

# Anti-immigrant confrontation in New Zealand

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A parade by hundreds of members of New Zealand's Indian Sikh community was confronted in South Auckland on December 20 by an anti-immigrant group calling itself "True Patriots of NZ." The far-right outfit is an offshoot of the fundamentalist Destiny Church, led by self-appointed "apostle" Brian Tamaki.

The group of 50 blocked the Great South Road, disrupting the parade and preventing it from moving. The "patriots" performed a Māori haka before linking arms and chanting, "One true God," "Jesus, Jesus wants you gone!" and "God of nation." A line of police kept the two sides apart with no arrests.

Tamaki describes the True Patriots as "Guardians of the Kiwi Way of Life. Defenders of Faith, Flag & Family." They profess to stand against "globalism, mass immigration, and woke ideology." In an online video, members are seen wearing t-shirts with slogans declaring, "Kiwis first" and "Keep NZ, NZ" along with a banner proclaiming, "This is New Zealand, not India."

The annual Sikh procession was authorised by the Auckland Council, police and traffic management. It was part of a Nagar Kirtan celebration, which marks the birth of Sikhism's first guru, and involves prayer, music and displays of Sikh symbols. Sikh community leaders later stated that they were committed to peace and asked members not to escalate tensions online.

The bullying and provocative intervention was intended to shut down the procession. The haka, often erroneously described as a "Māori war dance," can, when performed with intensity, be fiercely confrontational. In February, Tamaki's so-called "Man Up" group violently stormed a west Auckland library during the city's Pride Festival to prevent a public drag performance.

Displays by sub-groups of the Destiny Church have intensified over the past year, expanding from anti-gay and anti-trans events to fascistic protests against "mass immigration" and in support of Israel's genocide in Gaza.

Tamaki's so-called "Freedom and Rights Coalition" has blocked motorways while employing the Trumpian slogan "Make New Zealand Great Again."

In September, Tamaki and his retinue attended the "Unite the Kingdom" rally in London, organised by fascist Tommy Robinson. It was the largest far-right mobilisation in British history, estimated at over 100,000 participants, built on a long-running campaign blaming social distress and the collapse of essential services on migration and asylum seekers.

Tamaki said he was invited to the event by Robinson. Addressing the crowd, he claimed to be representing New Zealand. "Ban any type of public expression in our Christian nations of other religions," Tamaki declared. His speech was preceded by a haka, performed in honour of American right-wing activist Charlie Kirk, who had been fatally shot in the United States a week earlier. His performing group ripped up a Palestinian flag.

Tamaki has been emboldened by the rapid shift to the right by the entire political establishment both within New Zealand and internationally. The rise of far-right forces, along with growing authoritarianism by governments of all stripes, is the response of ruling classes to seething mass opposition in the working class and among youth amid the breakdown of capitalism. Stagnating wages, growing inequality, austerity and the sharpening of imperialist rivalries create a social base that reactionary forces seek to exploit, in the absence of a genuine socialist alternative.

Tamaki's anti-Sikh pronouncements echo India's Hindu supremacist Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has banned a Sikh group in that country over bogus allegations of "terrorism." During a visit to India this year by NZ Prime Minister Christopher Luxon, Modi openly criticised alleged "anti-India activities by some illegal elements," referring to Sikhs living in New Zealand.

On social media, Tamaki has referred to Sikh activists

who advocate for a Khalistan state as a “terrorist organisation” and “Khalistan terrorists.” He claimed they were “wielding swords and daggers, flying foreign and terrorist flags.” At a rally in June, flags associated with Khalistan and Islam were burned, with Tamaki labelling both religions “evil” and “satanic.”

Tamaki’s jingoistic declamations are part of a broader offensive claiming that mass immigration without “assimilation” is “national suicide” and an “invasion” by foreign cultures and religions. Following the 2019 terror attack in Christchurch, in which 51 Muslim worshippers were killed by fascist gunman Brenton Tarrant, Tamaki posted on social media that Islam was a “fast creeping social invasion” responsible for the “outright destruction of Western Civilisation.”

Destiny Church has for years sought to cultivate a base among the most oppressed sections of the working class, particularly Māori, turning them towards religious obscurantism and right-wing politics. Tamaki’s activities are funded by tithing his congregations and running dubious tax-exempt “charities.” The church played a major role in right-wing protests against COVID-19 lockdowns and vaccination policies, with Tamaki declaring COVID was a sign people had “strayed from God.”

For an extended period, Tamaki and the church were widely regarded with opprobrium, but his far-right views and profile are now being normalised. In November, the so-called “Free Speech Union” gave Tamaki a platform at a public meeting where he called for banning the burka, halal foods and foreign religions. A prominent right-wing podcast, The Platform, prominently defends and interviews him.

Above all, the xenophobic and anti-immigrant rhetoric advanced by Tamaki and his groups is cultivated and accommodated by key sections of the political establishment, in particular the right-wing populist NZ First Party, led by Foreign Minister Winston Peters, and ACT which are both coalition partners in the government headed by the National Party.

Peters established NZ First in 1993, in a split from National, and built his political career on populist dog-whistling and anti-immigrant bigotry. Widely despised, NZ First received just 6 percent of the vote in the 2023 election but has been promoted for years by the entire establishment. This includes Labour, with whom Peters formed government in 2017 on a joint platform to slash immigration, then around 70,000 a year, by up to 30,000.

NZ First and ACT, both parties of big business, pave the

way for far-right outfits by seeking to steer popular anger in the most reactionary direction. They attempt to stoke racial animosity towards indigenous Māori, bigotry towards transgender people, anti-immigrant chauvinism and anti-science quackery. Meanwhile, many immigrant workers are brutally exploited under conditions of virtual slave labour.

In a so-called “state of the nation” speech in March, Peters declared NZ First was the “true nationalist party,” raising the slogans, “Make New Zealand First Again” and “Together we are going to take back our country.” In a semi-coherent tirade, Peters declared a “war on woke” and lambasted protesters as “communist, fascist and anti-democratic losers” and “Marxist whingers.” A new website for the “True Patriots NZ” group echoes the NZ First rhetoric.

Peters recently announced that NZ First will vote against a free trade deal that the government has struck with India, mainly on the grounds that it will purportedly open the door to more immigrants. The National Party is now dependent on Labour’s support for it to be approved by parliament.

New Zealand does not have a mass fascist or right-wing movement, but there is a growing danger. The ruling class is using whatever tools it can to push bourgeois politics into an authoritarian and militarist direction.

The far right feeds off a deep-going social crisis that has been caused by the pro-business policies of successive governments, Labour and National-led alike. Both of the main capitalist parties continuously promote New Zealand nationalism, including anti-immigrant scapegoating, creating a political atmosphere in which reactionary forces are emboldened.

The fight against fascistic and far-right forces thus requires a struggle against the entire political establishment. That means building a mass socialist movement of the working class, directed against a capitalist system that is hurtling towards barbarism, and dedicated to uniting workers internationally on the basis of their common class interests.



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