

New Zealand ACT Party leader calls for privatisations, rails against Marxism

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David Seymour, leader of the far-right ACT Party and a senior minister in New Zealand's National Party-led coalition government, delivered a "State of the Nation" speech on January 24.

He demanded the sweeping privatisation of public services, including health and education, the removal of regulations that constrain corporate profit-making, and a doubling of the military budget to prepare for war. He also warned of the "danger" of young people and students being attracted to Marxism and "the hard left."

Seymour's speech overshadowed a "State of the Nation" speech by Prime Minister Christopher Luxon the day before, which announced funding cuts to science and innovation and the creation of a new agency to encourage foreign investment.

The ACT Party, despite receiving just 8.6 percent of the votes in the 2023 election, is playing a leading role in the government's onslaught against workers' living standards. Its ministers have put forward major legislation to penalise workers for taking industrial action and to subordinate government regulations to the interests of corporate profit.

Bourgeois politics in New Zealand reflects the accelerating lurch to the extreme right by ruling elites internationally, expressed most sharply in the election of the fascistic Donald Trump in the United States, who was warmly congratulated by Seymour and Luxon, as well as the opposition Labour Party leader Chris Hipkins.

Seymour's speech resembled a statement a few days earlier by Javier Milei, the president of Argentina, whose austerity measures have pushed Argentina's poverty rate from 42 to 53 percent in just one year. Milei, a close ally of Trump, raved against "woke ideology" and "leftist sons of bitches," and demanded the further dismantling of state services and tax cuts to

benefit the super-rich.

Like Milei, Seymour asserted that New Zealand was divided into "two tribes": the "change makers" and "pioneers" who start businesses and supposedly embody "the true Kiwi spirit"; and on the opposing side, the "people building a majority for mediocrity" who want to tax wealth and "believe that their troubles are caused by other people's success."

To put more wealth at the disposal of the elites, Seymour said the country had "to get past squeamishness about privatisation." He proposed to dismantle universal public healthcare and education, lamenting that "we are now spending nearly \$6,000 [a year] per citizen on healthcare." Cash incentives or tax cuts could be used to persuade people to "give up their right to the public healthcare system."

Seymour said the state should sell the 60,000 public houses that it currently owns. This would provide a bonanza for property investors, while driving up rents and exacerbating the housing affordability crisis and record levels of homelessness. In 2023, 112,496 people, or 2.3 percent of the population, were experiencing "severe housing deprivation," up from 99,462 in 2018.

While the National Party, the biggest party in the coalition government, has ruled out major privatisations in this term, Luxon told the media he was "open to a conversation" about Seymour's ideas and indicated that National would campaign for asset sales in the 2026 election.

National has already adopted numerous policies from ACT, including the Regulatory Standards Bill aimed at shredding "red tape." In a recent *New Zealand Herald* column promoting the bill, Seymour said too much money was spent on making buildings compliant with earthquake regulations, when "fewer than 500 people have died from earthquakes" in New Zealand.

Removing such regulations is a recipe for disaster. In 2011, large parts of Christchurch were rendered uninhabitable by an earthquake; 185 people died, 115 of them in the CTV building, which was not built to withstand earthquakes.

While calling for vital services to be defunded and privatised, Seymour proposed an extra \$3.2 billion for the military, increasing its budget from 1 to 2 percent of gross domestic product. He noted that “US foreign policy” would place “pressure” on New Zealand to do this, without elaborating.

The government, supported by the Labour Party, is integrating New Zealand into US-led war plans against China, as well as the ongoing wars in the Middle East and against Russia. As a minor imperialist power, New Zealand’s ruling elite is seeking to secure its seat at the table for the violent redivision of the world.

The ruling class is aware that its plans are extremely unpopular and that workers and youth are moving to the left. A survey last year found more than two thirds of people oppose greater military spending, and 65 percent agree that “New Zealand’s economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful.”

Seymour, echoing Milei and Trump, delivered a tirade against socialism. He declared that “the hard left prey on young New Zealanders,” who were being “infected by universities with the woke mind viruses of identity politics, Marxism, and post-modernism.” He warned that growing student debt, the high cost of housing, and exposure to the ideas of Karl Marx, the founder of scientific socialism, was “a dangerous combination.”

The government is not seriously concerned about Labour, the Greens, Te P?ti M?ori—all capitalist parties with no genuine differences with austerity and militarism—or with identity politics, which is completely opposed to Marxism. The fixation on racial and gender identity by these parties and their pseudo-left supporters serves to obscure the fundamental class divide in society and the objective necessity for building a unified, international movement of the working class against the capitalist system.

The ACT Party is itself seeking to divert social anger by whipping up racial divisions with its false claims that M?ori receive special privileges. Only a small section of bourgeois and upper middle-class M?ori have benefited from identity politics to advance their

careers in business, politics and the state apparatus; the vast majority of indigenous people are among the most exploited layers of the working class.

There is not yet a mass socialist movement, but the government is preparing to ramp up domestic surveillance and crack down on opposition to war and social inequality. A proposed law against “foreign interference,” supported by the Labour Party, will be used to criminalise actions that are deemed to threaten New Zealand’s “economic well-being” (corporate profits) and “international relations” (imperialist alliances).

Seymour’s speech underscores the urgent need for the working class to make its own political preparations. Anger towards social inequality, fascism and war is not sufficient. What is required is socialist consciousness and organisation, in opposition to Labour and all its allies. Workers and youth must arm themselves with the program of Trotskyism, the Marxism of the twenty-first century, and join the fight to build the Trotskyist movement, represented in New Zealand by the Socialist Equality Group.



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