

New Zealand media, government demonise Russian migrant workers

Tom Peters
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The *New Zealand Herald* reported on October 8 that unnamed representatives of the country's "Ukrainian community" held a "high-level meeting" with the Labour Party-led government where they "raised concerns with government officials over the ongoing recruitment of Russian fishing crews."

In response, Immigration Minister Michael Wood told the newspaper: "I have encouraged fishing companies to consider their reliance on Russian workers given the unstable situation created by Russia's abhorrent invasion of Ukraine." While a spokesperson for Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta said current travel bans and sanctions are not aimed at "everyday Russian citizens," only those with links to the Putin regime, Wood's statement suggests that preparations are underway to extend such measures.

The *Herald* article is part of an intensifying xenophobic campaign to demonise all Russians, including workers who have no responsibility for the Putin government's invasion of Ukraine. The aim is to justify New Zealand's further integration into the US-NATO imperialist war against Russia, which is developing into a third world war. The US and its allies are seeking to resolve their worsening economic crisis by establishing their hegemony over both Russia and China.

The dangers facing the world's population cannot be overstated, as Moscow and Washington are recklessly threatening to use nuclear weapons to secure their geopolitical interests.

New Zealand, a close ally of the US, has already sent 230 troops to Europe to assist with training Ukraine's armed forces, and has contributed military equipment, money and intelligence to the war effort. All of this has been accompanied by a barrage of propaganda aimed at overcoming broad anti-war sentiment in the New Zealand population.

New Zealand's largest fishing company Sealord, and others in the industry, have for decades used foreign

crews as cheap labour. In 2011, journalists and researchers exposed abusive and slave-like working conditions that many of these crews were subjected to, triggering a major scandal.

Fishing crews are recruited from Indonesia, the Philippines and other parts of Asia, as well as Russia and Ukraine. Radio NZ reported on May 17, 2021, that in 2019, prior to the pandemic, 31 percent of the industry's workforce were temporary migrants, about 4,000 workers.

Now, a significant number of these highly exploited workers are being denounced in the most hysterical terms as agents of Moscow. According to the *Herald*, "questions over the morality of hiring Crimeans," in particular, have been raised with Sealord and Independent Fisheries Limited. Crimea is claimed by both Russia and Ukraine and was formally annexed by Russia in 2014, following the US and NATO sponsored coup, spearheaded by fascists, which installed an aggressively anti-Russian regime in Kiev.

The Ukrainian government has said it intends to retake Crimea by force, and recently organised a terrorist attack on the Kerch bridge aimed at escalating the war. Ukrainians who spoke to the *New Zealand Herald*, however, equated Crimeans with Russians.

One unnamed "source" told the *Herald* that the employment of Crimeans was "indirect sponsorship of Russia's war crimes." Another accused these crews of being "aggressively pro-war and pro-Putin." A Ukrainian described as "familiar with the crews who come to New Zealand" made the blatantly racist comment that employing Crimeans was "the same as [employing people from] Syria or Iran or North Korea. Nobody will think about hiring a Somalian fishing crew."

The *Herald* also quoted the Ukrainian Association of New Zealand (UANZ), a group that is routinely cited as the unchallengeable voice on all matters relating to the war in Ukraine. The organisation questioned why

Crimeans were being allowed to work on New Zealand fishing vessels despite “widespread condemnation of the Russian aggression, which is currently threatening to destroy the world in a nuclear apocalypse.”

The implication of all these repugnant statements, presented uncritically by the *Herald*, is that all Russians, including ordinary working people, must be regarded as enemy aliens. This is of a piece with the vilification of Russian musicians, athletes and performers throughout Europe and North America.

The article also recalls the hysteria whipped up against Germans living in New Zealand during the First and Second World Wars. With the outbreak of war in 1914, people from German families, whether naturalised or not, found themselves harassed and spied upon by police and hounded by nationalist thugs. Many were forced out of their jobs or had their businesses vandalised, and hundreds were imprisoned on Somes Island.

The UANZ held a pro-war rally in June, where Auckland Mayor Phil Goff and Minister for Ethnic Communities Priyanca Radhakrishnan promised more weapons and support for the Ukrainian armed forces. The rally was backed by the Greens (who are part of the Labour-led government) and the pseudo-left Auckland Peace Action group.

In a September 26 Facebook post, UANZ chairperson Yuriy Gladun denounced calls for Russians fleeing Putin’s mobilisation order to be allowed entry into New Zealand. The post, which was reported uncritically by media outlet *Stuff* on October 7, slandered the entire Russian population as complicit in the “destruction of Ukrainian cities and villages” and war crimes.

No political tendency in New Zealand has opposed the reactionary demands aired by UANZ and the media for the banning of Russian migrant workers. This includes the Greens, who sometimes pose as defenders of migrants and refugees, as well as the various pseudo-left groups which support the government’s alignment with the US and NATO against Russia.

The pro-government *Daily Blog*, for its part, has concentrated on justifying New Zealand’s integration into the war preparations against China. It has declared that China’s “fishing militia” aims to take over the Pacific and has called for a stronger military “to protect our fisheries.”

The Maritime Union (MUNZ) took a nationalist position when questioned by the *World Socialist Web Site*. Communications spokesperson Victor Billot said: “We don’t see the [Russian or Ukrainian] workers on those

vessels as necessarily responsible for what their governments are up to, in either case. So, we wouldn’t want to have some kind of prejudice against any workers.”

He added, however, that “a large part of the problem is because the industry has been reliant for many years on using overseas labour and that is a way that they’ve driven down wages and conditions.” The union wanted vessels in New Zealand waters to have more “New Zealand workers on good wages and conditions,” he said.

Last year, MUNZ supported a government decision to ban a cruise ship from entering New Zealand, based solely on the nationality of its workers.

This nationalism is aimed at dividing workers and covering up the responsibility of the unions themselves for the dire working and social conditions that exist. For decades, the unions have overseen the destruction of full-time jobs and the cutting of wages, in the maritime industries as in every other.

Opposition to all forms of nationalism and xenophobia, including that promoted by the union bureaucracy, is a crucial part of the fight to build a global anti-war movement. Only the independent political intervention of the working class, united across national borders, can disarm the ruling class, in every country, and stop its insane drive towards a catastrophic world war. This requires a socialist strategy and internationalist strategy, aimed at putting an end to capitalism and the division of the world into nation states, which is the source of war.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) have resolved to build a movement of workers and youth against imperialist war. We call on those who agree with this perspective to contact us.



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