Australian government continues deportations of New Zealanders

Tom Peters
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Alex Viane, 40, faces deportation from Australia to New Zealand, despite never having set foot in New Zealand and having no ties to the country. His parents, partner and baby daughter are all Australian citizens.

Viane was born in American Samoa and became a New Zealand citizen as a youngster, despite never being to the country. His family moved to Australia in 1990, when he was a child. Last July, Australian Immigration and Border Protection Minister Peter Dutton ordered his deportation on "character grounds" due to undisclosed criminal convictions. Viane challenged the order, but the Federal Court dismissed his appeal on January 12.

Viane is one of more than 3,000 people who have been deported following an amendment in December 2014 to section 501 of Australia's Migration Act. Anyone who has committed offences with prison sentences totalling 12 months or more can be expelled now, regardless of how long they have lived in Australia. Many people have been deported for minor offences, such as drug possession or shoplifting.

New Zealanders now make up the largest nationality group in Australia's immigration detention centres, with approximately 175 people currently detained. In the past financial year, 664 New Zealanders had their visas cancelled. Under a long-standing agreement between the two countries, New Zealanders can live and work in Australia indefinitely without gaining citizenship. Out of more than 600,000 New Zealanders living in Australia, about 400,000 are not Australian citizens.

People who have spent no time in prison can be summarily deported also. Section 116 of the Migration Act gives the minister sweeping powers to cancel a visa if "the presence of the visa holder in Australia is or may be, or would or might be, a risk to the health, safety or good order of the Australian community."

On December 4, Radio NZ reported that a 21-year-old man, who has lived in Australia since he was six years old, was deported to New Zealand under section 116. The Brisbane resident was accused, but not convicted, of involvement in an alcohol-fuelled fight while celebrating his birthday.

Filipa Payne, from Iwi N Aus, which advocates on behalf of New Zealanders in Australia, told the *World Socialist Web Site* that parents were being separated from their children for minor offences.

Payne said: "I know a mother who's being detained for shoplifting. She's been shifted to a detention centre in Melbourne and her daughter lives on the Gold Coast. There's a family that has been completely ripped apart."

Both the Labor and Liberal-National parties in Australia are whipping up nationalism and xenophobia to scapegoat migrants for the social crisis and to prepare for war. Successive governments have imprisoned refugees indefinitely in inhumane conditions on Nauru and Papua New Guinea's Manus Island.

The Australian media and political establishment is now demonising young African migrants. Minister Dutton has threatened to lower the age at which someone can be deported from 18 to 16.

Payne pointed to the lack of social services for migrant communities. "Instead of focusing so much hate on these African children, if there is a problem, why aren't they offering help?" she asked. "I think that Australia's white race policy is very much alive and there is a horrific amount of hate that comes from the government towards people from all sorts of nationalities. It's abusive and it's inhumane."

Payne noted that A J Graham and Mehaka Lee Te

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Puia, members of the Rebels motorcycle gang, were deported to New Zealand last year despite Australia's High Court ruling that their visa cancellations were invalid. Dutton issued new deportation orders, effectively overturning the court's decision.

Anyone who challenges a deportation order under section 501 can be detained, sometimes for years. Payne has visited New Zealanders in immigration detention centres throughout Australia, including on Christmas Island, a remote territory in the Indian Ocean.

She described the appalling conditions: "There's a whole lot of self-harming. People set fire to themselves, people sew their lips together. People ring me after they have seen someone slit their wrists. One person was asked to help someone hang themselves. I encourage people who have been in a detention centre to go and see a doctor and get a diagnosis for post-traumatic stress disorder."

Two New Zealanders died in 2015 and 2016 while awaiting deportation: Junior Togatuki and Rob Peihopa.

Iwi N Aus also works with New Zealanders in Australia who are unable to access social services, or have become homeless. Following legal changes in 2001, it became much harder to gain Australian citizenship and New Zealanders were barred from receiving unemployment and other benefits.

Two years ago, Payne met a mother forced to live with her children "in a container storage unit near Perth, because they had no income. The horrible thing is that the New Zealand mother had an Australian partner, who was abusive. The children were Australian citizens but had to stay in a container because their mother's a Kiwi."

Successive New Zealand governments have ignored the plight of NZ migrants affected by Australia's discriminatory policies. Deportees are left with virtually no resources and frequently subjected to parole conditions when they arrive in New Zealand, despite having been punished already.

Payne explained that in 2015 the then-opposition Labour Party's corrections spokesman Kelvin Davis joined her in visiting Australian detention centres and criticised the deportations. Since the Labour-led government took office in October 2017, however, "they've gone silent and I find it very disappointing."

The Australian government, Payne declared, "should be denounced. Why is Australia on the Human Rights body of the United Nations, and why is the New Zealand government not opposing them? Why is trade more important than the hurt and abuse that is going on to New Zealand citizens, and children?"

Australia is New Zealand's biggest trading partner and closest military ally.

On January 15, responding to Viane's deportation, NZ Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern opposed removal of New Zealanders with no links to the country, but told Newstalk ZB that Australia was "within their rights to do what they are doing."

Like its Australian counterpart, NZ Labour has a long history of attacks on immigrants, particularly from the Pacific Islands and Asia. The party ran an anti-immigrant election campaign and formed a coalition with the New Zealand First Party, whose xenophobic positions parallel those of One Nation in Australia and President Donald Trump in the US. NZ First and Labour have led an anti-Chinese witch-hunt aimed at scapegoating foreigners for the housing crisis and bringing New Zealand into line with the US military-build up against China.

The Ardern government's tacit agreement with Canberra's brutal treatment of immigrants and refugees is a clear indication that it is planning similar attacks on their basic democratic rights in New Zealand.

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