

New Zealand government stokes fascist smear campaign against Green MP

Tom Peters
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Over the past week, New Zealand Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters, leader of the right-wing nationalist NZ First Party, has fuelled a vile slander campaign accusing Green Party MP Benjamin Doyle, without a shred of evidence, of being a sex criminal and a danger to children.

The unhinged and hysterical claims, which have been repeated by sections of the corporate media, point to the rapid lurch to the right by the political establishment. Like the Trump administration in the US, the National Party-led coalition government, in which NZ First plays a major role, is whipping up racism and backwardness in order to divert attention from soaring social inequality, brutal austerity measures and the integration of New Zealand into US-led war preparations against China.

Towards the end of March, Doyle came under attack by various far-right hacks, including anti-transgender activist Ani O'Brien—who was a digital director for former National Party leader Judith Collins—and Chantelle Baker, a Christian “influencer” who played a major role in anti-vaccination protests in 2022.

These and other individuals shared innocuous photos from Doyle’s private Instagram account—including one of the MP kissing his own child—and made lurid and defamatory statements. In a typical post, Baker asked: “Are the @nzpolice investigating the very concerning images this man has been posting involving incredibly young children?” She added, in a swipe at the gender diverse community, that “of course, [Doyle] identifies as non binary.”

Peters amplified these baseless innuendos in a social media post on March 29 which demanded that the Green Party answer “serious questions” about Doyle’s Instagram account, including the meaning of the account’s name, “BibleBeltBussy” (“bussy” is a lewd slang term “used to denote the male anus,” according to Wikipedia). Peters also asked why Doyle had deleted several dozen photos from the account, implying this was somehow suspicious.

Based on the so-called “evidence,” the worst that an objective observer could conclude is that Doyle made a foolish choice in naming the Instagram account.

The deputy prime minister frothed: “This is the guy who wants to provide puberty blockers on demand and surgery for

children. Doyle has been placed in Parliament to sabotage ethical beliefs our society stands for.”

In an interview with Peters on the far-right Platform podcast on March 31, host Sean Plunket declared that Doyle had made “sexually provocative” social media posts and asked Peters whether he believed that Doyle was “a promoter of paedophilia.” Peters replied that “this requires a serious inquiry” and called for a police investigation.

Plunket also repeated extreme right-wing conspiracies attacking the Burnett Foundation, formerly the AIDS Foundation, where Doyle worked before entering parliament. He said the state-funded sexual health organisation was involved in “very questionable sex education in schools.”

Peters replied: “You’re right about the AIDS Foundation,” saying it was “pushing a certain type of behaviour which only invites more AIDS.”

Peters is repeating the same deranged lies that he spread during the 1980s when, as a member of the National Party, he opposed the legalisation of homosexuality. He told parliament on October 9, 1985, that the Homosexual Law Reform Bill would contribute to the spread of AIDS and that its supporters had a “hidden agenda” of promoting paedophilia.

Doyle has become the target of a far-right hate campaign after delivering a speech at a protest outside parliament on March 23 supporting access to gender-affirming medication for transgender youth. On the same day, Peters gave a speech in Christchurch in which he demonised transgender people, denounced sex and gender education in schools and declared a “war on woke.”

It is no accident that the campaign against Doyle erupted shortly after Peters’ visit to Washington and talks with the Trump administration last month. Anti-LGBT demagoguery was a major feature of Trump’s election campaign and his anti-democratic executive orders since becoming president, including a ban on transgender athletes and an order to cease all funding for gender-affirming care.

NZ First and the government are using the Trump playbook to shift politics in New Zealand further and further to the right.

The conspiracy theories that LGBT people are “grooming” children are emboldening fascist groups. In February, the fundamentalist Destiny Church stormed a drag event at

Auckland's Te Atatū library, forcing about 30 adults and children to lock themselves in a room, fearing for their safety. Destiny's leader Brian Tamaki has circulated the "allegations" against Doyle and called for police and child welfare agencies to investigate the MP.

Green Party co-leader Marama Davidson said on March 31 that Peters was "actively fanning flames of hatred" towards the LGBT community, and that the Greens had received an "immense number of death threats and abuse" directed against Doyle and his family. Doyle has taken leave from parliament.

The main opposition Labour Party leader Chris Hipkins similarly criticised Peters, saying his comments showed "an ugly side of New Zealand politics."

Davidson made a futile appeal to National Party Prime Minister Christopher Luxon to "take responsibility for the behaviour of his coalition colleague." When questioned by reporters, Luxon expressed support for Peters, saying the language used on Doyle's account was "really inappropriate."

The claims by NZ First and its supporters to be protecting children are ludicrous and hypocritical in the extreme.

The NZ government has aligned itself with the fascist Trump administration, which is tearing up democratic rights and carrying out mass deportations of entire families. It also backs the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza, in which tens of thousands of children have been murdered. Peters has slandered opponents of the genocide as "racists" and "fascists."

The Platform's Plunket and the rest of the right-wing pundits attacking Doyle are all supporters of the Israeli state and defenders of genocide.

In New Zealand, as a result of the brutal austerity policies inflicted by successive Labour and National Party-led governments, at least one in five children lives in poverty. The current government has slashed the nutritional content of school lunches for hundreds of thousands of children, under conditions where half a million people (10 percent of the population) are relying on food parcels from charities.

As for the issue of child abuse, a royal commission of inquiry last year found that thousands of children had been beaten, tortured and sexually abused for decades in state-run schools, detention facilities and psychiatric institutions. Successive governments, including ones in which Peters held leading positions, covered up these crimes and shielded the state from accountability.

NZ First is a deeply unpopular party: it received just over 6 percent of the votes in the 2023 election. Peters founded the party in 1993 on an anti-immigrant platform, and it has a long record of promoting racism and xenophobia, particularly against people from China, India and the Middle East.

Along with the libertarian ACT Party, NZ First is seeking to scapegoat indigenous Māori people for the social crisis by falsely implying that they have received "privileges" due to identity politics, which has in fact benefited only a narrow, affluent layer.

The toxic and divisive politics of NZ First and the government must be opposed. But it must be stressed that NZ First is only able to play such a prominent role in the country's politics because it has been legitimised by National, the Labour Party and the Greens itself, as well as sections of the trade union bureaucracy.

In 2017, the Greens joined a Labour-led coalition government that included NZ First. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern made Peters the deputy prime minister and the foreign minister—the same positions he holds today in the National-led coalition.

On November 8, 2017, the Greens' then co-leader James Shaw told parliament that the Greens and NZ First "do not agree on everything, but we do agree—as has not been documented—on far more than we disagree, and we do look forward to working with them over the course of the coming years to find common cause and to deliver the best for New Zealand."

The Ardern government adopted NZ First's anti-immigrant proposals and its call for a major increase in police numbers. The Greens' Shaw worked directly with NZ First's defence minister Ron Mark to argue for increased military spending, on the false pretext of providing disaster relief to the Pacific. The real purpose was to align New Zealand more closely with US war preparations against China.

At the same time, ACT and NZ First have benefited from the fixation of the Greens and Labour, and their pseudo-left supporters, on divisive identity politics based on race, gender and sexuality—which explicitly blames white and male workers for social problems caused by capitalism.

As is the case in the US, Europe and Australia, the entire political establishment has worked to elevate the far-right and promote every form of backwardness, in order to divide the working class and defend the profit system. Democratic rights, including the rights of LGBT people, immigrants and other minorities, can only be defended by unifying the working class in opposition to this system. This requires a political struggle against all the parliamentary parties, including the Greens, based on a socialist and internationalist program.



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