

New Zealand First issues anti-Chinese denunciation

Tom Peters
25 June 2013

Winston Peters, leader of the right-wing populist NZ First Party and a former foreign minister in the 1999-2008 Labour-led coalition government, last month delivered a xenophobic rant against Chinese immigration at an Auckland meeting of Grey Power, a senior citizens group. He asserted that New Zealand was becoming an “Asian colony” and Chinese “corruption” was turning Auckland into a “Supercity of Sin”.

Peters denounced the conservative National Party government for giving “fast track” visas to “rich Chinese so-called tourists” to gamble at Auckland’s SkyCity casino. He added that they would soon be able to visit a 15-storey brothel being built nearby by the “Hong Kong born Chow brothers”.

Peters cynically mouthed concern for Asian immigrants who were “promised jobs then end up working for nothing.” At the same time, he blamed them for increased crime and for pushing up the cost of housing, transport, healthcare and pensions. “New Zealand has become an offshore retirement home for many from China,” he declared.

NZ First’s anti-immigrant campaign coincides with the delivery of thousands of leaflets titled “China: A Threat to New Zealand?” by the fascist group Right-wing Resistance, in Auckland and several smaller centres.

Anti-Asian racism has been the defining feature of NZ First since it was founded in 1993. This has not prevented it from being welcomed into coalition governments led by both the National and the Labour parties, which have each whipped up anti-immigrant sentiment to divert anger over deteriorating social conditions. Moreover, NZ First’s latest campaign is an extension of the anti-Chinese sentiment whipped up by the opposition Labour Party, the Greens and the Maori-

nationalist Mana Party.

Last year all the opposition parties, including NZ First, attempted to promote anti-Chinese chauvinism over the sale of a handful of farms to Chinese firm Shanghai Pengxin. The Greens and Labour also denounced National’s decision to allow Chinese firm Huawei to bid for contracts linked to New Zealand’s broadband Internet network, after Australia’s Labor government declared the company a security risk.

The opposition parties, along with the Council of Trade Unions and various pseudo-left groups, formed an alliance under the nationalist slogan “Aotearoa [New Zealand] is Not For Sale,” ostensibly to oppose the government’s privatisation of power companies. In reality, the campaign targeted foreign, especially Chinese, investors (see “New Zealand ‘Not for Sale’ campaign promotes anti-Chinese sentiment”).

The conflicts over Chinese investment and immigration are being fuelled by the Obama administration’s aggressive ‘pivot’ to Asia. The Obama administration aims to maintain US hegemony in the Asia-Pacific by containing China’s rise, economically and militarily.

Like its Australian counterparts, New Zealand’s ruling elite faces an increasingly fraught dilemma over how to balance deepening economic ties with China against its longstanding strategic dependence on the US. China has recently become NZ’s biggest export market, overtaking the US and Australia.

At the same time, the New Zealand-US military alliance has been fully restored, prepared by the decisions of the 1999-2008 Labour government to take part in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The recent Australian Labor government’s new Defence White Paper proposes to consolidate Australian and New Zealand military co-operation in the South Pacific in

order to counter growing Chinese influence. The New Zealand government has also backed the US intervention in Syria.

The government and sections of big business have insisted that New Zealand can balance close relations with China and the US without “taking sides”. Labour and its allies, on the other hand, represent sections of the ruling elite who consider New Zealand should resist Chinese economic incursion and support Washington’s war preparations.

The *Dominion Post* noted that Peters’ “confrontational” speech drew only lukewarm criticism from National, Labor and the Greens, reflecting his potentially “pivotal role” in any coalition deals after next year’s general election. The main criticism of Peters came from Ethnic Affairs Minister Judith Collins, who told the *New Zealand Herald* that his tirade amounted to “economic sabotage”. But Collins defended Race Relations Commissioner Susan Devoy, who declined to criticise Peters.

An unnamed Greens spokesman told Fairfax Media that the party objected to Peters’ language but called for a “sophisticated discussion ... on some of the issues he raises, such as the impact on property prices.” Labour leader David Shearer said his party disagreed with “some” of Peters’ views, without specifying which.

Columnist Chris Trotter, a prominent Labour apologist, defended Peters. He called for a “discussion” of the shifting “balance of ethnic power” supposedly caused by immigration. Trotter denounced Chinese immigration as a product of “globalised neoliberalism”, which he absurdly claimed had created “a borderless planet”.

The Maori nationalist Mana Party and its pseudo-left affiliates—Socialist Aotearoa (SA), Fightback and the International Socialist Organisation—have remained silent on Peters’ speech. In March the pro-Mana blog Tumeke fulminated against Asian immigrants for “depriving Maori of ever being a majority in their own land.” Like NZ First, Mana’s policy is to discriminate against immigrants by “prioritising the employment of New Zealand residents”.

The pseudo-lefts falsely depict China as an imperialist power, with designs on New Zealand. In a January 2011 article, SA asserted that China would “undoubtedly turn neo-colonialist in the south Pacific”

and seek to “control our economy for its own benefit”. Implicitly supporting US war preparations against China and urging workers to do likewise, it declared: “As American elites prepare to deter Chinese aggression and domination in the new century, so should the international working class.”

Workers and young people must reject outright all forms of nationalism and racism designed to scapegoat immigrants for the social crisis for which successive National and Labour governments are responsible. Anti-Chinese chauvinism is being exploited to divide the working class and prepare for New Zealand to take part in a US-led war against China.

What is required is a principled struggle for a socialist and internationalist perspective, not just against the government and right-wing anti-immigrant parties such as NZ First, but above all against the reactionary nationalism promoted by Labour, the Greens, Mana, and their pseudo-left supporters.

The urgent task is the construction of a New Zealand section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution, which fights for the unity of the working class, regardless of ethnicity, language or religion, to abolish capitalism and establish a planned world socialist economy.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact