

Australian media widens campaign against Chinese “influence”

James Cogan
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“Are you now, or have you ever been, an agent of influence for the Chinese Communist Party?”

It has not reached the point where people are being hauled before a Royal Commission in Australia and asked such a McCarthyite question, but processes are developing in that direction. A media campaign against alleged Chinese “power and influence” in the country is assuming ever-more anti-democratic and sinister dimensions.

The campaign is based on the purported “concerns” of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), which, along with other intelligence and military agencies, works in constant collaboration with its American counterparts. ASIO’s conduit is an “investigation” being carried out by the state-owned Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), along with the newspapers published by Fairfax Media—the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Melbourne Age* and *Australian Financial Review*. It was well and truly joined over the weekend by the *Australian*, one of the flagship publications of Rupert Murdoch’s global media empire.

A pall of suspicion has been cast over current and retired politicians, business figures, universities and academics, journalists, Australian citizens of Chinese descent, and more than 170,000 Chinese students who are studying at Australian universities and vocational colleges. The implication of the media coverage is that, in one way or another, whether consciously or not, they are being used to assert the interests of the Chinese regime in Australian politics and society.

The preoccupation with Chinese “agents of influence” can be understood only by assessing it within the context of Australia’s role in the rising geo-political tensions in the Asia-Pacific region. Australia is one of the key allies of the United States in its escalating efforts to confront China and shatter Beijing’s ability to challenge the global dominance of American imperialism.

While China is Australia’s largest export market, the dominant factions of the ruling class have chosen to maintain their alignment with the US ruling elite, its

strategic ally for over 70 years and largest investment partner.

The foreign policy of Australian imperialism is in line with Washington on a range of issues that could lead to open conflict with Beijing. These include threatening military action to compel North Korea to give up its missile and nuclear weapons programs; opposing Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea; and seeking to compel China to open protected areas of its economy to foreign ownership and competition. Australia hosts crucial American military bases and assets, and its military and intelligence agencies are integrated and “inter-operable” with their US counterparts.

The obvious aim of the anti-China campaign is to intimidate, silence or purge from the political, academic and media establishment those who question the alignment with the US.

The ABC is conducting the campaign through the current affairs’ “Four Corners” program and on its website. The Fairfax press is waging it via an ongoing series in its publications, under the banner “China’s Operation Australia.”

At the centre of the “investigation” is an attack on the governing Liberal Party and the opposition Labor Party for accepting donations from “Chinese-linked corporations and individuals.”

The ABC website named the “Chinese-linked” donors on June 8 and asserted that unspecified analysts—presumably ASIO—“say Chinese political donations are one way that Beijing seeks to gain influence over Australia.”

Included in the ABC’s scurrilous list, however, is billionaire Chau Chak Wing, an Australian citizen for 20 years. This week he made a public statement denying any relationship with the Chinese government or membership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Others on the list are Taiwanese, including at least one who has close links to the pro-independence movement. Another is a Hong Kong-born Catholic businessman.

No comparable list has been published showing the vast

sums of cash that flow to the main capitalist parties from American and other foreign corporations, or from Australian-based banks and companies.

Most Liberal and Labor leaders have been involved, in one way or another, in soliciting donations from “Chinese-linked” corporate sources over the past decade or more. Desperate to prove their allegiance to the US-Australia alliance, both parties have responded by scrambling to condemn China for “interference” in Australian politics. Inquiries are being initiated to draw up legislative changes to ban donations from overseas corporations.

On June 10, the *Australian* extended the witch-hunt to the country’s universities. It published sensationalist claims that research projects being conducted in partnership with Chinese universities and institutes are “contributing to enhancing the sophistication of China’s military and intelligence technology.”

The University of Adelaide was indicted for collaborating in research to develop “superior rubber-based materials.” Such rubber, readers were told, could be used in the production of Chinese jet fighters.

The University of NSW was working with Chinese companies on a “new type of world-class wireless infrastructure.” The article declared such technology would have “obvious military and espionage uses.”

The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) was indicted for joint projects with Chinese collaborators in fields such as “big data technologies, metamaterials, advanced electronics and quantum computing and communications.” All these areas, the article insisted, “have military or security applications.”

One could have added that virtually any aspect of technology has similar potential.

The author of the inane article, academic and former Green candidate Clive Hamilton, asserted: “UTS appears to have become an unofficial outpost of China’s scientific research, some with direct application to advancing the PLA’s (Peoples Liberation Army) fighting capacity.”

This follows a comment published on June 4 by the *Conversation* website, written by academic James Leibold, demanding the eviction of the Australia China Relations Institute from UTS. Leibold accused the institute of “courting” Australian journalists on Beijing’s behalf, by financing them to undertake “study tours” of China.

Among the journalists he named—and over whom he, at the least, cast suspicion—were Paul Kelly, editor-at-large of the *Australian*; Ross Gittins, economics editor for the *Sydney Morning Herald*; Malcolm Farr, national political editor of News Limited’s online news.com.au; and Jim Middleton, a commentator on Sky News.

On June 11, the ABC accused the Chinese government of

attempting to establish influence over the Australian media—including the ABC itself. Among the cases it ludicrously cited was a program co-produced by Murdoch media’s Sky News cable channel and China Central Television. It consisted of a panel of “experts” debating foreign policy controversies such as Beijing’s territorial claims in the South China Sea.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted last September, the anti-China campaign is being waged in the “language of political purges, police raids, mass arrests and internment camps for ‘traitors’ and ‘enemy aliens’ in the event of a war with China” (see: “Opponents of war with China labelled ‘rats, flies, mosquitoes and sparrows’”).

The over-riding aim of the campaign is to combat the widespread anti-war sentiment in the working class. Years of wars and intrigues, waged on the fraudulent pretext of combatting terrorism, have given rise to growing opposition to the US-Australia military alliance. American imperialism, not China, is viewed as the greatest threat to peace and progress by most Australian workers and youth.

The greatest fear of the ruling class is that anti-war sentiment will intersect with the mounting anger toward the existing economic and political order that has emerged around the world. No less than in the US and Europe, millions of workers in Australia are increasingly hostile to the capitalist profit system, and the political parties that defend it, due to the endless assault being waged against their living standards.

Under such conditions, the stoking of anti-Chinese paranoia is being used to try to disorientate and divert sections of the population into patriotism and chauvinism. It will be used to justify squandering resources on the military on the grounds the country is “under threat” from the Chinese regime. Opponents of militarism and war—especially the socialist movement—will be denounced as “traitors” and apologists for the Chinese Communist Party.

The fact that the CCP is the political representative and guardian of the Chinese capitalist class, and is totally hostile to socialism and the working class, will not stand in the way of this Australian nationalist propaganda.



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