them and was briefed, pledging to keep

information secret. He then proceeded to ask Hager if he had gone to Afghanistan, which Hager has not. However Hager's 1300+ footnotes representing five years of research and interviews has far more authenticity and accuracy when measured against the public relations-parachute-reporting that has characterised the majority of the New Zealand media's reporting of Afghanistan to date.

Vernon Small in a recent Dominion opinion piece was surprisingly frank when he said that: "In fact, I, and other reporters before me, were introduced to US intelligence and communications staff at Bamiyan and at other Kiwi bases and ate and chatted with them. The stars and stripes flies alongside the New Zealand flag at Bamiyan to advertise the US contingent."

John Key's response has been to roll his eyes, rubbish the work on the grounds of its authorship by Hager and state blankly that although he has not read the work, there is no evidence to back up Hager's claims. This has been an almost carbon copy to his dismissal of Jon Stephenson who is the only other major New Zealand journalist writing independently and critically about New Zealand's involvement in Afghanistan. The only major difference between Key's treatment of either journalist is the malice and personal attacks poured on Stephenson.

Phil Goff's response has not been much better. Refusing to call for an inquiry and describing the book as 'spurious', again without reading it. The general response so far from media has been to focus almost entirely on the revelation of the presence of U.S. intelligence officials in the Bamiyan camp, normalising and downplaying the fact by revealing a general knowledge of their presence, justifying it through the nonchalant shrugging of their shoulders at the apparent lack of need to report this to the general public.

Jerry Mateparae, the recent head of the Defence Force, who officially took up the role Governor General on the day of the book's release, has denied or been unable to recall any of the issues raised in the book. Simon Wilson writing in the Metro (before the publication of the book) wrote, "Mateparae is a former head of the SAS, the Army and the NZDF, and has therefore been responsible, in

one capacity or another, for the troops in the field and for advising the government on their activities, for the entire period of the Afghan war."

Hager being interviewed on TV3's Firstline after the publication of *Other People's Wars*

This is an aspect that Hager has talked about. Either senior parliamentarians in both the Labour and National governments lied, or they chose not to know about what was going, or both. The denials by both military and parliamentary figures have been clear to say they did not know about CIA bases. Not that there were not bases, or that they were staffed by intelligence figures, just a very specific, very vague wave-off, that relies on Hager not being able to provide documentation that directly links any of these senior figures to the issues raised. Key himself has been clear to talk about the lack of a "smoking gun" in relation to Hager's claims.

One of the leaks is a confidential 2010 Defence Force report which said the projects overseen by the Provincial Reconstruction Team "...do not appear to be sustainable in any way". This is a key aspect behind the change in presentation of New Zealand's support for imperialist interventions. We are 'peacekeepers' who are 'rebuilding' in occupied lands, from Bosnia, to East Timor and now Afghanistan and Iraq. The language of intervention, invasion, and occupation has changed and been softened to hide away the realities of New Zealand's support of American invasions which have killed hundreds of thousands of lives over the past decade.

Hager's meticulous documentation deals a striking blow to this notion. New Zealand's involvement in Afghanistan is about closer ties to the U.S., it is not about 'hearts and minds' or provincial reconstruction, it is about providing intelligence and support for the US bombing and indiscriminate attacks on the Afghan people. When they say that the SAS are 'mentoring' Afghan troops it is now clear – even though it was obvious before – that it means being at the front of any attacks or operations, not unlike U.S. 'observers' in the Vietnam war. Fran O'Sullivan, in The New Zealand Herald, wrote that there exists "...a culture of secrecy which means New Zealand journalists can obtain clearer

information from military websites overseas than is made readily available at home" and said "... much of the official information which the Labour government chose to publish was hopelessly outdated."

This is the other important aspect of the story which Hager hasn't engaged on to the same extent. Namely the co-option of the media (as if they weren't already coopted to begin with). Every journalist who has spoken of their trips to Afghanistan since the publication of Hager's book has done so as a defence of the establishment and as an attack on Hager's credibility. None of them thought that the presence of U.S. intelligence officials camped within the New Zealand base was at all at odds with the 'peacekeeping', 'reconstruction' public face of the mission. The reality is that the media are no longer reporting on the military but instead reporting for the military.

In part the reason for this is that as mainstream journalists, they are reliant on the government and dominant political parties for stories, gossip, and scoops. If they break this system of patronage, then they lose their place in the food-chain.

While various governments have not been able to cow either Stephenson or Hager, both journalists stand as a testament to the ostracisation involved when actually holding power to account. The role of people like Richard Long, who moved from Evening Post editorship to being chief of staff to then National Party leader Don Brash as well as the tight links between media, business and the political sphere shown by the fallout from the News of the World scandal in England makes this symbiotic relationship clear.

Since 2001, the Workers Party and its forerunner organisations have joined in the calls and the marches against the war and New Zealand's involvement, and on occasions the Workers Party has played key organisational and/or political roles in that movement. Clearly Hager has outlined how the political parties and senior military figures have learnt and developed their public relations strategies and tactics. We need to learn from this in order to counteract government propaganda and whatever other public relations approaches they attempt next.

Local politics

Gisborne City District councillor stands up for socialism

Jared Phillips

In early September Gisborne City District councillor Manu Caddie hit back against a local figure who is critical of socialism and who was attempting to discredit Caddie by labelling him a socialist. This occurred within a debate over rates differentials. In an opinion piece in *The Gisborne Herald* (3/9/11) Caddie wrote:

... an aspiring mayoral candidate blamed socialists on Gisborne District Council for the increase in his rates demand, which he thinks is a form of wealth tax. Of course, he failed to mention his properties are collectively worth millions of dollars and the proportion of his rates to property is less than one tenth of what the vast majority of us contribute. Instead of shrinking from his critic and acting as centrist and apologist, and denying the principles of socialism, Caddie defended the core principles of socialism. He stated that 'The core notion of traditional socialism is that working people have to be in control of their own lives.

He went on to distinguish socialism from Stalinism and highlighted the importance of local and industrial democracy. He then summarised: Socialism is the idea that people should



Gisborne City District councillor Manu Caddie

be in control of their own destiny and lives, including the institutions within which they work and the communities within which they live. This is the potential and my vision for local government.

Caddie has been a hard-working youth-worker and community campaigner in Gisborne for a number

of years. Whilst our organisation doesn't agree with every sentiment in his article (which is viewable at <http://www.gisborneherald.co.nz/article/?id=24392>) it is highly refreshing to see local representatives step up for their constituents and speak the truth about the types of changes needed to make a democratic and equitable world.

Victoria University students support Palestinian Resistance

The following article by Marika Pratley, Wellington PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) campaign Co-ordinator and Vic Palestine member, was first published at workersparty.org.nz

Over August Vic Palestine organised a series of events to create awareness and build support for the Palestinian struggle around Victoria University and Wellington. This included a film screening of *Occupation 101*, a Student Representative Council (SRC) on the right to education for Palestinians, a

panel discussion on Israel and Palestine, and a fundraising gig to prepare for the photography exhibition "Unrecognised", which is opening in Wellington tonight. Despite Zionist supporters ripping down posters in an attempt to censor the campaign, there has been strong support given by the community and all events

were well attended.

The SRC happened on the 29th of July in the Victoria University student union building, with over 140 people. The Motion was put forward: "To affiliate to the Right to Education Campaign at Birzeit University as a public show of solidarity and support

Palestine solidarity

to all Palestinian students and teachers who are struggling to live, work and study under the illegal Israeli occupation.”, as part of the right2edu campaign (further information can be read here <http://right2edu.birzeit.edu/downloads/pdfs/CampaignAffiliationMotion...> <<http://right2edu.birzeit.edu/downloads/pdfs/CampaignAffiliationMotion...>>).

John Minto from GPJA in Auckland was there to talk in support of the motion, and referenced the struggle of abolishing apartheid in South Africa as a reason for supporting the issue. There were also speakers from Vic Palestine, the Greens and other radical left organizations on campus. Debate on the motion was based mostly on people not understanding the need for international solidarity, rather than being Zionist supporters. However the outcome was an overwhelming majority of students in support of the right2edu campaign, and the motion was passed.

The SRC was followed by a panel in the first week of August. Nigel Parsons, a Political Scientist from

Massey University opened the panel by discussing the Israel Palestine situation. Dr. Parsons used Foucault's theory of Bio-politics as a basis for discussing how the state functions in controlling people's lives. He then proceeded to apply this through historical development of Israel, and how this control has impacted on the Palestinians as individuals and their community as a whole. He went on to discuss how the Oslo agreement relied on incorporating the PLO, leading to the Palestinian Authorities controlling their own resistance, and allowing for the development of settlements in the West Bank. He ended his talk pointing out that when demanding for 'the right of state' for Palestinians, it's absolutely essential to consider what this means in practice, and what 'type' of state the Palestinians would be demanding.

This was followed by Hone from Kia Ora Gaza. He gave a skype presentation of photos from the Kia Ora Gaza convoy that visited Palestine in December last year, with other international organizations. Kia Ora

Gaza are organising another group to go at the end of 2011 and are looking for volunteers.

The final part of the panel was presented by Nadia from Vic Palestine. She focused her talk on the experiences of Palestinians youth, and how they relate to the occupation. This included accounts of people in Palestine as well as her own experiences, being apart of the Palestinian diaspora that were born and raised outside of Palestine. She included example of how her cousin fell in love with an Israeli Conscientious objector, and what it feels like to have a displaced identity due to the denial of rights for the Palestinian community.

The final part of the Palestine Solidarity fortnight, was a fundraising gig at Garrett street in Wellington. This was done on behalf of the Concerned Citizens, to fundraise for a photo exhibition, which is intended to raise awareness of the UN meeting in September, which will decide whether or not Palestine will be recognized as a state.

Support Palestinian Resistance: buy a shirt!



\$30 each

Name.....

e-mail address.....

No. of shirts.....

e-mail [wpnz.pflp.solidarity@
gmail.com](mailto:wpnz.pflp.solidarity@gmail.com)
PO Box 10-282 Dominion
Road, Auckland
[http://wpnz-pflp-solidarity.
blogspot.com/](http://wpnz-pflp-solidarity.blogspot.com/)

small ☐
large ☐
XL ☐
XXL ☐
10-fitted ☐
12-fitted ☐
14 fitted ☐

Student activism

‘We Are the University’ - A firsthand perspective on the Auckland University occupation

This article is written by a Workers Party sympathiser at Auckland University

Once again the mainstream media establishment have neglected to tell all sides of a story - in this case regarding the autonomous student action that resulted in an occupation at the University of Auckland on the 26th of September. I feel that my own experience goes in direct opposition with a lot of what has been said - from not only having been at the event, but also taking a small role in its organisation. The occupation was about far more than the Voluntary Student Membership (VSM) bill, it was about the increasing corporatisation of tertiary education in this country, of which VSM is but one part of a sustained attack on tertiary education as a whole.

Other demands were against the cutting of academic work conditions, negatively affecting quality of research, and against the continual rise in student fees. With this in mind, the choice to occupy the Owen G. Glenn Building was an inspired one, as to many it is a symbol of Auckland University's not-so-gradual transition from an educational institute to a business.

What is also important to point out is that the occupation consisted of far more than simply the usual ‘rabble-rousing’ left-wing activist intelligentsia with no connection to ‘regular’ students, as some right-wing commentators have been trying to argue in an attempt to delegitimise. While some of the ‘usual suspects’ were present, they had a minimal involvement in the organisation of this occupation, which made this event especially exciting for me personally.

I have known a substantial number of the organisers and leaders of this movement for a long time, most of whom have had no prior interest in tangible political action. They were inspired not only by the left-wing academic literature they were reading as part of their education, but also by the grassroots social movements that are



Students encircled a police car after a man participating in the demonstration was arrested.

currently happening all over the world in response to finance capitalism in which students play an important role. From this nucleus of socially conscious but largely politically inexperienced students, we managed to coat the university in not only posters advertising the rally yet also just general agitprop.

Once we were in the building, I met about a dozen classmates I've had over the years who I had no idea were into this sort of thing. As a member of the student union executive commented to us, what is impressive about this action is the predominant organic character of it, in which student unions and existing radical organisations played a largely backseat role.

What is also interesting is how the media have fixated on the brief skirmish with the police after the occupation, rather than either the occupation or the demands I have just outlined. None of the news coverage I have seen covered any of the pre-occupation speeches from radical lecturers, journalists and sympathetic politicians; nor did they pay any attention to the press release we sent out before the rally. They were instead interested in constructing a narrative where the ‘violence’ that the students allegedly partook in undermined its message, as a sort of self-fulfilling

prophecy.

As someone who was at the frontlines when this incident happened, I did not see any student commit violence against the police. When an activist was arrested due to previously being trespassed off campus for merely attending an anti-Israel protest in support, not doing anything that could be even tenuously construed as violent or antisocial, we peacefully blockaded the car demanding they let our comrade go since he had done nothing wrong. The police were the only people who committed any violence, storming in to break up the blockade. One would think that in a perfect world the police would be trained in methods of breaking these blockades with minimal physical harm, however this was not the case - some women at the frontline were hit quite hard in the breasts, while others report being choked.

This action is only the beginning, and no matter how much politicians, bureaucrats and the media attempt to write us off and delegitimise us, we will be back, stronger and in greater numbers than before. Despite of what university management may think, We Are the University.

<http://www.wearetheuniversity.org.nz>

Two law changes for foreign born students

Byron Clark

Legislative changes affecting international students studying in New Zealand and refugees based here wanting to pursue tertiary education are in the works. The first will make it easier for students from overseas to come to New Zealand to study, the second will make it more difficult for New Zealanders who came here as refugees.

University issued visas

Immigration New Zealand chief executive Nigel Bickle told The Press recently that “trusted institutions” could get the power to make visa decisions for students, allowing international students to bypass the immigration department when getting visas. While throughout most of the world tertiary education –especially in a foreign country– is a privilege for the wealthy, the right for short term migrants to come to New Zealand to study is one that should be supported, along side calls to allow migrant workers greater rights. It should be noted of course that international students pay for their study with no subsidies from the New Zealand state. That of course, rather than an altruistic desire to provide education, is the reasoning behind this new policy. To quote Bickle, “Expanding these markets [China and India] will help the export education sector grow into a \$5 billion-dollar a year export earner which it has the potential to do.”

Cuts to refugee grants

Refugees, a group of migrants less likely to be able to pay large sums for higher education, will not benefit from this new international student policy. While the state dismantles barriers for wealthy foreign students, they have made study my difficult for refugees resident in New Zealand, by removing refugee study grants. “I always dreamed to study since I was a child, but as a result of war and



Immigration New Zealand chief executive Nigel Bickle

bad economy, I never had the chance.” Mohammad Ali Amiri was quoted as saying in the Tertiary Education Union newsletter, “I had to work hard to support my family. But since I came to New Zealand, my dream came true and I got the chance to study, even if I had to work fulltime to support my family. Even sleep couldn’t stop me studying – I had only three to four hours sleep a day. But this year I couldn’t continue with my study as a result of government cuts to the study grant for refugees.”

A campaign aiming to have refugee-background students recognised as an equity group in government policy, which would mean getting additional study support, was launched on August 23rd at a forum organised by ChangeMakers Refugee Forum, the National Refugee Network, MCLaSS and academics from Victoria University.

Potential backlash

With below inflation funding increases and outright cuts, education providers have been starting to turn away students and tighten up on entry requirements, all while trying to recruit fee-paying international students. With youth unemployment at 27% and talk of benefits being linked to job training, resentment of international students could develop as New Zealand born young people find higher education unobtainable, this would play into the hands of politicians who seek political gain in xenophobia. An important task for the left is to make sure anger is directed where it belongs– at the economic policies that have led to this situation and not at foreign born students.

Fiery scenes at Victoria University as security attack students

This article was first published on September 14, 2011 at workersparty.org.nz. More analysis of the current wave of student activism on campus's can also be located on this website.

Over 300 students gathered today to protest ongoing cuts and redundancies at Victoria University this afternoon. More than one hundred students marched to deliver a letter outlining their concerns to Vice Chancellor Pat Walsh. At that point University security guards blocked access to the students, whose sole intention was to deliver their letter to Walsh or a representative. Security staff proceeded to push students down stairs and punched several in the head. "I was just trying to slip the letter under Pat's door; security came up and started trying to push us down stairs. There were people behind us; people could have got hurt if security had actually succeeded. Because of that, they started punching me in the head. I guess they're not fans of non-violent protests..." says student Sam

Oldham.

A number of current and former students spoke beforehand including a recent PhD graduate, as well as a number of staff. Speakers highlighted issues of course and staff cuts as well as incompetent and short-sighted management running the university into the ground. It was put forward that senior management at VUW have cultivated a culture of fear and intimidation over more than half a decade, with staff fearful of speaking for fear of repercussions. "I am disgusted that this culture of intimidation at VUW has extended to management condoning and supporting security staff violently attacking students. If we can't be critical of uni policies and changes, how are meant to act as the critic and conscience of society?" Says

postgraduate student Amanda Thomas. Hundreds of outlines of students were drawn in chalk to represent the death of quality tertiary education. The sheer amount of chalking stopped security from immediately washing out any slogans they disliked, something that had been going on in the preceding two weeks. Security have claimed that chalking is "banned" at VUW. Students are organising more actions to stop VUW management further damaging the institution. "I'm disappointed in the university, it is supposed to be a critical and creative space, but when we actually use those rights, we're literally pushed down stairs," says student Octavia Palmer.



Victoria University students protested on campus in Wellington against voluntary student membership