

New Zealand: Mana Party supports Labour's anti-Chinese campaign

Tom Peters
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The New Zealand Labour Party's assertion last month that people with "Chinese sounding names" are purchasing a disproportionate amount of property in Auckland is widely and correctly seen as a blatant attempt to promote racism and xenophobia.

A July 26 TV3/Reid Research poll indicated that Labour has failed to increase its support by scapegoating Chinese people for the city's out-of-control housing bubble, which is a product of the rampant financial speculation that increasingly dominates capitalism in New Zealand and internationally.

Labour's provocative attack—in a city where 9 percent of the population is ethnic Chinese—was intended to divert anger over the country's social crisis and unaffordable housing, and to condition public opinion to support Washington's war preparations against China.

This xenophobic campaign has received enthusiastic support from various liberal commentators, including columnist Chris Trotter, the trade union-funded *Daily Blog* and RadioLIVE. Winston Peters, leader of the anti-immigrant New Zealand First Party, praised Labour for adopting his policies, telling the *New Zealand Herald*: "Imitation is the most sincere form of flattery."

All these figures promote the lie that New Zealand is being "colonised" by Chinese investors—a claim that dovetails with Pentagon propaganda about Chinese "expansionism" and is being used to mobilise support for US war plans throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

The anti-Chinese campaign has also revealed, once again, the pro-imperialist character of the Maori nationalist Mana Party, which includes the pseudo-left groups, Socialist Aotearoa and Fightback, and is supported by another pseudo-left group, the International Socialist Organisation. Mana's embrace

of Labour and NZ First demolishes the pseudo-lefts' claims that Mana is a "pro-poor," "anti-capitalist" and anti-racist party.

Leading Mana member Annette Sykes leapt to Labour's defence on Facebook, declaring on July 14 that its attack on Chinese house buyers was not "xenophobia" but "plain interpretation of the only data available." On the *Daily Blog*, Mana's John Minto also defended Labour and called for a ban on foreigners buying houses.

The party's *Mana News* continued the reactionary diatribes. One article, entitled "I don't mean to sound racist but ..." on July 15, asserted that "offshore investors that live in China are throwing millions of dollars at properties like it's chump change." Without providing any evidence of this, the author declared that "people are claiming that someone is racist for stating the obvious."

In another article, *Mana News* editor Joe Trinder supported Labour's xenophobic attacks, declaring that "migrants are contributing to the housing crisis."

On July 17, Trinder appeared to back-pedal, writing that Chinese people "are not to blame," while railing against "foreigners" in general, saying "the issue is a capitalist system of foreign property speculators from all over the world in an unregulated property bubble." His article still sought to frame the housing crisis in racial terms, claiming "people of Asian descent are buying too many homes," while Maori could not afford to buy homes.

The purpose of such statements is to divide the working class along racial lines to prevent a unified struggle against capitalism. Mana also seeks to cover up the vast gulf between working class Maori and the affluent tribal elite, which derives significant profits from property investments and sees foreign investors as

rivals. Both Mana and the Maori Party speak for this privileged layer, which hopes to acquire some of the public housing currently being sold off by the government.

Mana's statements underscore the thoroughly rotten role of the pseudo-lefts, which joined the party when it was founded in 2011 and campaigned for it in the past two elections. Socialist Aotearoa has not opposed the anti-Chinese campaign—which is not surprising given that it has accused China of planning to invade New Zealand and called for the working class to align with US militarism.

Fightback and the ISO tried to distance themselves from the anti-immigrant statements by Mana's John Minto. Fightback wrote: "In the 2011 and 2014 General Elections, MANA stood for an expansion of state housing, recognition of Maori claims, opposition to imperialist agreements with the US, and rights for migrants. Scapegoating of 'foreigners' weakens this program and prospects for liberation."

This attempt to portray Mana's xenophobic propaganda as some sort of aberration is completely false. Mana has repeatedly joined Labour and New Zealand First's anti-Chinese campaigns. In 2012 Mana leader Hone Harawira called on people to join protest rallies, ostensibly to oppose the privatisation of power companies, if they were "pissed off at the Chinese buying our land."

Mana's 2011 program called for the government to "prioritise the employment of New Zealand residents" over immigrants. In an election debate on August 9, 2014, Harawira denounced immigrants for "taking jobs that other people should be having."

During the March 2015 by-election in Northland, Mana openly supported NZ First leader Winston Peters' campaign. Mana's Rueben Taipari Porter hailed Peters' victory as an "historical change" that would mark "the beginnings of a new political strategy to bring the power back to the people."

Mana's hostility to foreigners stems from its Maori nationalist ideology, which the pseudo-lefts falsely promote as progressive. This race-based identity politics represents the interests of a thin layer of bourgeois and upper middle class Maori, not those of workers whether Maori or non-Maori. What Fightback calls the "recognition of Maori claims" refers to multi-million dollar payments that successive governments

have made to tribal leaders in order to establish lucrative business ventures.

Mana wants to increase these settlements, which have done nothing to improve the living standards of working class Maori. During the first phase of the post-2008 financial crisis, while thousands of workers were being laid off throughout the country, total Maori business assets ballooned from \$16.5 billion in 2007 to an estimated \$36.9 billion in 2010.

The pseudo-left outfits embraced Mana in an attempt to integrate themselves into the political establishment. They also represent an upper middle class constituency, which includes trade union bureaucrats, academics and other professionals, whose priority is their own social advancement and who are hostile to socialism.

A genuine socialist and internationalist party must be founded to oppose the increasingly vicious attacks on immigrants and the preparations by the political establishment to join a US-led war against China. Such a party can only be built in a political struggle against the divisive, xenophobic and pro-capitalist politics promoted by Mana and its pseudo-left allies.



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