

Defend the rights of New Zealanders in Australia! Support the Socialist Equality Party!

The Socialist Equality Group (New Zealand)
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As the ruling elites in Australia and New Zealand prepare for war and deeper attacks on living standards, all the establishment parties whip up xenophobia and chauvinism—directed in particular against immigrants and refugees—to divide workers and divert attention from the responsibility of governments for the social crisis.

The campaign being waged by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) for the July 2 election in Australia thus takes on great political significance, not only for Australian workers but for workers in New Zealand and throughout the region. The SEP is the only party that intransigently defends the basic democratic right of all workers to live and work wherever they choose. Its fight against nationalism in all its forms is essential to the building of an international anti-war movement of the working class to halt the accelerating drive to war.

While refugees, particularly “boat people,” have been the main targets of the Australian media and political establishment, Pacific Islanders and New Zealanders, the largest immigrant group, have also come under attack. There are roughly 600,000 New Zealanders in Australia, more than the population of greater Wellington (471,000). Generations of workers have crossed the Tasman Sea to settle in Australia and make their living in industries such as construction, manufacturing, mining and the public services.

During the 1970s, it was still possible to travel between the two countries without carrying a passport. New Zealanders could live in Australia indefinitely with essentially the same rights as citizens. Over the past 15 years these rights have been stripped away and New Zealanders have been subjected to discriminatory and increasingly brutal policies. In 2001, the Coalition

government of John Howard removed New Zealanders’ eligibility for unemployment benefits, and abolished their direct path to Australian citizenship.

From 2005 New Zealanders could no longer access Australia’s student loan scheme. In 2012 the minority Labor government of Julia Gillard, backed by the Greens, removed their eligibility for disability support. Tim Gassin, chair of advocacy group Oz Kiwi, recently told Fairfax Media there were many “horror stories” of people “disabled without support, single mothers struggling to support their children... living in dire poverty.”

In 2014, the Coalition government passed a law, with Labor’s support, under which New Zealanders can be deported if they have been imprisoned for 12 months, even for minor offences. More than 300 have been deported since December 2014, including some who have spent most of their lives in Australia.

At least two New Zealanders have died while awaiting deportation. In April, 42-year-old Rob Peihopa was found dead at Sydney’s Villawood detention centre, where he had spent 10 months awaiting deportation. While authorities claimed he suffered a heart attack, he had two black eyes and lacerations on his face. His family has accused the Immigration Department of a cover-up.

Last year, 23-year-old Junior Togatuki died in Goulburn’s Supermax prison, from what authorities say was a suicide. He had pleaded not to be deported from Australia, where he had lived since the age of four.

In New Zealand, the National Party government has tacitly endorsed the deportations, while the opposition Labour Party has made limited and entirely hypocritical

criticisms of the policy. Successive Labour and National governments have been just as brutal in their deportation of “overstayers” from impoverished Pacific Island countries.

Both parties endorse Australia’s barbaric violations of asylum seekers’ human rights, including their detention at the Manus Island and Nauru prison camps.

The Greens support Labour and the anti-immigrant NZ First Party, which have led a xenophobic campaign to scapegoat foreigners, particularly Chinese people, for the country’s housing and social crisis. These methods are now finding their parallel in Australia in mounting attacks on Chinese investment particularly in land and housing.

The Australian and New Zealand ruling classes are polluting the atmosphere with nationalist propaganda to assist their preparations for war. The entire political establishment in both countries has signed up to Washington’s “pivot to Asia” and are being integrated into the Pentagon’s preparations for war against China.

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In defiance of widespread anti-war sentiment, Canberra and Wellington have committed billions of dollars to purchasing new military hardware, at the expense of basic services. Hundreds of millions are being spent on propaganda glorifying the Australian and New Zealand role in World War I in a bid to condition another generation of youth to “sacrifice for the nation”—that is, for the interests of the corporate and financial elite.

Like the outmoded capitalist nation-state system as a whole, the border between Australia and New Zealand is completely irrational. As in Europe, freedom of movement is being restricted and migrants’ rights attacked even as the two countries have become more economically integrated than ever before.

Workers cannot defend their basic democratic and social rights, let alone halt the drive to war, outside of a political struggle to create a unified movement based on the perspective of socialist internationalism. That is what the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) is doing through the political fight of the SEP (Britain) in the Brexit referendum, the SEP (US) in the American presidential campaign, the PSG’s intervention in Berlin state elections, as well as through the SEP’s campaign in Australia.

The Socialist Equality Group (SEG) in New Zealand urges workers in Australia, New Zealand and throughout the region to support the election campaign of the SEP (Australia) in every way possible and in that way express your support for the building of a unified anti-war movement of the working class in the region and around the world. Apply to join and build the SEP in Australia and the SEG in New Zealand, or in countries where the ICFI not yet have sections, contact us and begin the task of building one.

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