

Winnie plays Pooh Sticks

July 1996

Last week, in classic Winston Peters style, the leader of the NZ First Party tells a Howick audience that "If selling our birthright was the way to prosperity, the Asians would be doing it." The speech entitled "Whose Country is it Anyway?" was closely followed by announcements of another public meeting, this time organised by the Government Accountability League. "NZers only" read the public notice and it was these two words that finally got the meeting cancelled under pressure.

Steven Young responds to Peter's anti-Asian electioneering:

Asian immigrants in general and Chinese immigrants in particular should be grateful to the leader of the Winston First Party for pointing out publicly that New Zealand's immigration policy is not as widely accepted as they would like to imagine. These new wogs have got to understand that it not sufficient that you are young, healthy, university qualified, talk English (or bring \$0.75 million dollars and pay \$25,000 if you can't speak English as she is spoke on the BBC). No! No! No! Accordingly to Winnie (Dominion 16 February), you've also got to have the magic C words "commitment" and "contribution".

Now commitment and contribution to this country are rather difficult to prove either way if you've just got off the plane. How do you demonstrate it? Join the PTA? play rugby? drink more beer? Maybe you should invest in a house (but not a big house!) buy a car (but not a flash car!) do a little business (but don't travel overseas!) send the kids to school (but not Epsom Normal or Auckland Medical School!) go fishing (but not for paua!) If Winnie's criteria, whatever they are, for commitment and contribution were applied to all New Zealanders, whether they emigrated here 15 months ago, 150 years ago or 1500 years ago, how many would be pass the test?

A consummate politician like Winnie does not go out of his way to appeal to the red-necks, (and the disadvantaged and the old), unless he is pretty sure he can milk them for their votes in an election year. We immigrants, new and old, should be grateful to him for reminding us that xenophobia is not far below the surface and comes out to party in places where "New Zealanders only" are welcome.

We should also know that the mainstream parties have condemned this stirring of racist hysteria, and their spokespeople such as Phillip Burdon, Chris Carter and Mike Robson have publicly rubbished Winnie for his politics of envy. Immigrants new and old in an election year should know who their friends are.

Born just after WWII, a young man named Winston would have been brought up with high hopes and Churchillian aspirations. It's a pity he's more inclined to don a white sheet and a pointy hat and burn crosses in Howick.