

Right-wing attack on New Zealand Green MP

John Braddock
8 December 2017

The New Zealand Criminal Bar Association took the unusual step on November 30 of releasing a statement defending Green Party MP Golriz Ghahraman, whose previous role as a lawyer with UN agencies has become the subject of a vicious right-wing campaign.

Ghahraman, 36, who is Iranian by birth, has lived in New Zealand since she was nine, when her family was granted asylum as political refugees. She entered parliament following the September 23 election this year and was widely hailed as the first “refugee” politician—evidence of the country’s commitment to “diversity.”

This abruptly changed when Ghahraman’s work history was publicly denounced by former Labour Party staffer Phil Quin. In a series of tweets, Quin declared that Ghahraman had volunteered to defend “the worst killers known to man” at the Rwanda Tribunal and branded her a genocide-denier.

Ghahraman had worked as an unpaid intern in a team that defended Joseph Nzirorera, who died before he could be convicted over the 1994 Rwanda genocide, and in a paid position representing singer Simon Bikindi, who was convicted for incitement to genocide.

Citing this, Quin fulminated: “Any MP who acted as a voluntary intern to defend war criminals, and authors papers that deny the Rwandan genocide, must resign.”

The *New Zealand Herald* published an article on November 28 claiming that Ghahraman had defended the “butcher of Bosnia.” She was a junior member of the legal defence team for Bosnian Serb wartime leader Radovan Karadžić who was found guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity.

The *Herald* reported that Ghahraman’s profile on the Green Party’s web site had been changed, following her own admission that it “could be clearer.” She changed a general statement about her involvement in war crimes trials to: “Golriz worked for United Nations Tribunals as part of both defence (Rwanda, the former

Yugoslavia) and prosecution (Cambodia) teams.”

In response to the escalating accusations, the Bar Association declared that the criticism of Ghahraman for defending persons charged with being war criminals was “completely unacceptable.” She was doing “no more than performing the obligations required of a lawyer to make her skills available to those who need them without fear or favour,” it said.

The Bar Association noted that the right to a defence was an “essential part of a civilised society.” The denunciations of Ghahraman reflected an “unfortunate trend in our society” that the presumption of innocence “does not always translate to recognition of the right to a fair trial” and defence lawyers are often attacked as if they have committed an offence.

The tirade continued, however. Editor of the right-wing KiwiBlog, David Farrar, flatly dismissed the right of the accused to legal defence as a “red herring.” The “outrage and condemnation,” which he fomented, was justified not because she was a defence lawyer, but for claiming she had been a prosecutor, Farrar said.

While Ghahraman was carrying out an entirely legitimate role in providing legal defence for a person on trial, the various media pundits attacking her are guilty of rank hypocrisy. Not only do they defend the war crimes for which New Zealand governments are responsible in participating in US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but they cover up the intrigues of the major powers responsible for the political crises and wars in Africa, the Balkans and elsewhere.

Behind the attacks on Ghahraman is a definite political agenda, aimed at undermining basic democratic and legal rights, stoking nationalism and preparing for war. The new Labour-led government supports Washington’s aggressive stance against North Korea and China, as well as Iran. Under these conditions, public figures, who are deemed to be insufficiently “reliable,” are the targets of intimidation

and vilification.

The campaign against the Iranian-born Ghahraman follows the demonisation of National Party parliamentarian Jiang Yang. He has been at the centre of a witch-hunt over alleged “Chinese influence” in New Zealand politics because he taught English at a Chinese military training institution more than 20 years ago. The Washington-based think tank, the Wilson Center, has demanded that the NZ Security Intelligence Service investigate politicians, students and anyone else with suspected links to the Chinese government.

In Australia, a similar nationalist campaign is underway, targeting politicians with alleged links to China. This week the Australian government announced sweeping new anti-democratic legislation to counter so-called foreign interference in Australian politics, to extend laws related to treason and espionage and to ban all foreign donations for political activity.

Neither Ghahraman nor the Greens are a threat to the established order. The party is a pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist organisation that represents “environmental” business interests. It has ministers in the Labour-led government, which also includes the right-wing, anti-Asian NZ First Party.

Nevertheless, concerted efforts are underway to ensure the Greens do not interfere with the government's agenda of austerity and war.

The Ghahraman case follows the disciplining of the Green Party prior to the election, through a right-wing campaign against then party co-leader Metiria Turei. Turei stood down as leader and quit parliament following allegations of “welfare fraud” more than 20 years ago. Turei revealed that as a young single mother she had misreported the number of people in her household in order to receive a higher benefit to support her daughter.

As a result of the furore, the electoral support for the Greens collapsed. From polling a high of 15 percent at the beginning of the campaign, they scraped back into parliament with just 6.3 percent of the vote. It was a sharp warning that the financial elite would brook no wavering, by any government, over the ongoing assault on working class living standards.

With the formation of the new government, the process has continued unabated. Labour-aligned figures have joined right-wing media commentators to apply ongoing pressure to discipline the Greens by attacking

Ghahraman. Editor of the trade-union funded *Daily Blog*, Martyn Bradbury, accused the Greens of perpetrating “fiasco” by presenting “a back story that sold her as the defender of the oppressed when she was in fact defending the oppressors.”

The case once again demonstrates that there is no constituency in the ruling elite that defends basic legal and democratic rights—in this case the right of a defendant to a lawyer, and the right of the lawyer not to be vilified for the alleged crimes of the client.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact