

Australian PM refuses to halt deportations of New Zealanders

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Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull visited New Zealand on October 16-17, his first overseas trip since he ousted Tony Abbott last month.

Turnbull and New Zealand Prime Minister John Key reportedly discussed the Australia-New Zealand military alliance, including their countries' participation in the US-led war in Iraq and Syria. No details were released.

Turnbull has described Key, a fellow former investment banker, as a political role model. Key's National Party government has imposed drastic austerity measures, including cuts to welfare and other social services, an increase to the goods and services tax, and large tax cuts for big business. Turnbull is preparing similar attacks in Australia.

The leaders' meeting, however, was overshadowed by heightened tensions over Australia's brutal deportation of New Zealand citizens convicted of crimes. In November 2014 the Australian Liberal-National Coalition government, supported by the opposition Labor Party, halved the prison sentence required to trigger a deportation from 24 to 12 months.

Since then, roughly 80 New Zealand citizens have been deported and 200 are awaiting deportation in Australia's prison-like immigration detention centres, including about 50 on the remote Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean. An estimated 1,000 people could be removed to New Zealand in the short term, while about 5,000 may meet the criteria for deportation.

In New Zealand there has been constant media coverage of the deportations following the death of Junior Togatuki, who apparently committed suicide while being held in isolation awaiting deportation.

Togatuki had lived in Australia since he was a child and had no connection to New Zealand. Contrary to statements by Australian Liberal and Labor politicians and the Australian media, many deportees only committed minor crimes such as shoplifting, possession of cannabis

and traffic offences.

The day after Turnbull's visit, the *New Zealand Herald* reported that a 56-year-old tetraplegic, wheelchair-bound man was deported after living in Australia for 36 years. He had spent 13 months in prison for self-medicating on controlled painkillers, then four months in an immigration detention centre. Since arriving in New Zealand the man has been forced to rely on charity to survive. "I feel like I've just been dumped—away from all my family and friends. I have nothing here," he told the paper.

Turnbull bluntly refused the Key government's request to exempt New Zealanders from the deportation policy, which is part of Canberra's efforts to divert anger over the economic crisis into reactionary xenophobic channels. This campaign includes the demonisation of Muslims and the illegal imprisonment of asylum seekers in appalling conditions in Papua New Guinea and Nauru.

The rights of New Zealanders living in Australia have been significantly eroded over the past 15 years. In 2001 John Howard's government removed entitlements to unemployment and other welfare benefits, a decision justified with the racist claim that Pacific Islanders were using New Zealand as a "back-door" to enter Australia. These changes have contributed to a surge in homelessness among New Zealanders in Australia.

Key attempted to put a positive spin on the leaders' meeting, telling TV3 that Turnbull had been "massively sympathetic" and made an "absolute commitment" that appeals against deportation would be treated in an "utterly reasonable" manner. Nothing has changed, however, and the deportations will continue.

Much of the corporate media criticised Key's handling of the talks. A *Dominion Post* editorial on October 20 declared that Key had "failed" and "Turnbull's 'concessions' are meaningless."

The editorial also hit out at "Australian politicians bragging about the spirit of Anzac," that is, the military

alliance between the two countries during World War I. It stated that “[t]his spirit is limited and arguably weakening with the passing of years.”

New Zealand’s opposition Labour and Green Parties have made similar warnings, reflecting fears in the ruling elite that public anger over the deportations could jeopardise efforts to promote the alliance with Australia.

Australian Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young, whose party has complained to the Human Rights Commission about the detention of New Zealanders, similarly stated on October 16: “I hope that the ANZAC spirit isn’t jeopardised by the rashness of the Coalition government’s obsession with political point scoring on immigration.” The Greens, however, are complicit in the attacks on refugees and immigrants, including the reestablishment of offshore detention camps in 2012 under the Greens-backed Gillard Labor government.

Appeals to the “Anzac spirit” are thoroughly reactionary. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent in both countries on glorifying the Anzac alliance, in order to prepare the populations for future wars. As well as sending troops to the Middle East, Australia and New Zealand are integrated into the US “pivot” to Asia—its encirclement and preparations for war against China.

At the same time, New Zealand’s media and opposition parties have fraudulently presented New Zealand as a more humanitarian country than Australia. The *Dominion Post* declared that “Australia’s notions of fair play are very different from ours. There is a brutal side to the Australian character that repels many New Zealanders.”

Such statements are a slander against the vast majority of Australians, who are not responsible for the criminal actions of the ruling class. Last month tens of thousands of people protested against the Abbott government’s refusal to take more than a token number of refugees from Syria.

While Turnbull was meeting with Key, Labour politician Kelvin Davis visited Christmas Island and spoke to New Zealanders detained there. Davis reported that they had witnessed suicide attempts by asylum seekers, as well as physical abuse and neglect by the detention centre guards. He described the detention of New Zealanders there as “callous” and showing “a lack of humanity.”

Davis did not, however, demand an end to detentions and deportations, telling TV3: “If Australia feels they have to detain people, just do it humanely.”

Davis’ trip was a hypocritical stunt. Labour does not

oppose Australia’s detention of asylum seekers from other countries, including Sri Lanka, Iran, Afghanistan and Myanmar. The party tacitly supported a deal signed by Key in 2013 with Australia’s then-Labor government, under which New Zealand authorities have assisted the interception of asylum seeker boats off the Australian coast. New Zealand was given the option of sending asylum seekers to the Nauru and Manus Island detention camps if there is a “mass arrival.”

New Zealand’s 1999-2008 Labour government used the US “war on terror” as a pretext to introduce harsher restrictions on asylum seekers. In 2003 Labour provoked mass protests by refusing to repeal a 1982 law that bars the majority of Samoans from gaining citizenship. Samoa was a New Zealand colony until 1962.

Successive governments have exploited impoverished Pacific Islanders for cheap labour, while regularly deporting “overstayers” and their families, including long-term New Zealand residents.

More recently, Labour, the xenophobic New Zealand First Party and the Maori nationalist Mana Party have viciously attacked Chinese immigrants, blaming them for the soaring cost of housing and other aspects of the deepening social crisis.

As in the European Union, where borders are being resurrected, the relatively free movement of workers between Australia and New Zealand is under attack. Foreigners from all backgrounds are being scapegoated for the destruction of jobs and attacks on living standards brought on by the crisis of capitalism.



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