

National Party Win Decisive Victory in General Election

Contributed by Graham Day
Saturday, 15 November 2008
Last Updated Tuesday, 18 November 2008

The National Party convincingly won the general election on November 8th attracting 45.45% of the party vote giving them 18 list seats as well as winning 41 constituencies: 4 short of a majority in the House of Representatives. Therefore National will be able to form a government under the MMP system with the right wing Act New Zealand Party and United Future, and the possibility of extra support from the M ori Party.

Party

Votes

% Party Vote

Electorate MPs

List MPs

Seats in the House
of Representatives

National

951,145

45.45

41

18

59

Labour

706,666

33.77

21

22

43

Green

134,622

6.43

0

8

8

New Zealand First

88,072

4.21

0

0

0

Act

77,843

3.72

1

4

5

M ori

46,894

2.24

5

0

0

Progressives

19,536

0.93

1

0

1

United Future

18,629

0.89

1

0

1

Table
of results New Zealand general election 2008

At present, the National Party is cobbling together a parliamentary majority by securing supply and confidence votes from the minor parties. In particular Act and United Future who indicated during the election campaign that they would support a National led government. No doubt the price for this will be a few ministerial posts in the new government. This will see Sir Roger Douglas - the architect behind the neo liberal economic reforms in the 1980's - return to the government benches as an Act list MP. Most workers will find abhorrent the fact that he is back in government. Additionally, the M ori Party have said they would not rule out doing a deal with National which has been advocated by their co-leader Tariana Turia during the campaign.

The
M ori Party

The
M ori
Party

had hoped to win all 7 M ori electorate seats but instead they had to settle for 5, which was an improvement of 1 on the last election. Labour retained the other 2 seats. Interestingly, the M ori Party is looking to do a deal with National. As I write the M ori Party is in talks with National and it is extremely likely that they too will give support to a National led government by abstaining in supply and confidence votes no doubt for a ministerial post or two. To qualify what an abstention vote is it is in fact a cowardly way of voting for the National Party! Let's be quite clear if this deal occurs the M ori party will collapse as their electoral support disappears. This can be deduced from the fact that most M ori are workers and they will rue the day they voted for the M ori Party. This is further backed up by the party votes in the M ori electorates, which Labour won over 50%, the M ori Party 28% and National 7%. There is no mandate for such a deal to happen.

Minor Parties

The Greens managed to pass the 5% threshold in the party vote to secure 8 seats in parliament. This was 2 seats more than in 2005 and it is anticipated that the Greens may gain one more list seat when the special votes are counted. Obviously they were able to capture some disillusioned Labour voters, but they were disappointed that they didn't do better. The Greens advocating green taxes as a solution to climate change and putting the burden on workers is an explanation as to why the Greens didn't poll better as well as the swing to the right during the election.

New Zealand First failed to secure 5% of the vote and will not return to parliament. The National Party exacted its revenge on Winston Peters for the 'wine box' scandal in the 90's. The Owen Glen affair in the run up to the election exposed the murky waters in which all major political parties obtain donations from wealthy people. New Zealand First was found by the Serious Fraud Office, Police and Electoral Commission to have no real case to answer for. However the court of public opinion on that issue, in combination with more general political factors, was enough to decide New Zealand First's fate. The other main factors were National's perceived move to the left under Key together with disenchantment with the Labour-led government and New Zealand First's role in it.

Because

New Zealand First got 4.2% of the vote instead of the required 5%, this was effectively a wasted vote. However, it is difficult to say who these people would have voted for if they had known that in advance. New Zealand First voters were mainly elderly ex-National voters disenchanted with National's lurch to the neo liberal right in the past, but who could never bring themselves to vote Labour. Some of them reverted to National this time. If they had got 5%, that would have been enough to keep National out of government.

Bankruptcy
of the Labour Leadership:

It was a disastrous night for the Labour Party and the working class as a whole. Labour has been reduced to constituencies in the cities of Dunedin, Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland (albeit with the loss of traditional Labour constituencies of Waitakere and Auckland Central), as well as being reduced to winning only Palmerston North in the provinces. In Auckland's Maungakiekie, as well as the provincial constituencies of Rotorua and Taupo, boundary changes helped National win these seats. However, it is doubtful that with such a swing against Labour whether or not Labour could have held on to these seats.

The
victory
of
the National Party at the polls is entirely due to the bankruptcy of the Labour Party leadership, who conducted a lack lustre campaign based on trust. After all, the right wing
leadership
of the Labour party has worked within the confines of capitalism for the past 9 years and had no real meaningful reforms to give workers as the government coffers are now in deficit. Despite vague suggestions of useful public works to help ride out the recession and attempt to mop up raising unemployment plus the pitiful policy of introducing 13 weeks unemployment benefit, as of right, for people losing their jobs a lot of the manifesto was pared back due to it

being unaffordable!

This

resulted in the lowest turnout since 1978 and the second lowest turnout in a general election since 1902, with a 77% turnout reported on election night. This was down 3% on the 2005 general election. Additionally only 55% of voters on the M ori roll voted. Quite simply a large proportion of workers didn't vote Labour or just didn't vote. There was no enthusiasm for workers to vote Labour and this added more weight to the idea it was time for a change.

Added

to this was the Labour government passing 'trendy' legislation such as the 'anti smacking' Bill etc. Whilst we do not support violence against children or within the family per se, it does not begin to tackle the issues that working class families face and the bill was seen by many as 'state interference' and telling people what to do. Certainly such legislation however well meant is mere 'window dressing' and does not tackle the real cause of the problem capitalism itself.

Clark's
resignation

Helen

Clark resigned as leader of the Labour Party when she graciously accepted defeat on election night. This came as a surprise to most in the labour and trade union movement. Clark accepted responsibility for the defeat and 'fell on her sword'. This was swiftly followed the next day by the resignation of the deputy leader Michael Cullen. Clark's resignation was to stop faction fighting in the parliamentary Labour caucus and to some extent this appears to have worked.

Already

the Labour caucus has unanimously elected right winger Phil Goff as leader and Annette King as deputy leader. This exposes the complete lack of democracy in the party and denies the rank and file of the movement any say in the matter. Fundamentally, nothing has changed as they have no answers to the problems that workers face and will continue with the same policies of working within the confines of the capitalist system. Phil Goff says he wishes to win the 2011 general election on roughly the same policies that lead to defeat in 2008. However the pressure of events will fall on them and cracks will appear in the seemingly unified right wing Labour caucus as the labour movement as a whole demand action against the National government and the capitalist system.

Sects

The Workers Party stood as an alternative to Labour in an attempt to build a 'revolutionary party' outside of the traditional mass organisations of the working class. There is no alternative for workers outside of the labour and trade union movement and future events will shake the mass organisations from top to bottom as the capitalist crises unfolds. The fact that the Workers Party secured 0.04% of the party vote says it all. It polled well behind other parties for instance the Bill and Ben Party who secured 0.51% of the party vote!

National government.

John Key's National government will be a government of absolute crises. John Key went into the election promising to bring in change without fully defining it. He offered a 'bright future' and 'Labour lite' policies. In fact the best description that comes to mind is the policies of Tweedledum and Tweedledee. It is expected that when the government books are opened the country will be NZ\$2.6 billion in the red this financial year and that this will probably increase by NZ\$1 billion per year for the foreseeable future.

John

Key describes his government as being in the centre ground. However, it will not take long for this smokescreen to be blown away with the country in a fiscal nightmare. The National government will use the financial crises to off load the capitalist crises onto workers and no doubt the Act Party will urge them on to do so.

Certainly

on the agenda is an undermining of workers' rights, workplace pay and conditions, collective bargaining as well as the introduction of the 90 day rule whereby the employers can sack workers for no reason without recourse in their first 90 days of employment. It is highly unlikely that the minimum wage will be increased.

Additionally

to this is cuts in public services dressed up as culling unnecessary bureaucrats out of the public service and possible sale of state assets.

In

such a climate as this with growing unemployment, inflation and undermining of workers rights, workers will have no option but to struggle and transform their traditional organisations. This will first take place in the trade unions as they transform them into militant trade unions and at a later stage in the Labour Party itself as they push it to the left to meet their socialist aspirations. The blue touch paper has been lit!