

Legislative Assembly Hansard – 06 May 2021

**RACISM**

Ms JENNY LEONG (Newtown) (17:25): We need to #StopAsianHate and we need to stop the warmongering. There has been a rise in anti-Chinese and anti-Asian racism directly fuelled by politicians from across the political spectrum, media commentators and so-called experts whose hawkish positions are becoming increasingly hysterical and divisive. It has been over a year since the most recent anti-Chinese rhetoric started with COVID, but this was certainly not the beginning.

The year 1901 saw the White Australia Policy enacted—in part a response to the resentment held by white miners to the success of Chinese miners on the goldfields—further entrenching systemic racism on top of colonial invasion and genocide inflicted on First Nations people. Jump forward to the rise of One Nation and Pauline Hanson warning of fears of the "Asian invasion" and John Howard's "tough on borders" claims that "we decide who comes to this country". How proud they both must be today of Morrison and Dutton's skilful implementation of racist border policies under the guise of a global pandemic which initially saw those from China being sent to Christmas Island. Now our borders are shut to those wishing to return home from India.

We must focus locally and globally on rebuilding our commitment to international solidarity and restrengthening our efforts towards an activist-led peace movement. Many of us have continued to suffer through an increase in anti-Asian racism and distrust. There are real consequences of this. A member of the New South Wales Parliament had their house raided by ASIO. New South Wales councillors with Chinese heritage have received letters and death threats. There are reports documenting discrimination in the media, barriers for people working in the public service, increases in racist attacks, citizens having their loyalties questioned at Senate committees, universities being subjected to foreign interference laws, and the Australian Human Rights Commission being criticised for its "Racism. It Stops with me" campaign.

Then there is the endless tirade of racist crap and so-called jokes hurled at public figures. This is not okay. The message from many at the #StopAsianHate vigil that I joined recently outside Customs House in Sydney was clear: We will no longer be silent. We will not be your model migrants. You will not stereotype us as geeks. You will not objectify us as the subject of your exotic fantasies. And we will not shy away from speaking proudly about our cultural heritage for fear that you will brand us as apologists for the Chinese Communist Party.

On top of this racism, but absolutely connected to it, we are seeing the emergence of an alarmist, warmongering narrative, in some cases being driven by those who will directly profit from shifts to a war footing. The Greens are proudly a party that has at its core a respect for principles of peace and nonviolence. My first time volunteering for The Greens was at a State election back in 2003, about a month after the massive No War protests in Sydney. I wore my "No War" T-shirt. To this day a postcard of our Greens senators calling for an end to the war in Iraq when the United States President addressed the Australian Parliament sits in my office as a reminder of our principles and our commitment to both peace and nonviolence.

We abhor the militaristic pronouncements by the likes of the Home Affairs Secretary with his appalling "drums of war" rhetoric, or the not-so-confidential briefing to Australia's special forces soldiers last year. This cold war rhetoric and anti-China posturing is dangerous. It serves political aims and fans racism at the expense of well-considered diplomacy in this country and around the globe. We on the left have an important role to play in cutting through the propaganda and the anti-Chinese sentiment. We need to be pushing for an independent foreign policy that enables us to advocate for a realistic approach to China-Australia relations. We must remind people that while Australia has long hitched a ride on the US's coat-tails, when it comes to foreign policy it means we have shamefully followed the US into every war for decades.

At our core, we must be anti-racist in our approach to all that we do. That includes how we talk and what we do when it comes to international relations and to China. It is not easy and there are many complexities to negotiate. But if we vacate this space and leave it open to be filled by hawks and those posing as doves who claim to care about human rights but when you scratch below the surface you find a disturbing mix of white saviour complexes and entrenched fear of yellow peril, then we will have lost. Let us be inspired by the peace activists and the anti-racism campaigners here and around the globe, past and present. Let us remember the actions of those who have inspired us and continue to take a strong commitment to international solidarity, peace and nonviolence in our local communities and around the globe.