

New Zealand: Mana Party leader calls for Chinese drug smugglers to be “executed”

By Tom Peters
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Hone Harawira, leader of the Maori nationalist Mana Party, declared in a TV3 interview on June 24 that “any Chinese that brings meth [methamphetamine, also known as P] or precursors into this country” should be jailed for life, deported, or “executed.” He said this would not apply to other ethnicities, only Chinese people.

This blatantly racist call to bring back the death penalty was Harawira’s first major announcement ahead of the New Zealand election in September. It is an early sign of the thoroughly reactionary basis on which the campaign will be fought by all the pro-capitalist parties. Capital punishment for murder was abolished in New Zealand in 1961 and for treason in 1989.

Harawira expressed his admiration for Singapore, where hundreds of people have been executed for drug-related offences in recent decades. Singapore is a deeply authoritarian and anti-working class city-state which presides over grotesque levels of social inequality.

Mana Party president Lisa McNab, apparently taken by surprise by Harawira’s outburst, issued a statement on June 28 saying the party executive “does not support capital punishment.” However, she did not oppose Harawira’s anti-Chinese racism but instead praised his “energy” and “commitment” and said “we understand the rationale” behind his call for executions of Chinese drug smugglers.

Harawira has not retracted his proposal, which has been condemned by the Human Rights Commission and the New Zealand Drug Foundation.

The government and a few Labour Party MPs have made token criticisms of the Mana leader. Minister Paula Bennett compared Harawira with Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, whose “war on drugs” has led to thousands of people being killed by police and vigilantes. Labour’s Chris Hipkins tweeted: “Even Donald Trump at the height of his anti-China narrative didn’t suggest an ethnically targeted death penalty.”

In fact, Harawira’s call for capital punishment is part of a long-running anti-Chinese campaign by New Zealand’s opposition parties. Over the past five years Labour, New Zealand First, the Greens and Mana have scapegoated Chinese immigrants and investors for the country’s housing crisis, pressure on social services and unemployment. Labour recently announced a policy to slash immigrant numbers by 30,000 a year, a reduction of almost half.

The opposition parties have sought to align New Zealand more openly with the US military encirclement and threats against China. Last year the Greens supported the National Party government’s decision to spend \$20 billion on the military to enhance its ability to operate alongside the US. Labour and NZ First called for even greater military spending (“New Zealand Defence White Paper prepares for war”).

In Australia, a similar campaign is being waged by the Labor Party, the media and the intelligence agencies, to demonise supposed Chinese “influence” in domestic politics. Australia would be a major base for US operations in the event of war with China.

Mana has now taken the anti-Chinese campaign a step further, demonstrating that it is a right-wing nationalist party that supports the US-led imperialist build-up against China.

Harawira intends to contest the northern Maori electorate of Te Tai Tokerau, which he held until 2014 when he lost it to Labour. New Zealand is divided into overlapping general electorates and Maori electorates and voters can choose which to enrol in. Te Tai Tokerau overlaps with NZ First leader Winston Peters’ electorate of Northland.

In a press statement, Harawira appealed for support from NZ First, a party founded in the 1990s on a platform opposed to Asian immigration, for his “law to execute Chinese” convicted of importing methamphetamine.

Harawira denied that his policy was racist, but rejected suggestions that it could be broadened to apply to New Zealanders convicted of drug dealing. He left the door open for such an extension, however, saying executing Chinese offenders would be “a start.” He added: “Maori are in the bottom of New Zealand society in terms of housing, employment, education, health and justice. Now that’s what I call racist.”

In fact, the social disaster is a class, not a racial issue. The Northland region is the poorest in the country with high unemployment and high rates of suicide and drug abuse. Far from offering any progressive solution, Mana and NZ First are seeking to channel social anger in the most reactionary direction.

Harawira does not represent working people or the poor, Maori or non-Maori. Before founding Mana, he was a member of the openly pro-business Maori Party, a coalition partner in the right-wing National-led government. Mana has agreed to work with the Maori Party in this year’s election.

Both Maori nationalist parties represent indigenous capitalists who have become rich through multi-million dollar payments from successive governments to Maori tribes, under the Treaty of Waitangi settlements process. Ostensibly redress for the crimes of British imperialism, these payments have done nothing for the majority of Maori, who are one of the poorest layers of the working class. The Maori elite, however, now controls around \$40 billion in business assets—up from \$16.5 billion a decade ago—and according to the government the Maori economy is growing faster than the economy as a whole. At the centre of Mana’s policy platform is a demand for increased Treaty settlements and other measures to support Maori business.

Mana’s racist law-and-order demagoguery underscores the politically criminal role played by New Zealand’s pseudo-left groups—the International Socialist Organisation (ISO), Fightback and Socialist Aotearoa. These middle class outfits joined Mana when it was founded in 2011, as did former Green Party MP Sue Bradford and leading officials from the Unite trade union.

None of these groups has commented on Harawira’s reactionary anti-Chinese statements. The trade union funded *Daily Blog*, which supports Labour, Mana and NZ First, has also remained silent. Its editor Martyn Bradbury has attacked Chinese immigrants, investors and tourists (see: “Anti-immigrant campaign intensifies in New Zealand”).

The pseudo-lefts campaigned for Mana in the 2011 and

2014 elections, hailing it as “anti-racist”, “pro-poor” and “anti-capitalist.” Harawira was a major speaker at the Unite union’s 2013 national conference and Fightback’s 2014 conference. An article by the ISO on August 29, 2013, glorified Harawira as “the only principled MP in parliament.”

These claims were always a fraud. Mana’s cheer-leaders never mentioned its blatant xenophobia: the party has repeatedly joined Labour’s anti-Chinese campaigns and declared in 2015 that “people of Asian descent are buying too many homes” (see: “Mana Party supports Labour’s anti-Chinese campaign”).

The ISO and Fightback left the Mana Party after it failed to win any seats in the 2014 election, which it contested in an alliance with the Internet Party. The ISO said it would still be “proud to work alongside” Mana. According to Socialist Aotearoa’s web site, the group is still part of Mana.

These organisations share Mana’s nationalist and pro-capitalist politics. They joined hoping to advance their own position within the political establishment. Like Mana, they are steeped in identity politics, which elevates race and gender above class divisions and is one of the main mechanisms used by sections of the middle class to advance their careers in politics, academia, the trade unions and business.

The pseudo-lefts bitterly oppose the fight waged by the Socialist Equality Group (NZ) to build an independent revolutionary party of the working class, based on socialism and internationalism and opposed to every form of racial and nationalist politics, including Maori nationalism.

The pseudo-lefts do not object to New Zealand’s integration into US war preparations. They speak for sections of the upper middle class whose wealth and status depends on the strength of New Zealand imperialism and its alliance with the US. In 2011, Socialist Aotearoa declared that China could invade New Zealand and called on the working class to join the US preparations for war.

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