

New Zealand opposition parties campaign on anti-Chinese xenophobia

Tom Peters
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In the first two weeks of August, New Zealand's opposition parties—Labour, the Greens, the Internet-Mana Party and the right-wing NZ First Party—all joined the recently established far-right Conservative Party in denouncing the impending private sale of Lochinver Station farmland to the Chinese company Shanghai Pengxin. Labour has vowed to block the sale if it wins the September 20 election, with leader David Cunliffe telling the media that New Zealanders risked becoming “tenants in our own country.”

The campaign is blatantly xenophobic. The opposition has seized on Shanghai Pengxin's purchase despite Cunliffe admitting that Chinese investors own less land in New Zealand than those from the United States, Germany, the Netherlands, Australia, Switzerland, Monaco, Britain, Luxembourg, Canada and Israel. According to the National Party government, China accounts for only 4 percent of foreign buyers.

Labour and its allies have also attacked Asian immigrants, with Labour pledging to slash the annual migrant intake by at least half. India and China are the two leading sources of immigrants and NZ's Asian population has grown by 50 percent since 2001.

Taking their cue from NZ First, which has campaigned against Asian immigrants in every election over the past two decades, Labour and the Maori nationalist Mana Party have scapegoated immigrants for the social crisis, including the high cost of housing and pressure on healthcare services, schools and jobs. (See: “NZ opposition parties wage xenophobic campaign against Asian immigrants”)

Labour's opposition to the Lochinver sale dominated headlines in the first half of the month. Right-wing *New Zealand Herald* columnist John Armstrong said the issue had “raised the standard of debate” in the election

campaign and weakened the government. TV3's political editor Patrick Gower described Labour's policy as an electoral “grenade” that put Prime Minister John Key “on the wrong side of public opinion” defending the sale. TV3 and TVNZ highlighted the issue in at least three televised debates between Labour and National MPs and the leaders of minor political parties.

The attempt to whip up anti-Chinese sentiment has become a distinctive feature of the opposition's electioneering under conditions where Labour is widely seen as no different to National and its support has collapsed. Labour agrees that the working class must continue to pay for the economic crisis, through the elimination of jobs, cuts to spending on health and education, and other austerity measures, while the rich continue to increase their fortunes.

The big business parties also agree on strengthening the military-intelligence alliance with Washington. Speaking to Newstalk ZB on August 13 Labour's foreign affairs spokesman David Shearer endorsed Obama's decision to send troops and war planes back to Iraq. When it was last in office, Labour sent soldiers to Iraq and joined the US-led occupation of Afghanistan. The Greens, who supported the deployment to Afghanistan, have remained silent on the renewed assault on Iraq.

The anti-Chinese campaign dovetails with the requirements of the Obama administration's “pivot” to Asia—a strategy to militarily encircle China in order to maintain US dominance in the region. Washington is supporting the re-militarisation of Japan and strengthening military ties with the Philippines and Vietnam, while encouraging all three countries to press their territorial disputes with China. The Australian government has agreed to station US marines in

Darwin and has offered the US much greater use of its military bases.

The difference between Labour and the National government is that the latter, while fully supportive of Washington's "pivot," remains nervous about antagonising Chinese investors. China is NZ's main trading partner. Reflecting the concerns of a layer of big business, a *Herald* editorial said "we should welcome Chinese investment" and noted that blocking land sales could imperil investments in China by NZ dairy conglomerate Fonterra.

Labour, Mana, the Greens and NZ First began campaigning against land sales to China in 2012, the year after that Obama's pivot was announced. The parties used rallies across the country, ostensibly called to oppose the privatisation of power companies, to denounce Shanghai Pengxin's purchase of the Crafar family's farms.

Mana leader Hone Harawira called for people to join the protests if they were "pissed off at the Chinese buying our land." The nationalist campaign was supported by the pseudo-left organisations Fightback, Socialist Aotearoa (SA) and the International Socialist Organisation (ISO), which are all affiliated to Mana and support the indigenous capitalist layer that it represents.

SA and Fightback both issued statements at the time supporting a rival bid for the Crafar farms by the Maori tribe Ngati Rereahu, some of whose members had occupied the land. The ISO was somewhat critical of the xenophobic rhetoric of NZ First, Labour and the Greens, but not of Mana. It declared that New Zealand was "Maori land" and Maori tribes would have to fight to regain land from Chinese or other NZ owners.

All three groups have remained completely silent on the new campaign against the Lochinver sale, thereby tacitly endorsing the positions of Mana and Labour.

Mana represents Maori business interests who regard Chinese investors as rivals. On Facebook on August 3, party president Annette Sykes denounced the latest deal with Shanghai Pengxin and said land approved for the company should be given to the Maori tribe Tuwharetoa instead.

In a minor parties debate on TV3 on August 9, Harawira stated that if deals like the Shanghai Pengxin purchase continued, "our children and our grandchildren will grow up in a land owned by

someone else." He also denounced immigrants for "taking jobs that other people should be having" and called for an employment quota for New Zealanders, "Maori in particular."

Greens co-leader Metiria Turei said her party had drafted a bill to "restrict land sales just to New Zealand residents." NZ First leader Winston Peters ranted that he knew of "somebody from Beijing owning 55 houses in Auckland" and branded the sale of Lochinver Station as "treachery."

At NZ First's campaign launch on August 10, Peters denounced the government's links with Chinese businesses, asserting that it was "deeply infiltrated and funded by foreign money interests." Cunliffe has identified NZ First as a potential partner in a Labour-led government.

The filthy anti-Chinese campaign demonstrates the completely reactionary character of Labour, Mana, the Greens and their pseudo-left supporters. If a Labour-led government is installed it will carry out attacks on Asian immigrants, while deepening the National government's assault on the working class and commitment to US war preparations against China.

The author also recommends:

New Zealand pseudo-lefts support Washington's war preparations against China
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