

New Zealand government minister stokes anti-Indian racism

Tom Peters
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Shane Jones, a member of the right-wing nationalist New Zealand First Party and minister for Regional Development in the National Party-led coalition government, sparked controversy over the past week with racist comments targeting Indian immigrants.

Speaking with the far-right Reality Check Radio on April 20, Jones denounced a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with India, falsely claiming that it would lead to “unfettered immigration.” In fact, the deal only provides for up to 5,000 extra temporary work visas at any one time.

With the coalition divided on the FTA, the National Party is relying on the opposition Labour Party’s support—which was confirmed on April 23—to pass it into law.

Jones ranted that immigration will “drive down the value of wages, it will clog up our roads, it will completely overwhelm our health and other frontline services. And I don’t care how much criticism we get, I’m just never going to agree with a butter chicken tsunami coming to New Zealand.”

Such statements are part of NZ First’s positioning ahead of the November election. They are a crude attempt to scapegoat immigrants for the social crisis created by decades of brutal austerity measures, the transfer of wealth to the rich, and the diversion of billions of dollars to the military, under successive governments in which NZ First has played a significant role.

The coalition government is insisting that the working class must suffer a further decline in its living standards as the economic crisis worsens and prices soar due to the illegal US-Israeli war against Iran—which the government supports.

Jones’s comments follow months of racist agitation against Indians, who make up more than 5 percent of

the NZ population (292,000 people). The fundamentalist Destiny Church has held provocative demonstrations in Auckland, with slogans including “This is New Zealand, not India,” “Kiwis first” and the Trumpian “Make New Zealand Great Again.”

Recently, graffiti saying “Kill all Indians” has appeared in the Auckland suburbs of Royal Oak and Papatoetoe, including at a school. According to police, people of South Asian descent are the most common targets of racially-motivated attacks, with 4,767 hate incidents reported involving South Asian victims between January 2022 and October 2025.

National Party Prime Minister Christopher Luxon criticised Jones’s comments as “alarmist” and “scaremongering.” Opposition Labour Party leader Chris Hipkins told the *New Zealand Herald* the NZ First minister was promoting “outright racism, and our migrant community should not have to put up with that.”

These statements are utterly hypocritical. NZ First was founded in 1993 in a split from the National Party, based on a platform opposing Asian immigration. The party’s frequent racist outbursts against Chinese, Indians and Muslims did not prevent it from being part of successive coalition governments led by National and Labour—including the 2017–2020 Labour government led by Jacinda Ardern.

It is not accidental that Jones began his political career in the Labour Party and served as a senior Labour MP from 2005 to 2014. He joined NZ First in 2017.

For most of the twentieth century, Labour upheld a racist “white New Zealand” immigration policy. More recently, it has echoed NZ First’s anti-Chinese rhetoric—including scapegoating Chinese immigrants for high house prices in 2015—while pushing for New

Zealand's integration into US-led war preparations against China.

This xenophobic anti-China campaign played a major part in the 2017 election and was amplified by the pro-Labour *Daily Blog*. Middle class pseudo-left groups like Socialist Aotearoa and the International Socialist Organisation also celebrated the Labour-NZ First coalition.

The Ardern government, which also included the Green Party, supported NZ First's demands to significantly restrict immigration, and made the party's leader Winston Peters deputy prime minister and foreign minister—the same positions he has in the current government.

In the months following the Christchurch massacre of 51 Muslims by the fascist Brenton Tarrant in March 2019, Jones, then a minister in Ardern's cabinet, railed against Indian immigrants in terms that echoed the "Great Replacement" conspiracy theory.

Labour and the Greens have so far refused to rule out forming another coalition government with NZ First, which could be in a position after the election to decide which of the major parties leads the next government.

Another ally of Labour, the Māori nationalist Te Pāti Māori (TPM), has joined in the stoking of anti-Asian xenophobia. Last year its then-MP Tūhaka Ferris attacked Labour for having a multi-ethnic campaign team for a by-election in Auckland.

Last weekend Che Wilson, who was the president of TPM from 2018 to 2022, performed a haka that contained anti-Indian slurs and gestures directed at Parmjeet Parmar, an MP of Indian descent in the right-wing libertarian ACT Party. TPM MP Oriini Kaipara was forced to denounce Wilson's performance as "racist" in an attempt to distance the party from him.

Anti-migrant xenophobia, however, is inseparable from the racialist identity politics espoused by TPM, whose leader Rawiri Waititi has asserted that the "Māori genetic makeup is stronger than others."

The prominent role played by NZ First in the Luxon and Ardern governments does not reflect widespread support for its chauvinist policies: the party received just 6 percent of the votes in the 2023 election.

Rather, the party's elevation points to the lurch to the right by the entire political establishment and the union bureaucracy, sections of which have also supported NZ First. The aim is to divide workers, prevent a unified

movement against austerity, and prepare the population to take part in the developing imperialist world war. In addition to demonising immigrants and LGBT people, NZ First frequently denounces Marxism and socialism, as well as protesters against the genocide in Gaza.

NZ First is serving the same essential function as far-right parties such as One Nation in Australia, Reform UK, the Alternative for Germany and Trump's Republicans. In the US, brutal and fascistic methods are being used to detain, deport and imprison migrants—the spearhead of a far-reaching assault on democratic rights.

Workers must reject anti-immigrant poison and all forms of nationalism, which is promoted by the ruling class to obscure the real source of the deepening social crisis: the capitalist system, which subordinates every aspect of life to profit and is plunging billions of people into poverty, war and fascist barbarism.

The working class is an international social force whose strength lies in its unity across national and ethnic divisions. The essential task is to break workers from all capitalist parties and to build a conscious, unified movement against austerity, racism and imperialist war, based on the fight for socialism.



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