
New Zealand

New prime minister: worse than the old

by Allen Douglas

On Aug. 7, New Zealand's Prime Minister David Lange suddenly resigned. The following day, Geoffrey Palmer, deputy prime minister and minister of justice, was selected by the parliamentary caucus of the ruling Labour Party to succeed him.

Lange, who had held the job since Labour's ouster of the opposition National Party in 1984, had piled up quite an impressive record: He oversaw the destruction of the ANZUS defense pact among Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, by not allowing U.S. nuclear-armed ships to visit New Zealand's ports; he presided over a rise in interest rates from 8% to as high as 28%, which devastated New Zealand's farms and businesses; he "privatized" many government departments, selling some off for only 15 cents on the dollar; he raised unemployment to levels higher than the Great Depression; and he increased the foreign debt from NZ \$12.8 billion to over \$46 billion.

The official reason for Lange's unexpected resignation was "health problems," and indeed he did have a severe heart attack last year. Yet in other public statements, Lange made clear that he just couldn't stand the thought of serving with former Finance Minister Roger Douglas, whom he had sacked last December but who had just been reelected to the cabinet by Labour's parliamentary caucus the previous week. One could hardly blame Lange for that. Douglas, a wild-eyed deregulation fanatic, was the chief architect of the financial reforms which the London *Economist* magazine praises as "the most radical in the Western world." New Zealand's population has been considerably less enthusiastic about these reforms: Early July opinion polls had Labour trailing the opposition National Party by 27 points.

Yet the much-publicized theatrics between Lange and Douglas conveniently obscure the deeper processes afoot. The economic collapse caused by their joint policies, horrible enough in itself, will also energize the most dangerous trend in New Zealand, and one intimately associated with the new prime minister—the prospect of a racially based civil war.

Palmer and the radical Maori upsurge

One well-informed New Zealand source commented upon Palmer's election as prime minister, "This is the man Moscow would most like to see run New Zealand." And indeed, when Palmer visited Moscow last year, the first New Zealand cabinet minister to do so in 28 years, the Soviets rolled out the red carpet for him, even showing him the normally highly restricted naval base of Vladivostok in the Far East. Gushing with enthusiasm for Gorbachov and his *perestroika*, Palmer also gave a big push to Soviet plans for port facilities in New Zealand for their "fishing fleet," along with landing rights for their airline Aeroflot, to "rotate the fishermen."

While expanding their formal military capabilities in the South Pacific, the Soviets have also been developing an irregular warfare capability among the small fraction of New Zealand's 13% indigenous (Maori) population that has been radicalized by Theology of Liberation priests and radical anthropologists. Trained in Cuba and Libya, the radicals have been armed by AK-47 automatic assault rifles delivered to them from Soviet submarines on New Zealand's remote coasts, evidence of which has been covered up by the Labour Party government.

Not strong enough to launch a bloody upheaval by themselves, the radicals' hand is continually being strengthened by the government itself, as was acknowledged in a survey by the *Financial Times* of London, which reported that a more significant reason for the increased tension than the economic collapse "is a general renaissance of Maori culture and a recovery of self-confidence under a new generation of capable and confident leaders. This has been fueled by new government policies and legal rulings that have given added significance to the much-flouted Treaty of Waitangi."

The government official responsible for these decisions has been New Zealand's chief legal official, Geoffrey Palmer. It was he who played a key role in establishing the Waitangi Tribunal (named after the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi between the British Crown and the Maori chiefs), allowing it vast powers to confiscate land and give it back to the Maoris. It was he who commissioned a report which charged that the criminal justice system discriminates against Maoris, and that therefore a parallel justice system should be set up for Maoris alone.

The redistribution of land, together with control over resources such as forestry and fishing, naturally enrages the white majority who are having their land or assets confiscated. And the scale of this is massive. The tribunal has already decided that 50% of all New Zealand's fisheries will be given back to the Maoris over the next 20 years, and later this year will decide on a claim involving control over *one-half of the South Island*, the larger of the two islands which make up New Zealand. Needless to say, as the country goes up in racial flames, none of this redistribution is going to help the average, law-abiding New Zealander of Maori descent—nor is it intended to.