

Anti-Chinese witch-hunt against New Zealand MP

Tom Peters
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On Wednesday, just 10 days before New Zealand's general election, the UK-based *Financial Times* and NZ media outlet *Newsroom* published extraordinary allegations that National Party government MP Jian Yang had been investigated on suspicion of being a Chinese "agent."

Anonymous sources said Yang, a New Zealand citizen who moved to the country in 1999 and has spent six years in parliament, was investigated by the Security Intelligence Service (SIS). The publications further alleged that "security questions" were raised when Yang studied at the Australian National University in the mid-1990s. No actual evidence was presented that Yang is a spy.

Yang denounced the articles as a "smear campaign" aimed at damaging the ruling National Party in the election. China's foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said the allegations were "fake news" fabricated "out of thin air."

New Zealand Prime Minister Bill English told the media on Wednesday he had been aware of Yang's military background, which was not a secret. Before leaving China, Yang studied and lectured at the People's Liberation Army Air Force Engineering College and the University of Foreign Languages in Luoyang, part of the Third Department of the PLA, one of China's military intelligence agencies. Yang said he taught English to cadets in Luoyang and was a civilian officer in the PLA.

Yang is the latest target in a witch-hunt, in countries allied with the United States, against people accused of being Chinese "agents." The *Times* noted that Canada's intelligence agency had warned in 2010 about Chinese "agents of influence" in provincial governments. Similar allegations were revived and widened this year by the Australian media and intelligence agencies

against politicians, business figures and students. New Zealand, Canada and Australia are members of the US-led Five Eyes intelligence network.

This international McCarthyite campaign is bound up with US preparations for war against China, begun during President Barack Obama's administration and accelerated by Donald Trump. Washington sees China as the major obstacle to US domination over the Asia-Pacific region and is seeking to roll back Beijing's diplomatic and economic influence. The US military has vastly increased its presence in Asia and staged numerous provocative exercises near Chinese-claimed waters in the South China Sea, while hypocritically denouncing Chinese "expansionism" in the region. Trump has called for trade war measures against China and threatened a nuclear war against its ally North Korea.

The *Financial Times* wrote that Yang's position in New Zealand's parliament "raises questions about western preparedness to deal with China's increasingly aggressive efforts to influence foreign governments and spy on them." The implication that Yang is a spy was backed up by sources close to the US government.

Christopher Johnson, a former CIA analyst now with the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, a prominent US think tank, told the paper that Beijing sees New Zealand as a "softer target" for infiltration than the US or Britain and could be using it "as a testing ground for future operations in other countries."

Peter Mattis from the Jamestown Foundation, a Washington-based think tank whose directors include retired US generals and national security advisors, told the *Financial Times* Yang was likely to have "been in Chinese military intelligence or at least linked to that system."

The attack on Yang in the lead-up to the election is

clearly intended to shift the politics of New Zealand and other countries into closer alignment with the US drive to war.

Successive Labour and National Party governments in New Zealand have strengthened military ties with the US, joined the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and collaborated with operations against China. According to leaks by Edward Snowden, New Zealand's Government Communications Security Bureau shares vast amounts of intelligence with the US National Security Agency and has spied directly on China on behalf of the US.

Prime Minister English has said he would consider joining a war against North Korea, something Labour also has not ruled out.

However, the National government so far has been reluctant to denounce China as an "aggressive" or "expansionist" power, as the Australian government and other US allies have done. On September 8, Foreign Minister Gerry Brownlee told the *New Zealand Herald* the US was "a very, very good friend of New Zealand but equally China is a very, very good friend of New Zealand."

China is New Zealand's second-largest trading partner. Yang, who sits on the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee, has played a significant role in promoting closer relations between the two countries.

Among the broader population there is widespread opposition to Trump's war-mongering and the military-intelligence alliance with the US. A survey published in June of 34,000 people by Fairfax Media and Massey University found that "when asked to choose between building closer bilateral relations with the US, the UK and China, only 15.6 percent chose the US." By contrast, "China came out tops, with 42.5."

The opposition parties, led by the Labour Party, supported by much of the media, are pushing for a more overt anti-China stance and are seeking to shift public opinion by whipping up nationalism and xenophobia.

Labour, the Greens, the right-wing populist NZ First Party and the Maori nationalist Mana Party have denounced the government's close business links with China. They have scapegoated immigrants, especially Chinese people, for the lack of affordable housing, low wages, the drugs epidemic and other aspects of the social crisis that is the product of decades of cutbacks

and austerity measures. Labour is calling for immigrant numbers to be cut by 30,000, more than 40 percent.

Labour and NZ First also have called for greater spending to upgrade the military to ensure "interoperability" with US forces.

Labour Party leader Jacinda Ardern refused to comment on the allegations against Yang. NZ First leader Winston Peters, however, said he was told by a Labour Party source that Yang was "a spy." Peters said he believed Labour leaked to the media information about the SIS investigation into Yang. Peters, whose party was founded on a platform of opposing Asian immigration, later tweeted: "National has been caught out. And New Zealand has been left exposed to being a pawn of the Communists in China."

Reflecting the reactionary nationalism of the trade unions, the union-funded *Daily Blog* joined the chauvinist campaign. Its editor Martyn Bradbury declared that National was "wedded and compromised personally to wealthy Chinese interests" and voters "have to ask some hard questions about where National's loyalties actually lie."

Unions such as Unite, the Tertiary Education Union, E Tu and the First Union have all joined NZ First over the past year in accusing migrant workers and students of putting pressure on jobs, housing, infrastructure and educational institutions. The Council of Trade Unions has endorsed calls to restrict immigration.

As the witch-hunt against Yang underscores, if Labour and its allies are elected they will escalate the attacks on Chinese immigrants and preparations to join a US war against China.



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