

Australian mining magnate's outburst against "Chinese mongrels"

Peter Symonds
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An anti-China outburst by Australian mining magnate and parliamentarian Clive Palmer on national television on Monday night brought a barrage of rebukes from across the political, corporate and media establishment. Palmer's "offence," however, was simply that he declared too openly and crassly what is already being discussed behind closed doors in political and military circles as part of the preparations for war against China.

Palmer, a right-wing populist who formed his own Palmer United Party (PUP) last year, was taking part in the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) panel program "Q&A." Needled by the show's compere, Tony Jones, over allegations by his Chinese corporate partner that he misused its money for electoral purposes, Palmer lashed out at the "Chinese mongrels" and "bastards."

Drawing on the reactionary traditions of anti-Asian xenophobia, Palmer ranted: "I'm saying that because they're Communist, they shoot their own people, they haven't got a justice system and they want to take over this country. And we're not going to let them." He continued: "The Chinese government wants to bring workers here to destroy our wage system... They want to take over our ports and get our resources for free."

Government and opposition leaders immediately condemned Palmer's remarks, pointing to the potential economic fallout. Treasurer Joe Hockey described the comments as "hugely damaging" as "they're our biggest trading partner, they buy a lot of our produce." Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said she planned to tell the Chinese embassy that the Australian parliament did not share Palmer's "abusive" outlook.

Labor Party opposition leader Bill Shorten joined in, describing the comments as "irresponsible and certainly not in Australia's best interests." He added: "China is one of our most important relationships and

unwarranted sprays like this are not helpful at all."

Palmer's remarks were clearly not planned. The PUP holds the balance of power in the Senate and is blocking key budget austerity measures, provoking intense resentment and hostility in the business elite. Murdoch's *Australian*, in particular, has pushed the issue of Palmer's alleged misuse of corporate funds for electoral purposes to discredit him and potentially lay the basis for charges against him. Pressed on "Q&A," Palmer hit out.

Palmer has not, however, retracted his remarks. He told the *Australian Financial Review* that his comments were not aimed at the Chinese people, but neither were they directed just at his Chinese business partners, Citic Pacific, with whom he is enmeshed in bitter and potentially financially disastrous legal disputes. Palmer said he made "no distinction" between Citic Pacific and the Chinese government.

In coming to her leader's defence, PUP Senator Jacqui Lambie, an ex-soldier, went even further, warning of the "threat of a Chinese communist invasion" of Australia. She accused both Labor and Coalition governments of failing to "build an Australian military able to defend us and stop our grandchildren from becoming slaves to an aggressive, anti-democratic, totalitarian foreign power." She called for a doubling of Australian military spending.

The chorus of official condemnation of Palmer is entirely hypocritical. What Palmer and Lambie have stated in crude, xenophobic terms are the pretexts being used to justify US preparations for war against China in the Indo-Pacific region. The Abbott Coalition government, like the previous Greens-backed Labor government, has fully committed to the US "pivot to Asia" and opened military bases in northern Australia to US Marines as well as warships and military aircraft.

There is a steady drum beat of criticism by the US and its allies against China's "expansionism" and "aggression" in territorial disputes with its neighbours. After China declared an air defence identification zone last November, Australian Foreign Minister Bishop was one of the most strident in berating China's "provocative behaviour" and hauled in the Chinese ambassador for a dressing down.

Far from China being "expansionist," let alone threatening to invade Australia, the US is engaged in a comprehensive strategy aimed at weakening China diplomatically and economically, and encircling it militarily. By 2020, the Pentagon plans to station 60 percent of its naval and air force assets in the region. The US has been strengthening alliances and establishing new basing arrangements, not only with Australia, but throughout the region, aimed at securing its hegemony, including over China.

The Abbott government has increased military spending—in line with demands from Washington—and last week signed a 25-year Force Posture Agreement with the US, establishing the legal and financial framework for the US military presence in Australia. In comments on radio, Lambie declared that Australia must build missile systems and missile defence shields. However, last week's AUSMIN talks in Sydney already gave the green light for US and Australian collaboration in anti-missile systems aimed against China.

The only objection in Australian ruling circles to the comments of Palmer and Lambie is that they have blurted out too openly and undiplomatically what the political establishment would prefer to keep under wraps, at least for the time being.

One concern is the potential for economic retaliation by China, especially as the mining boom is waning and there is growing uncertainty about the Chinese economy. An editorial in today's *Australian Financial Review* was entitled "Palmer's damage goes far and wide" and chastised him for a "combination of hubris and buffoonery."

If Palmer's remarks were simply buffoonery, why has the entire political and media establishment bothered to condemn them? The truth is that his comments have touched on a raw nerve and could lead to questions and criticism of American and Australian war plans that until now have been discussed in the

narrow circles of think tanks, strategic analysts and foreign policy journals.



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