

WSWS speaks to workers and student ahead of New Zealand election

Our reporters
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As New Zealand approaches an election on Saturday, the *World Socialist Web Site* has spoken with workers and young people about the rising cost of living, the pro-war policies of all the capitalist parties and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The incumbent Labour Party and the opposition National Party have both promised major cuts to public spending, while funnelling more money to the military. According to several polls, the Labour government's support has nearly halved from 50 percent in the 2020 election to around 26 percent.

Neither party has mass support, with more than a third of voters supporting a minor party such as the Greens, which are part of the Labour-led government, Te P?ti M?ori, which supports Labour, and the far-right ACT and New Zealand First. Large numbers of young people are not enrolled to vote, especially in impoverished working-class areas. Many enrolled voters are likely to abstain.

Prom, a postal worker in Auckland, told the WSWS he had voted for Labour in 2017 but would not vote for anyone this election. He mentioned that the E t? union had visited his workplace “spruiking for votes” as part of “a big propaganda drive for the Labour Party.” The union has accepted the slashing of hundreds of jobs at NZ Post.

Workers were told that “prices are going to go up” under a National-led government, but Prom said the cost of food and mortgage repayments was already rising. “It won't improve under National or anybody. It will just get worse, they'll keep increasing the attacks on us, whoever gets in.”

Regarding the growing danger of a US war against China, he said the WSWS had published “some good articles about how the Australian government and our government have tried to get the Pacific Island nations onboard, and the amount of money we've been dedicating to upgrading our military. It's just a waste.”

There was “not a peep” out of the Green Party about the

military build-up, he said. “I regard them with the same disdain as Labour and National, and any political party. I hold them all accountable.”

Commenting on the recent news about Prime Minister Chris Hipkins being infected with COVID-19, Prom said: “I hate to say it but I felt happy when I saw that. He deserved that. Along with the war, they're just sweeping COVID to the side.” The Labour government has removed all COVID-19 public health measures, resulting in more than 3,400 deaths and tens of thousands of hospitalisations over the past two years.

Anne, a medical laboratory worker who has been involved in recent strikes over low wages, said she was thinking of voting for the Greens or Te P?ti M?ori, which she views as lesser evils. “I talk to people at work all day long, and there's a lot of people who used to vote Labour and they've decided that Labour are spineless,” she said.

“I'm terrified by ACT and National getting in. I think if they won, there would be a rise in the suicide rate and crime and all sorts of misery. They are the rich people's parties.”

Criticising the “law and order” rhetoric from National and ACT, she said: “We need to start with the little kids and give them a good life, not just crack down on people who've had a horrible, dysfunctional life and punish them.”

Anne described conditions facing ordinary people as “horrific”. “I was talking to someone at work some months ago who was having blood tests related to malnutrition, because they didn't have enough money to buy food. I ended up telling them where the local foodbank was, which is not my job.”

She sharply criticised Labour and National's support for Israel's assault on the population of Gaza, based on its so-called “right to defend itself,” calling this stance: “Very lazy, tone deaf, gaslighting, probably trying to impress America and England. It's just evil.

“I’ve got a Facebook friend in Gaza who isn’t in contact at the moment. You’ve got people in an open air prison with PTSD. Sometimes they’re going to snap, and it doesn’t make violence okay, but decades and decades of being treated like the Jewish people were treated in the Holocaust, it has an effect on people.”

Stan, who is unemployed and whose wife suffers from diabetes and fibromyalgia, told the WSWS that life has become much harder. “We haven’t been able to get onto a fixed mortgage interest rate. It’s been going up, we’ve missed one or two payments, so the bank has been trying to get the debt collectors onto us.”

He believed that “all the parties are hiding their intentions. It’s a no-issue election, it’s just rhetoric and muck-raking. The cost of living keeps getting brought up, but nobody’s got an answer to it. No one’s got any answers for the housing crisis. Even if building continues at the rate it has for the last six months, homelessness is going to get worse and worse.”

Stan was scathing about Labour’s policy of removing the goods and services tax from fruit and vegetables. “Of course that’s welcome but that’s only a drop in the ocean. With general inflation and rising costs it’s going to make very little difference. Fruit and veges have gone up significantly in price. It’s just going to have the most miniscule effect and they’re promoting it as a major promise.”

He also attacked National’s “tough on crime” slogans, saying this was “just to distract people from what’s going on with the standard of living. The more inequality, the more the crime rate increases. The same with the gangs. With no opportunities for the disadvantaged, they’re just going to drift into the gangs because that’s the only place they feel like they belong.”

Stefan, a medical student in Wellington, said he did not feel personally worse off under the current government, but was considering voting for Te P?ti M?ori “mainly because of policies like GST off food,” which he believed would help bring about “a more equitable country.”

The WSWS reporter pointed to the record of this party, which was in government with the right-wing National Party from 2008 to 2017.

Stefan also expressed concern about the prospect of war, saying: “I was watching the leaders’ debate and they were talking about the AUKUS agreement, and Labour and National were noncommittal.” New Zealand is under pressure to support the military pact between Australia, the US and UK, which is aimed at preparing for war against China.

“I would be against imperialism, expansionism, which can be observed with the United States, especially with the situation around Taiwan. I would love to see de-escalation with Ukraine as well,” Stefan said.

The reporter pointed to a statement by Defence Minister Andrew Little that New Zealand had to be “equipped and prepared” to join a possible war to defend New Zealand’s \$20 billion exports going through the South China Sea. Stefan questioned this logic, observing that NZ’s exports are “largely going to China.”

Antonio, a university student and hospitality worker, said young people are most concerned about the cost-of-living crisis. “The older generation, like my mum, studied at university completely free and lived on very low rent. On the other hand, I have to pay \$245 per week for a room that’s far smaller than any room she ever had.”

Financially, he was only able to get by because his family paid for his tuition. “If I were to go into debt for my tuition, it would be really unaffordable. I would probably be in debt for the next 10 years.”

Antonio said he was “in full support” of the Palestinian uprising against their oppression by the Zionist Israeli state. He said Labour and National’s support for Israel’s murderous crackdown “doesn’t surprise me in the slightest. I will probably be voting for Labour, for the same reasons that people might have voted for Joe Biden—it’s just the lesser evil.”

“I do believe that a lot of the problems in politics are used to distract from the class war. Eliminating the disparity between the classes would only be a benefit,” Antonio said.



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