

Far-right smear campaign continues against New Zealand Green MP

Tom Peters
13 April 2025

New Zealand's Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters, leader of the right-wing nationalist NZ First Party, is continuing to support a fascistic smear campaign against Green Party MP Benjamin Doyle.

Doyle spoke to the media on April 9 for the first time following a fortnight of vile and baseless slanders from Peters and numerous far-right commentators, who implied that Doyle was a paedophile. Peters had demanded that the Greens answer “serious questions” about Doyle and called for the police to investigate the MP.

The only “evidence” produced by NZ First and its supporters are unremarkable family photographs shared by Doyle on Instagram—including some that included Doyle's child—alongside “inappropriate” language.

The hysterical campaign focused on the fact that Doyle—who identifies as non-binary and uses they/them pronouns—had named their Instagram account “BibleBeltBussy” and labelled one set of photos with the words “bussy galore.” For several days, New Zealand's media was dominated by discussion of the meaning of the word “bussy,” a lewd slang term which Doyle had foolishly adopted as a social media nickname.

The demonisation of Doyle is part of the National Party-led government's efforts to stoke divisions based on race, gender and sexuality, and to divert public attention from its historic assault on workers' living standards and preparations for war. This includes plans announced on April 7 to double the country's military spending, which will be paid for with even deeper cuts to healthcare and other vital services.

Doyle told the media that he had faced a “barrage of abuse and vitriol,” including “a significant number of threats to my life and the safety of my child and family.” The MP said their social media posts had been

“taken wildly out of context and manipulated” in a campaign driven by homophobic and transphobic lies and conspiracy theories.

Asked to respond specifically to Peters' statements, Doyle did not condemn the deputy prime minister. He said he would rather have a face-to-face “restorative conversation” with Peters, “because I believe that we can't resolve anything through bickering or in the media.”

Peters rejected the offer, telling Radio NZ: “No, I'm sorry, [Doyle] can speak directly to the police... Those are the people he needs to speak to, not me.”

Peters claimed that he was not attacking the LGBT community, writing on Facebook: “The posts were ‘problematic’ for their content—not because of what Doyle identifies as or what sexuality he might be.”

This is contradicted by the facts. The *Post* reported on April 9 that the campaign against Doyle was started by businessman Rhys Williams, a former member of NZ First. Using an anonymous X account, Williams distributed screenshots from Doyle's Instagram account, which were then seized upon by Christian and anti-transgender activists and by Peters.

Doyle became a target for these layers after advocating greater access to medical procedures for transgender people. NZ First, copying Donald Trump and other far-right movements internationally, has campaigned vigorously against transgender rights. At NZ First's insistence, the government has removed sex and gender education guidelines from schools.

In an interview with the right-wing Platform podcast on April 4, Williams described himself as a “concerned New Zealander.” In fact, Williams was the main organiser of a major anti-transgender conference in Wellington last year, which featured speakers from NZ First, the evangelical Destiny Church and the far-right

Christian lobby group Family First.

On his X account, which has more than 9,600 followers, Williams frequently glorifies NZ First while posting hundreds of comments demonising LGBT people. His deranged statements include: “Rainbow = pedophile ... simple as that” and “Trans Activists are either pedophiles or mass murderers.”

Williams also repeats conspiracy theories about the state-funded charities InsideOut and the Burnett Foundation, which promote sexual health and education, smearing them as part of a “rainbow cult” that is “grooming” children.

NZ First president Julian Paul told the *Post* that Peters had not coordinated or planned anything with Williams. “We became aware of the Doyle issue just like everyone else—reading the plethora of posts on multiple social media platforms,” he said.

This is not credible. Williams’ X account is followed by several senior NZ First figures, including Paul, “party secretary Holly Howard, board member Helma Vermeulen, and MPs Shane Jones, Jenny Marcroft, and Tanya Unkovich,” according to the *Post*.

Moreover, Williams’ politics are those of NZ First. Like Peters, he attacks transgender people and rails against “cultural Marxism”, while also supporting the Trump administration and defending the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Green Party co-leader Chlöe Swarbrick told Radio NZ that Doyle had become “collateral damage” in a culture war aimed at distracting attention from serious issues including the government’s austerity measures. “Winston Peters knows precisely what he’s doing. It’s the same playbook that he’s used for decades, which is to goad the media, to be outrageous... to court controversy in the headlines,” she said.

Yet the Green Party itself bears responsibility for the prominent role played by NZ First, which is effectively setting the government’s agenda despite only having received 6 percent of the votes in the 2023 election.

The Greens, including Swarbrick, enthusiastically joined a Labour-led coalition government in 2017 that included NZ First. Then Green co-leader James Shaw declared that the Greens agreed with NZ First “on far more than we disagree,” and pledged to work closely with the party. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern made Winston Peters both foreign minister and defence minister.

The Greens—along with the left and liberal publications such as the *Daily Blog*—played a crucial role in sanitizing NZ First by falsely claiming that it had moderated or even shifted to the left.

The Labour-NZ First-Greens government strengthened ties with US imperialism, attacked immigrants’ rights, and transferred tens of billions of dollars to the rich during the first years of the COVID pandemic.

NZ First is not, as Swarbrick put it, simply trying to “be outrageous” and “court controversy.” The party aims to push politics further and further to the right, using the same playbook as the fascistic Trump administration. It is stoking the most toxic forms of nationalism, racism and bigotry in order to provide scapegoats for mounting anger about soaring social inequality and poverty, and to prepare for war.

This agenda must be opposed, but the record shows that democratic rights can only be defended in a struggle against all the capitalist parties, including the Greens and Labour.

Workers and youth must also reject the divisive identity politics promoted by these parties, which plays directly into the hands of NZ First. Identity politics, based on gender and race, falsely blames white people, heterosexuals and men for inequality and discrimination, obscuring the fundamental class divide in society.

What is required is the fight to unite the working class—of every ethnicity, nationality, gender and sexual orientation—based on a socialist program to bring an end to the capitalist system, which is the source of inequality, fascism and war.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact