

New Zealand First demonises Muslim immigrants

Jeremy Lin, Tom Peters
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Winston Peters, leader of the right-wing populist New Zealand First Party, seized on the massacre in a gay night club in Orlando, Florida, to launch a vile attack on immigrants and refugees.

The shooter Omar Mateen was born in the US and appears to have been largely driven by a combination of psychological problems, hatred of homosexuals and backward, racist views. Whatever role Islamic terrorism played in influencing Mateen, there is no evidence that his attack was directed by ISIS or any similar group.

This did not prevent Peters from echoing Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton by branding the shooting an act of “Islamic extremism by a terrorist whose family had sought shelter in the United States.” Arguing for an even harsher immigration regime in parliament on June 14, Peters provocatively declared that “loose border controls” were “inviting that problem in our country.”

Peters’ tirade was only the latest attempt by NZ First to whip up anti-Muslim chauvinism. On June 5, he told TVNZ’s “Q&A” program that immigrants should be interviewed at the border and made to “salute our flag, respect our laws, honour our institutions.” In a slander against hundreds of millions of people, he demanded that immigrants from Muslim countries be screened for “anti-woman attitudes.” Peters called for New Zealand’s overall intake of immigrants to be slashed from last year’s figure of 124,000 to as little as 7,000 per year.

The far-right ACT Party, a coalition partner in the National Party government, sought to outflank NZ First by demanding that refugees be made to sign a “statement of commitment to New Zealand values,” including freedom of speech and respect for women and different sexualities. Peters hit back, saying this measure should be applied to all immigrants, not just refugees.

New Zealand’s political establishment is demonising foreigners in order to deflect blame for the escalating social crisis, including homelessness and unemployment, from the capitalist system which is its source. The attempt to divide the working class along national, religious and ethnic lines is also intended to justify NZ’s involvement in the war in Iraq and preparations for future wars.

NZ First and ACT’s outbursts followed the government’s announcement on June 13 of a tiny increase in the country’s refugee intake, from 750 to 1,000 people per year. New Zealand is ranked 90th in the world for its intake of refugees on a per capita basis.

The tiny increase, the first in three decades, will do nothing whatsoever to address the biggest refugee crisis since World War II. More than 60 million people have fled their homes, primarily because of US-led wars, backed by successive New Zealand governments, which have devastated Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria.

Peters’ attack on Muslims in parliament was denounced by Labour MP Iain Lees-Galloway as “shameful” and by Green Party co-leader James Shaw as “disgraceful.”

Such statements are profoundly hypocritical. Labour and the Greens courted NZ First as a potential coalition partner in the 2014 election, and have offered to form a political alliance with the party to remove the National Party government in next year’s election. Shaw told “Q&A,” “I feel very comfortable with the idea that we may end up working with NZ First.”

Since 2012 Labour, the Greens and the Maori nationalist Mana Party have all joined NZ First in whipping up anti-Chinese xenophobia. They have scapegoated foreigners, particularly Chinese people, for sky-rocketing house prices and rents, and called for a

ban on house sales to non-residents, who make up only around 3 percent of buyers.

In 2015 all the opposition parties enthusiastically supported Winston Peters' campaign in a by-election in the seat of Northland, presenting him as a "lesser evil" to National.

Speaking to Radio NZ, Green immigration spokeswoman Denise Roche described NZ First's proposed immigration cut as "harsh," but also called for a "decrease" in immigrant numbers.

Labour party leader Andrew Little told "Q&A" that migrants were placing "pressure on the road network, schools, hospitals and everything else." He has previously singled out Chinese and Indian migrants for taking too many jobs. FIRST Union leader Robert Reid, a panellist on the show, likewise blamed immigration for leading to "fewer opportunities for local people."

The opposition parties' criticism of the small increase to the refugee intake is equally hypocritical. Little said the increase showed "an absolute failure of moral leadership." Labour, however, has called for the quota to be raised to just 1,500. Last year the Greens submitted proposed legislation to parliament for an increase of 250.

The promotion of nationalism and xenophobia by every party dovetails with New Zealand's integration into the US drive towards war against China. To strengthen military interoperability with the US and Australia, the New Zealand government has announced a \$20 billion spending program for new frigates, air force planes and intelligence personnel.

Notwithstanding their professed concern for refugees, homeless people, and the 300,000 children living in poverty, Labour and the Greens support the huge military spending increase, which will be funded at the expense of essential social programs. They also support the National government's increase in the Goods and Services Tax and its corporate tax cuts, which have transferred massive amounts of wealth to the richest social layers.

Foreign-born workers, who make up a quarter of New Zealand's population, are not responsible for the social crisis, which is the outcome of austerity policies backed by the entire political establishment. There is more than enough money and resources to provide for the basic needs of the population, including refugees and

immigrants. But this wealth is monopolised by the top 10 percent of society, which profits by driving up house prices and rents, shutting down factories, and engaging in other speculative and parasitic activities.

The working class must oppose the attacks on Muslims and immigrants, on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program. Workers of every country must have the unconditional right to live and work wherever they choose, with full legal, democratic and citizenship rights. Capitalism, with its artificial and outmoded nation-state system, must be abolished and replaced with a rationally planned, global socialist economy, based on meeting human needs, not accumulating profits for a tiny elite.



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