

South Korea deports Korean-American woman accused of supporting the North

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South Korea deported Korean-American Shin Eun-mi on Saturday for supposedly making pro-North Korean comments. She arrived back in Los Angeles the same day, US time, and will be barred from returning to Korea for five years. Shin's case is just the latest in Seoul's attacks on democratic rights.

President Park Geun-hye's government accused Shin of violating South Korea's draconian National Security Act. Shin gave public talks around the country with Hwang Seon, the former deputy spokeswoman of the Democratic Labor Party (DLP), the forerunner of the Unified Progressive Party (UPP), which the government, via the Constitutional Court, forcibly disbanded in December. The government is considering issuing an arrest warrant for Hwang.

Shin said last Wednesday, as she appeared for questioning by prosecutors: "I can guarantee that I have done nothing that violates the National Security Act. I have made no pro-North Korea remarks in public. There are no such remarks in my book, either." Shin was referring to her book, *A Korean-American Ajumma Goes to North Korea*, which detailed her trips to North Korea. "Ajumma" is a Korean word referring to a middle-aged or married woman. Shin visited the North six times from October 2011 and published the book in 2012.

Right-wing organizations filed a complaint against Shin and Hwang after a November 19 talk at Seoul's Jogyesa Temple, claiming that the two women painted North Korea in a positive light. During the discussion, Shin said that in North Korea, "people seemed to be filled with expectation and hope about the young leader (Kim Jong-un)."

The complaints against the two women received more attention when a 17-year-old boy attacked Shin and Hwang with a homemade bomb at a lecture the women

held in Iksan, North Jeolla Province, in December. No one was seriously injured but two people received minor burns. The teenager, hailed as a hero by extreme-right groups, is currently awaiting trial.

The government's claims that Shin undermined "national security" are farcical. Her book on North Korea was even selected as suggested reading by South Korea's Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. Shin said: "If I did (violate the National Security Act), why did the government select my book as a recommended one in the first place? I just gave lectures and filmed a documentary based on the book."

Another comment by Shin points far more as to why she was targeted by the government. "Even though it is the 21st century, are we not seeing these pro-communist frame-ups, spy frame-ups?" she asked. "It is a ballad that I heard from when I attended kindergarten in the 60s." Several UPP members were arrested last year and accused, on the basis of fabricated evidence, of plotting a rebellion in support of North Korea.

Seoul has whipped up these red scares not simply as a turn away from democracy. It is bound up with South Korea's alignment with the United States and its "pivot to Asia," which is aimed at economically undermining and militarily surrounding China. This includes ramping up tensions on the Korean Peninsula against China's ally North Korea—and risking war with Pyongyang. The government fears that any anti-war sentiment could be used to oppose these growing war plans. Shin's greatest crime, as far as the government is concerned, is that she presented North Koreans as human beings who have the same hopes and desires as average South Koreans.

A similar motivation was behind the dissolution of the UPP last month. The investigation into Shin and

Hwang may have been initiated in a dishonest attempt to convince the public of a North Korean conspiracy in the South before the party's disbandment on December 19. The fact that Hwang was a top official in the party before it became the UPP undoubtedly helped the government make its case.

The UPP was firmly devoted to capitalism while serving as a "left" appendage of the opposition New Politics Alliance for Democracy. Park's government, however, was clearly worried that the UPP's criticisms of her government would find an audience among Korean workers and youth opposed to war. The UPP often called for talks between Seoul and Pyongyang, but would have undoubtedly supported the South in the event of actual war, as it endorsed the US-South Korea military alliance.

Seoul deepened its military cooperation with the US over the past year. This included signing a trilateral intelligence sharing agreement with the US and Japan, expressing support for a Thermal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) anti-ballistic missile system in South Korea and postponing the handover to Seoul of US operational control over the South Korean military. In the event of war, the United States will take command of the South's military.

Seoul also backed the Obama administration's claims that North Korea was responsible for hacking at Sony Pictures Entertainment and supported new US sanctions, calling them "appropriate." The South Korean media presented Washington's accusations as fact despite a lack of evidence.

US State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki raised mild criticisms of South Korea over Shin's deportation. While claiming at a daily press briefing on Friday that South Korea "has shown a consistent and longstanding commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights," Psaki said the US is "concerned that the national security law, as interpreted and applied in some cases, limits freedom of expression and restricts access to the Internet."

This "criticism" has nothing to do with a genuine concern for free speech. It is particularly hypocritical coming from a government that has been exposed as spying on and violating the democratic rights of its population and millions of others internationally on a daily basis. Instead, the US is using this issue to continue to pressure Seoul to work more closely with

Japan in the US-directed war preparations against China.



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