Oppose deportations and all anti-immigrant measures in Australia and New Zealand!

The Socialist Equality Group (New Zealand), Socialist Equality Party (Australia)
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The Socialist Equality Party (Australia) and the Socialist Equality Group (New Zealand) demand an immediate end to deportations and all the attacks on immigrants in Australia and New Zealand. In both countries, migrants are facing widespread, institutionalised discrimination and increasing racism and xenophobia.

Thousands of people have been stranded, away from their homes and families, by discriminatory border restrictions. Thousands more are being deported, despite the immense dangers posed by the deadly coronavirus pandemic that continues to rage internationally.

Like their counterparts in Europe, the United States and everywhere else in the world, Australia's Liberal-National Party Coalition government and New Zealand's Labour Party-Greens coalition government are seeking to whip up nationalism and xenophobia in order to divert rising working class anger over soaring levels of social inequality and poverty.

One particularly brutal example is Australia's policy of mass deportations, mostly to New Zealand. Home Affairs Minister Dutton recently boasted that in the past 12 months about 700 non-citizens have been forced out of Australia under section 501 of the Migration Act. Under this law, passed in 2014, the government can cancel someone's visa if they are convicted of a crime or crimes that carry a cumulative sentence of more than a year in prison—regardless of the nature of the offending or how long the person has lived in Australia.

Many people who consider themselves Australians have served prison sentences, only to be re-arrested and thrown into immigration detention centres to await deportation. Families are being ripped apart, with many parents permanently separated from their Australian-born children. Deportees often arrive in New Zealand with no home to go to and no family connections.

In a statement aimed at stoking the most backward, chauvinist sentiments, Dutton told Nine News on March 8 that his government was "taking the trash out" to "make Australia a safer place." Border officials allowed the network to film people being escorted onto a recent flight from Brisbane to Auckland, with reporters taunting them with questions like: "How does it feel to be kicked out of Australia?"

Canberra is blatantly violating international laws. One of those Dutton called "trash" was a 15-year-old boy, whose deportation was a clear breach of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The suggestion by Australian officials that the boy agreed to be deported is ludicrous. Apart from the fact that children cannot legally consent to such an action, it is well-known that many "voluntary" deportations are actually coerced: people "choose" deportation rather than remaining locked up indefinitely in detention centres.

New Zealanders are disproportionately affected, because of the large number who live in Australia—more than 650,000 people. Under draconian laws passed in 2001, New Zealanders who migrated after that date face almost insurmountable obstacles to gaining Australian citizenship. They are ineligible for unemployment, disability support and other benefits, and cannot vote.

These anti-immigrant laws have been upheld by successive governments of every stripe. Labor governments, backed by the Greens, have attacked immigrants and refugees just as brutally as the Coalition, including through the imprisonment of asylum seekers in offshore detention centres.

The SEP and the SEG call on the working class in Australia and New Zealand to defend all immigrants and to demand that all working people have the right to live and work wherever they want, with full citizenship rights. This requires a political fight against the entire political establishment, on both sides of the Tasman Sea. There is no constituency in the political establishment of either country for defending migrants and refugees, the most vulnerable sections of the working class.

The New Zealand government lashed out at Australia over the latest deportations. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern declared that she objected to "people being deported from Australia who we consider to be Australians." Greens

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foreign affairs spokesperson Golriz Ghahraman told Radio NZ that Australia was “behaving like a rogue nation.”

Such statements, however, are utterly hypocritical. The Ardern government has focused on the deportations of New Zealanders in order to stoke nationalist and anti-Australian sentiments. It tacitly supports Australia’s use of the Navy to turn back refugee boats, while keeping New Zealand’s annual refugee intake at just 1,500, one of the lowest in the world.

Moreover, the Ardern government’s own record demonstrates that it has zero concern for the rights of migrant workers. Between 2017 and 2020, Labour and the Greens were in a coalition government with the right-wing nationalist NZ First Party, which regularly demonised Chinese, Indian and Muslim immigrants—often using language similar to that of Brenton Tarrant, the fascist terrorist who killed 51 Muslims in Christchurch two years ago.

Ardern gave NZ First the positions of Defence Minister and Foreign Minister and the party played a major role in setting the government’s agenda. Labour adopted NZ First’s anti-immigrant positions, scapegoating migrants for unemployment and the high cost of living.

Wellington has exploited the COVID-19 pandemic to impose one of the harshest border closures in the world. Thousands of work visa holders, who were overseas when the border shut last year, have been unable to return, separated from their homes, jobs and families. Thousands more migrants, who lost their jobs in 2020, were barred from accessing welfare payments and forced to rely on food parcels.

New Zealand uses similar criteria to Australia to routinely deport people, largely to impoverished Pacific and Asian countries. A few days after Ardern denounced Australia’s deportations, *Stuff* reported that a couple and their seven-year-old son are to be deported from NZ to the Philippines—where COVID-19 is out of control and the government is waging a campaign of police state terror against workers and the poor—as punishment for claiming food vouchers they were not entitled to during the 2020 lockdown.

Also this month, immigration officials arrested and imprisoned 10 Chinese construction workers in Auckland. They are due to be deported next month for allegedly breaching migration rules.

The anti-immigrant measures in Australia and New Zealand are being accompanied by relentless anti-Chinese propaganda from the media, academics and political parties. Both countries are allies of the United States, and are supporting its militarisation of the Indo-Pacific region, in preparation for war against China. Like the US, both Australia and NZ have recorded a rise in racist violence and harassment targeting people from China and other parts of Asia.

The trade unions have joined in the nationalist and anti-immigrant campaign to distract from their collaboration with big business in destroying hundreds of thousands of jobs. The Australian Workers Union is being heavily promoted in the media as it attacks migrants for taking “thousands upon thousands of jobs that could go to Australians.” The Electrical Trades Union’s Allen Hicks recently declared that allowing foreign workers into the country was “an attack on Australian values.”

In New Zealand, the *Daily Blog*, which is backed by the Unite union, the Rail and Maritime Transport Union and the Dairy Workers Union, responded to the Australian deportations by demanding retaliation. It has called for “a hard-line government who will lock the doors” to Australians and Chinese people. This echoes the conservative National Party, whose leader Judith Collins said New Zealand should deport “Australians who we don’t want in this country.”

As was the case in the lead-up to World War I and during the Great Depression of the 1930s, the ruling elite is responding to the breakdown of capitalism, triggered by the pandemic, by seeking to divide workers along nationalist lines. The aim is to prevent any unified international fight against the real source of social inequality, unemployment and imperialist war: the profit system and the division of the world into rival nation states.

The working class must decisively reject this toxic nationalism, and advance its own independent policy. Workers can only fight back against the business elites’ ruthless policies of austerity by uniting their struggles across borders on the basis of an internationalist and socialist program. This includes opposition to deportations and to every other attack on the basic rights of immigrants.

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