

# Report slams New Zealand Labour government’s immigrant “dawn raids” apology

John Braddock  
19 July 2023

An official review into anti-immigrant “dawn raids” carried out by Immigration New Zealand (INZ) to seize and deport so-called “overstayers” has excoriated the Labour-led government for continuing the practice despite then Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern’s official apology to the Pacific community in August 2021.

The anti-working class, racist campaign, which from 1974–76 scapegoated migrants for a deepening economic and social crisis, saw police and immigration officials carry out a wave of early morning raids targeting alleged “overstayers.” Hundreds of workers who had been imported to fill labour shortages, and their families, were prosecuted for alleged visa violations and summarily expelled.

Announcing the “apology” at a highly publicised cultural event in the Auckland Town Hall, Ardern declared: “The dawn raids were a defining moment in New Zealand’s history, and the emotional harm caused by them remains etched in the living memory of those who were directly impacted.... An apology can never reverse what happened, or undo the damage caused, but we can acknowledge it and we can seek to right a wrong.”

Labour’s Minister for Pacific Peoples, Aupito William Sio, said the apology would promote a “reconciliation process” for those directly impacted. “I don’t think there is any Pacific family not affected by the dawn raids,” he said.

The review by Mike Heron KC, released last week, confirmed that the entire exercise was a fraud. The inquiry was commissioned by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) after it was revealed in May that dawn raids have continued throughout the 19 months since Ardern’s ceremony.

In the latest case, police showed up at 5:00 a.m. on April 19, scaring the victim’s children and taking him

into custody. The Tongan man was accused of overstaying his temporary work visa. Following an outcry, INZ admitted the early morning raid was not a “one-off.”

Church leader Pakilau Manase Lua said the Pacific community was “up in arms” over the case. “This is a complete betrayal of our community, it needs to stop,” he told Radio NZ. At a public meeting in South Auckland, Pakilau denounced Labour’s fraudulent apology as “lip service.” “What was that apology all about?... it was all for show,” he said.

Forced into damage control, the government established the Heron review hoping to bury the issue. The investigation found the practice was so entrenched the vaunted apology appeared “to ring hollow.” The Pacific community had, Heron declared, a reasonable expectation “that early morning intrusions into households would cease (or at least be exceptional).”

Between July 2022 and May 2023, INZ officers carried out 20 raids not only on the Pasifika community but also on Chinese, Indians, Indonesians and Malaysians. Heron said that while INZ officials attended the 2021 ceremony, “INZ told us that no consideration was given to out of hours operating procedures in the wake of the Government’s apology.”

Heron further found that despite the immense publicity given to Ardern’s apology, nothing was done by ministers or their officials to change the way the government sought people for deportation. This meant dawn raids, called “out of hours compliance activity” by officials—usually a 6 a.m. visit to the house of someone to deport them—continued.

Heron concluded there “does not appear to have been an attempt to implement the principles of the government’s apology or alter out of hours visits in light of it.” Only

after the review was initiated did MBIE begin updating its internal guidance for dawn raids. The fact that the government hadn't provided a clearly stated position about the raids was, Heron asserted, "emblematic of a larger problem."

The findings expose the hypocrisy of Labour's cynical use of race-based identity politics to maintain a political grip among the largely impoverished Pacific Island communities. Deputy Prime Minister Carmel Sepuloni, hailed as the first Pacific Islander to fill the role, distanced herself, telling TV1 she was "unaware" dawn raids would continue. "I thought they'd already ended" she said, adding she was "deeply disappointed when we found out that these were being undertaken."

Labour's immigration minister from 2020–22 Kris Faafoi, also of Pacific descent and MP for the multi-ethnic working class Mana electorate, took no interest in defending targeted immigrants. His successor Michael Wood, until his recent demotion (over undeclared investments) was touted as a leading light of Labour's phony "left," declared he was "a little surprised" the raids had continued.

Labour has a long history of anti-immigrant politics. In opposition, the party opened its 2017 election campaign announcing draconian measures targeting immigration. Then leader Andrew Little promised Labour would slash migrant numbers by up to 30,000—almost half the previous year's intake of 72,000. With Ardern as prime minister, Labour took office in coalition with the anti-Asian NZ First with a joint commitment to attack immigration numbers.

Little, now immigration minister following Wood's demise, has issued a pro-forma apology for the INZ failure to implement proper procedures. A former trade union boss, Little was made minister while carrying his own anti-immigrant record. In 2016, during a visit to the working-class centre of Lower Hutt, Little cited Indian and Chinese chefs as examples of semi-skilled migrants allegedly taking jobs from "those who are already living here" and putting downward pressure on wages.

Despite his criticisms Heron left the door ajar. He did not call for the raids to be ended but that the government legislate to "specify the criteria" for "compliance visits" and that they be used as a "matter of last resort." He recommends token limits on the more egregious practices, for example the likely impact on children and on "New Zealand citizens or residents."

Brutal deportations are meanwhile continuing. On Monday the *New Zealand Herald* reported that 25-year-

old Aaron Miao was served with a deportation order on June 30 and given two weeks to say goodbye to his family and leave the country. The father of two New Zealand children aged 10 months and 2 years, the latter born prematurely and needing regular medical care, is accused of overstaying his visa.

Miao's immigration lawyer Harris Gu blames INZ visa processing delays for him becoming an unlawful resident and called the impending deportation "inhumane and heartless." His partner Nico Guo is a New Zealand citizen and mother of their children. Guo said it was "not humanly possible" for her to raise their children on her own. The case is being appealed.

Such vindictive attacks on basic rights take place despite a cynical move by Labour, with COVID measures now removed, to boost immigration in response to business demands over critical labour shortages. Data released in March showed a net migration gain of 65,400 people for the year, compared with a net loss of 19,300 the previous year. For non-New Zealand citizens the year's influx of 88,900 was a record net migration gain. Just over half were from India, China and the Philippines.

Like governments throughout the world, Labour scapegoats migrants for the housing crisis, social inequality and pressure on public services. It used the COVID pandemic to intensify deportations of people who "overstay" the term of their visa or who commit trivial breaches of their visa conditions. Thousands caught outside the country were barred from returning after the border closed in March 2020 while the government refused to extend the temporary visas of migrants stuck offshore, including many with long-standing ties and families in New Zealand.

These policies were deeply resented and subject to protest in New Zealand and India. A popular Facebook group, Migrants NZ, started in 2020, expanded rapidly during the pandemic reaching a membership of more than 75,000 by providing advice and advocacy. It was forced to shut down in May 2022 following threats of legal action by the New Zealand Immigration Advisers Authority, a government agency.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**