

# **OPEN LETTER FROM WORKERS PARTY (NZ) TO SOCIALIST AOTEAROA COMRADES**

**- Prepared by Jared Phillips on behalf of Workers Party,  
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(from the Workers Party website: <http://workersparty.org.nz>)

Dear Socialist Aotearoa comrades,

In response to the recent left split from Socialist Worker, and the subsequent formation of Socialist Aotearoa, we are submitting the following endorsements, criticisms, and proposals. We hope you will all take the time to read, evaluate, and act on the propositions we put forward.

The last thing Socialist Aotearoa comrades will want to hear after the split from Socialist Worker is 'Hey guys, Workers Party is where it's all at, get yourselves over here if you want to be real revolutionaries'. We understand that as serious Marxists and serious practical socialist activists, there needs to be time for the comrades to properly reassess.

However, we also want to seize the time and take the opportunity to put forward our positions and proposals that we feel should be part of the reassessment for Socialist Aotearoa comrades.

## **The split: Endorsement and criticism**

The Workers Party (NZ) has been attempting to establish a strong level of engagement with the left of SW for some time (see appendix at back of document).

The Socialist Aotearoa split from SW is commendable from the point of view of building the anti-capitalist and socialist project

in New Zealand. The RAM project being pursued by the remaining members of SW is self-described loosely as an attempt to build an anti-neo-liberal visionary party, which is cross-class, cross-religious, supportive of business (except big corporates), and has some of its activists talking in slogans like 'neither left nor right'.

The SW/RAM tactic of using marxist and other well-intending radicals to build the non-revolutionary RAM project has been somewhat prevented from occurring. Effectively, the split from SW will recover a group of comrades who, apart from making single issue campaign appearances or performing basic trade union work, had become disoriented, some even to the point of inactivity, particularly in party/organisation building.

The contradictions had to be resolved eventually, and they have been resolved correctly. The left of SW will not be swallowed-up by populist reformism. This is applaudable.

While the salvaging of a socialist grouping, in the form of Socialist Aotearoa, is positive for the overall Marxist project - in the sense of retaining socialist comrades who may possibly have become cannibalised by RAM - the negative side is that the creation of Socialist Aotearoa will add another splinter to the list of tendencies operating in New Zealand, and in an overall sense this will mean less, not more, unity between socialists.

Workers Party (NZ) upholds the position that *party building*, not *tendency building* is the immediate task that socialist cadre should participate in. Further, we think there is not sufficient difference to require Socialist Aotearoa and Workers Party (NZ) to exist independently.

### **Far-left unity or vacillation around different left elements?**

In a further communication to SA comrades Joe Carolan wrote,

*'We should also make formal links with organised socialist groups such as the Alliance and the WP and declare a non-aggression pact built on mutual respect'.*

There are a two significant points to be made about this:

- The equitable treatment of the Alliance Party and Workers Party (NZ) is astounding. The Alliance, while still containing the odd militant and academic, is an imploding shell of a formerly strong *social democratic party*. Its national conferences are smaller than marxist national conferences. The Workers Party is a *socialist party* which is slowly but confidently growing on a national level, and is about to face one of its biggest challenges - the first standing of a *socialist party* on the party list under MMP.
- The idea of establishing 'formal links and mutual respect' is now totally obsolete, as these things have already been established in all but name. In terms of 'mutual respect' and 'non-aggression' Workers Party (NZ) has decidedly already applied this practice in the past years. One example was when Workers Party (NZ) publicly defended the left-SW comrades when the enforcers of identity politics attacked them for taking the initiative to protest against the actions of the Australian government in the Northern Territory. Another example was when the Workers Party (NZ) publicly advertised a Socialist Worker member as a key speaker at its 2007 national conference. In terms of 'formal links' the two groups are already linked in broad front work and in Unite Union work. We admit to having been critical of Socialist Worker's rightward drift, which the left of SW has now confronted.

In the same communication Joe Carolan wrote:

*'We should also push ahead with forming a wider campaigning group in Auckland that links together the best fighters of our tradition with the best of the libertarian communists and class struggle anarchists'.*

There are two specific points to be made about this:

- In terms of a 'wider campaigning group in Auckland', Global Peace and Justice Auckland already operate reliably in this role.[1] Not only is GPJA a reliable 'wider campaigning group in Auckland', it is open to participation of, and event facilitation for, a wide range of parties, left tendencies, communities, and single-issue campaign groups. It also has a strong contact base outside of these groups. The implicit writing-off of GPJA, without a coherent critique or reason to form a new 'wider campaigning group in Auckland' is another example of the way in which unity is frustrated despite laying claim to wanting unity.
- Active libertarian communists do not exist in Auckland unless they are defined as anarchists who don't despise some of Marx's thought. However, libertarian communist strains exist in the Workers Party (NZ) and amongst Socialist Aotearoa comrades. A relatively strong current of class struggle anarchists does exist in Auckland and they have carried out large amounts of positive work. However, it would be more useful to function alongside that current as a unified revolutionary organisation, instead of having two socialist organisations appealing for joint work with them.

Interestingly, these statements mean that Socialist Aotearoa appears to want formal relationships with all the key organisations to the left of Labour in Auckland *with the exception of RAM, who they have just split from*. This could mean that there is no real strategy towards new long-term unity and plenty of space for ongoing vacillations that are counter to the building of long-term and serious revolutionary unity.

We contend that instead of building relationships of unity, the use of the above approach could create the danger of a continuation of vacillations between different elements of the left, dropping them and taking new short-lived projects.

## **Rejecting the Socialist Worker mode of operation**

We have sharp but comradely criticisms to make about Socialist Worker methodology. In our assessment the Socialist Aotearoa comrades need to not only reject the right-shift in Socialist Worker, which is now concluded, but also to go one step further and reject some of its methods.

We think that, unfortunately, comrades who have belonged to both the left and right of Socialist Worker have over time become accustomed to a certain level of following decision making, or ticking the options, rather than participating in decision making. This, coupled with the Socialist Worker method of vacillating between other left elements, means the whole organisation was prone to big mood swings on political questions, creating or reinforcing a state of confusion rather than creating well-worked up (researched, debated, and tested) political clarity.

Joe Carolan will likely be the key figure in the activity of Socialist Aotearoa activity. He is an extraordinary agitator, networker, and campaigner with international experience. This is, of course, entirely valuable to the anti-capitalist and socialist movement. However, with the SW being in a state of imbalance (not healthy internal debate) over recent years, there has not been sufficient grounding to fully utilise such talents.

With Socialist Worker methodology new priorities appear with great frequency and a great determination to convey each new priority as the one that will lead to a breakthrough, ignoring the protracted downturn that Marxists have to recognise and confront. The now defunct Workers Charter (which now exists as a commendable newspaper, but not an organisation), the now defunct Solidarity Union, the now defunct Climaction campaign, and the list goes back further, are examples. Without a pronounced rupture from Socialist Worker methodology there is a danger that this list will continue to

grow. We respect the efforts put in for such work but we also contend that a more careful longer-term building approach is more important.

Some formal democratic processes need to be used in left organisations. However, clockwork-regular branch meetings, regular forums, a clockwork-regular newspaper, regular studies, [2] and regular attempted theoretical developments are key to the development of political and organisational democracy and a decision-making and active membership.

Maintaining blogspots and facebook, protest activity, and calling on members, allies, and networks to do odd-jobs are secondary activities. When these activities are applied as primary activities, an uneven relationship between a proxy leadership and a passive membership will inevitably result.

We suggest that the wider revolutionary project in New Zealand, and therefore internationally, would benefit greatly if the networking, campaigning, and political skills of Socialist Aotearoa comrades were given more focus, and that the Socialist Aotearoa comrades would benefit and see better long term results if they are *grounded* in a more democratic and organised structure.

### **Continuing towards a *nationally organised revolutionary organisation***

In an internal gathering in late 2003, Revolution Group (a pro-Trotsky group based in Christchurch), Workers Party of New Zealand (the former pro-Mao group based in Auckland), and Anti-Capitalist Alliance comrades (based in Wellington) voted to merge and build a *nationally organised revolutionary organisation*.

Now called the Workers Party (NZ), we have since that time increased our membership to the point where the majority of cadre did not pass through any of these original groups. We

have also recruited serious members who have belonged to Socialist Worker, Young Socialists, International Socialist Organisation, and the Committee for a Workers International embryo group in NZ. We made the decision to go about building a workers party now, rather than a tendency.

In the last two years alone we have participated in and supported many campaigns, most notably, against racist detention of Iranian migrants at Mt. Eden prison, Stop The Killings (in the Philippines) campaign, hotel workers unionisation campaign, restaurant workers unionisation campaign, Progressive Distribution Centre workers lockout support, civil rights defense campaign after government raids on Tuhoes and activists, box city protests - (living allowance for students, Wellington), successful Save the Film School campaign at Victoria University, campaign against Australian government intervention in the Northern Territories (Auckland and Wellington), Middle-East solidarity actions, and numerous workers strikes and pickets. In some of these campaigns we have played lead roles, and in others we have played active support roles. We have not played as strong a role in Venezuela solidarity work as we would have liked to.

Independently we have raised working class issues through interventions in local government elections, been the only left organisation to produce a monthly socialist publication, contributed to the monthly Workers Charter on occasion, held numerous education forums on topics of importance to the movements of workers and oppressed, put our website into an upgrade and initiated a blog with a reasonable hit-rate, and maintained healthy internationalist links with a wide range of workers organisations and parties in other countries.

### **The question of numbers and size**

We recognise that building organisational size in a period of working class downturn is extremely difficult, and recognise

that the Workers Party (NZ) is a small organisation. However, we content that *the potential reach of Socialist Aotearoa doesn't measure up to the current potential for a nationally organised socialist party.*

Within the wider task of building a *nationally organised revolutionary organisation* we highlight the necessary role of the branches. The Workers Party (NZ) has active branches in Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch, an embryonic branch in Dunedin that cooperates with the International Socialist Organisation, and a local branch in Newtown, Wellington. We also have members at large throughout the country.

The Socialist Aotearoa comrades have a branch in Auckland and a branch embryo in Hamilton. We also assume that Socialist Aotearoa comrades have contacts in different parts of the country. A specific comment we would make is that rebuilding outside of Auckland is an important longer term task that must be embraced, and the Workers Party has embraced it (as opposed to the inclination of some left groups of concentrating or placing cadre in Auckland).

### **What are the political differences between Workers Party (NZ) and Socialist Aotearoa?**

Measured against the need to build an influential and nationwide socialist organisation, we think there are not enough significant political differences between SA and WP(NZ) to make it best practice for the organisations to exist independently.

The Workers Party (NZ) (when it was in the formation of Anti-Capitalist Alliance) put this question to another left organisation which was an initiative of New Zealand supporters of the Committee for a Workers International (CWI). After a year or so, a leading member of that group agreed there weren't

sufficient differences and now plays a leading role in the Workers Party (NZ).

This is how we would summarise the political differences between Socialist Aotearoa and Workers Party (NZ). We suggest we differ on the following:

- Questions of Maori liberation and Maori nationalism (on which the Workers Party (NZ) position is not fully formed, but differs from most of the left on the issues of the Treaty, and the cross-class, or sometimes class-less, nature of much of the current Maori sovereignty movement)
- Questions of orientation to Maoist peoples' movements in Nepal, Philippines, and India (on which the Workers Party has no internally hegemonic perspective, but carries out open and public internal debate)
- Question of equal opposition to both New Zealand-based and foreign capitalism (on which the old SW vacillated, but, we expect, Socialist Aotearoa, having split from right elements will rapidly improve on)
- Question of the nature of and strategy towards the NZ Labour Party (on which *a few* Socialist Aotearoa comrades still apply forms of lesser-evilism. We look forward to these comrades developing a consistent revolutionary analysis of Labour as a capitalist party that is to be opposed in all aspects).

Again, we suggest this is not sufficient to require the two parties to exist independently. All of these questions are best discussed within the framework of a common revolutionary party. *These questions should not become barriers that separate revolutionaries into different political formations.*

### **A responsibility beyond formal links and mutual respect**

Workers Party (NZ) is registering to stand on the party list this general election. RAM's registration as a suit-and-tie populist party may to some extent cast a shadow on the far more

significant development, that of a committed socialist party being able to register on the party list for the first time. We ask Socialist Aotearoa comrades to not make an oversight on this. The likely union merger, between the three unions of the working poor in New Zealand will be a significant development on the industrial front. We ask Socialist Aotearoa comrades to not make an oversight on the importance of the far left being organisationally united in this. These developments mean there are conditions that make organisational unity more urgent than usual.

Workers Party (NZ) urges Socialist Aotearoa comrades to join us or join forces with us in one of the following ways:

- En masse, as individuals, with equal and fair expression at all levels
- As an organised group, with proportional and fair expression at all levels
- As branches, with proportional and fair expression at all levels

We view the first suggestion as being ideal because, in our view, organised tendencies within a single organisation should really only exist on the basis of political issues, not on the basis of personal and/or tendency loyalties (which WP comrades have broken with).

We think that the second and third possibilities would need positive democratically-decided processes and positive arrangements that both of the currently separate organisations can embrace.

Finally, if our proposals are rejected, we still feel correct in putting them forward, and will look forward to *continuing* joint campaigning work.

**Workers of the World Unite!**

## **APPENDIX: Clarifying our position on the left of SW before the split**

We feel it is important to comment on our orientation to the left of Socialist Worker before it split to form Socialist Aotearoa. In particular we need to make clear that we did, in a practical way, attempt to engage.

Reporting on a broad left meeting held on April 13, initiated by RAM and/or Socialist Worker, Joe Carolan wrote:

*'The turnout for the meeting was low - the promised Workers Party delegation was nowhere to be seen...'* - Joe Carolan, Report to Socialist Aotearoa comrades and supporters, approximately 21/4/08, sourced from open Socialist Aotearoa discussion list.

Workers Party (NZ) involvement in this meeting started more than a month before it was held, when we were first invited. Our position was entirely positive in relation to a joint-meeting with Socialist Worker, but not positive in relation to a broad left meeting initiated by RAM and including the Alliance, Greens, and Maori Party. We do not consider the Greens and the Maori Party to be forces that we should relate to in this way. We indicated this to Joe Carolan of Socialist Worker.

We proposed a joint meeting between Socialist Worker and Workers Party (NZ). This was rejected by the Socialist Worker Central Committee, although we believe Joe Carolan was in a minority supporting such a joint meeting. The SW Central Committee did want us to attend a RAM broad left meeting, which was still to include the parties we did not want to relate to in that way (Greens, Maori Party).

Joe Carolan continued to urge us to attend such a broad left meeting on the basis that we would be able to put forward our arguments to the left faction that was developing in Socialist Worker. So we agreed to attend. We seriously prepared for the

Sunday meeting and set aside social activities on Saturday night and party work on Sunday so we could be prepared for the Sunday meeting.

However, on the day immediately before the broad left meeting, Joe Carolan organised a SW left faction meeting, under the name Socialist Aotearoa, to take place that afternoon.

On Saturday night, after their faction meeting, some left SW comrades saw us in a social capacity and informed us that *none of the left SW comrades* would be going to the broad left-RAM meeting the following day. This meant there was no point in us attending as we had previously agreed to attend on the basis that we could put our arguments to the left faction of SW. So we didn't attend.

Despite saying he wouldn't attend, Joe Carolan did attend, but without the rest of the left SW faction. We couldn't put our views across to the left of SW at the broad left meeting on Sunday, and we certainly weren't invited to engage with the left of SW at their Saturday faction meeting.

Therefore, we believe that Joe Carolan's statement, quoted above, does not accurately reflect what happened. It makes the Workers Party (NZ) look to be either unreliable or mischievous, when in fact it was we who were let down by Joe Carolan and/or Socialist Aotearoa.

One week after the left SW faction meeting and the RAM/SW broad left meeting, the left of SW split and formalised the new Socialist Aotearoa group. The Workers Party (NZ) has still not had the opportunity to engage with those comrades. We have been more than open to engaging with those comrades.

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[1] The only significant Auckland campaigns to which it did not provide organisational assistance last year were the

'NZ/Aotearoa - Not For Sale' demonstration and the Northern Territories protests. The anarchists involved in the 'Not for Sale' campaign used a protectionist line that was generally to the right of GPJA. The Northern Territories activities were, commendably, initiated by the left in SW.

[2] We are not advocating the idea that individual members have to be rigid and cannot miss meetings or studies, etc. Of course participation in shift work or other abnormal working hours, childcare, and special campaigns, will often take precedence for individuals. However, we assert here that the branch, not the individual, has to function in a highly regular way to ensure organisational and political democracy.