

Anti-Chinese witch-hunt launched days before New Zealand election

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On Wednesday, three days before Saturday's national election, the *New Zealand Herald* published a lengthy article on allegations contained in a "research paper" prepared by a US-based academic, entitled "China's network of influence in New Zealand." The paper—which appears to have been prepared with input from American, Australian and New Zealand intelligence agencies—makes sweeping insinuations that a number of leading politicians are political servants of Beijing.

The sinister purpose of the anti-China witch-hunt is to shift New Zealand into even closer alignment with the United States. It is unfolding under conditions in which Washington is preparing to attack North Korea and provoking a potential war with China. Powerful factions of the American, Australian and New Zealand establishment clearly do not believe the current National Party government in Wellington has provided adequate military and diplomatic support.

The *Herald* article appeared the same day as the world media was reporting on President Donald Trump's fascistic diatribe at the United Nations, including his genocidal assertion that the US will "totally destroy North Korea" and accusations that China is violating "sovereignty" in the South China Sea. Under the Obama administration and now under Trump, the US military has been boosting its Asia-Pacific presence and strengthening its ties with Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and other countries. The aim of the US build-up is to militarily encircle and threaten China, which is viewed as the major obstacle to US dominance in the Asia-Pacific and globally.

New Zealand is a member of the US-led Five Eyes intelligence alliance and spies on China on behalf of the US. As well as sending troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, Prime Minister Bill English said he would "consider" joining a US war against North Korea. However, the government has sought to avoid saying anything that might disrupt business relations with China, New Zealand's second-largest trading partner.

The "research paper" on "Chinese influence" was authored by Anne-Marie Brady, a New Zealand academic

based at the Wilson Center in Washington DC, a think tank largely funded by the US government. Its board of trustees includes state officials and US presidential appointees.

Brady's 57-page document is a McCarthyite screed, declaring that agents of the "Chinese Communist Party" are attempting "to guide, buy or coerce political influence." It accuses the National Party government of being "soft on China" and implies that many of its leading figures have been bought off. Brady alleges that the government made only "muted" criticisms of China's military base-building activities in the South China Sea in 2015 and 2016, and only after "massive pressure from Australia and the US."

Brady claims that China's actions are a threat to "our sovereignty"—which she clearly identifies with full-throated support for US imperialism. She asserts that Beijing wants to wrest New Zealand away from its US alignment and establish its own military ties with the country. She even states, without any evidence, that near-space balloon launches carried out on NZ farmland by Chinese scientists may have been related to the development of long-range missiles!

The academic's document resembles the nationalist rants by the anti-immigrant New Zealand First Party and the trade union-funded *Daily Blog*, which regularly accuses the government of being "wedded and compromised personally to wealthy Chinese interests."

Brady makes far-reaching insinuations against former Prime Minister John Key, a millionaire businessman who headed the government from 2008 until December 2016. She draws attention to his recent sale of an Auckland mansion for \$20 million to an undisclosed Chinese buyer, and claims the amount paid was far above its market value. Key resigned suddenly following the shock election of Trump, who had vowed that his administration would wage trade war measures against China and escalate military tensions with Beijing. Since leaving parliament, Key has worked for media company Comcast to help expand its business into China.

The "research paper" draws attention to the fact that

Conor English, the current prime minister's brother, is a director of GMP Pharmaceuticals, part-owned by a Chinese company. His wife Johanna Coughlan and Labour Party MP Raymond Huo are listed by Brady as co-heads of the One Belt One Road Foundation, launched in March during a visit by Chinese Premier Li Keqiang to promote trade and investment ties.

Brady notes that former National Party leader Don Brash chairs the Industrial Bank of China in New Zealand, while former Prime Minister Dame Jenny Shipley chairs the China Construction Bank (New Zealand).

Without any evidence, Brady declares that Labour's Huo, National MP Jian Yang and Labour candidate Naisi Chen are agents of the Chinese Communist Party. She writes that if Chen were elected, "between them they will be enough members to form a New Zealand parliamentary CCP party cell."

Chen is deemed to be a CCP agent because she is an organiser of the Chinese Students and Scholars Association, which Brady claims is a Beijing-controlled "united front" organisation. This has ominous implications for other Chinese students in the association, who now could become targets of witch-hunts.

Brady supports the attacks on Yang, which erupted last week on the basis that he taught at military training institutions in China more than 20 years ago. Anonymous sources told the media Yang was recently investigated by New Zealand's Security Intelligence Service (NZSIS). The *Financial Times* quoted an ex-CIA agent and a member of the Jamestown Foundation, a think tank close to the US government, who insinuated that Yang is a spy.

Summing up the conclusions that Brady intended should be drawn from her report, Paul Buchanan, a former US intelligence analyst, told the *New Zealand Herald*: "To have so many prominent individuals in the pockets of an authoritarian regime [China] is concerning."

Brady has stated she was inspired to write the paper by the actions of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), which worked with media outlets earlier this year to launch a campaign against alleged Chinese "agents of influence." The Australian government has initiated a parliamentary inquiry, while ASIO has demanded sweeping anti-democratic powers to investigate and purge Chinese "interference."

Prime Minister English has so far dismissed Brady's allegations. He told the *Herald*: "I don't see any obvious sign of things that are inappropriate." Opposition Labour Party leader Jacinda Ardern, however, indicated support for investigations. She declared: "I am interested in that work that was done in Australia. I would like to take a closer look when there is a little bit more time available."

Labour has repeatedly scapegoated Chinese investors and immigrants for the housing crisis and unemployment, in an attempt to stoke anti-Chinese sentiment and justify New Zealand's alignment with the US. Now, Ardern is indicating that a Labour-led government would empower the intelligence agencies to conduct a purge of purported Chinese "agents of influence" in politics, business and more broadly.

A spokesperson for the NZSIS, which works in close collaboration with its American and Australian counterparts, told the *Herald*: "We undertake a wide range of investigative activity. The NZSIS has a role to detect, defend and counter foreign threats."

Such anti-Chinese hysteria must be taken as a stark warning by the working class not only in New Zealand, but internationally. In the corridors of power around the world, the ruling elite is concluding that a military clash and all-out war between US imperialism and China is not only possible, but inevitable.

Every party of the New Zealand capitalist class, including Labour, the Greens and the pseudo-left groups, has maintained a conspiracy of silence on the danger of world war. They are well aware that a public discussion will galvanise the immense anti-war sentiment that exists among workers and youth. In the final televised debate on Wednesday between Ardern and English, they were not even asked about their attitude to Trump's implicit threat, a few hours before, to use nuclear weapons to annihilate North Korea.

Whichever party or combination of parties take office after the weekend election will come under immense pressure to take a far more aggressive pro-US stance. The whipping up of nationalism and anti-Chinese xenophobia is aimed at justifying such a position and creating an atmosphere in which opposition will be branded as a fifth column of Beijing and subjected to state repression. The urgent task is the development of a socialist and internationalist anti-war movement, against the capitalist system and all its political defenders.



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