Australian media targets universities in new anti-China campaign

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This week, sections of the corporate press have published McCarthyite claims that Australian universities are at risk of growing "Chinese influence." The hysterical allegations are directed at joint partnerships between Chinese companies and Australian universities, and have included xenophobic denunciations of Chinese students.

The latest campaign follows a series of witch-hunts over the past year, alleging that the seemingly benign activities of Chinese corporations, businesspeople and students, are part of an ill-defined plot led by the Chinese Communist Party.

Accusations along these lines have previously been spearheaded by the publicly-owned Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and Fairfax Media, working in close collaboration with the most pro-US sections of the Australian political establishment, including the intelligence agencies.

Their aim has been to legitimise Australia's central role in US-led military preparations in the Asia-Pacific, including the Trump administration's threats of a preemptive strike against North Korea, and its plans for war with China.

The latest furore has been led by the *Guardian*, which bills itself as "liberal" and "progressive." It published a feature length article on Tuesday headlined: "'Faustian bargain:' defence fears over Australian university's $100m partnership."

The article uncritically provides a platform for figures with close ties to the Australian military and intelligence agencies to denounce a $100 million "innovation precinct" at the University of New South Wales (UNSW).

The centre was unveiled last year by Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull. It is under the umbrella of the Torch program, a Chinese government initiative promoting collaboration between Chinese technology companies and research institutes. The precinct, however, is funded by private Chinese companies, not government sources.

The 29 Chinese companies that have invested in the program focus on research into areas such as marine technologies, solar and wind power generation and the development of nanotechnologies. The *Guardian* nevertheless states that seven of the companies work in areas with "dual use military potential." These, they claim, include GPS navigation, aerospace work and underwater cameras.

To bolster this threadbare argument, the article resorts to declarations that developments in these technological fields are moving so rapidly that it is impossible to know what may, at some point in the future, have vaguely-defined "military potential."

The only Chinese company investing in the project named in the article is Huawei Technologies, a telecommunications firm whose business operations in Australia have previously been stymied by the domestic spy agency, ASIO.

While it has been subjected to numerous unsubstantiated accusations of espionage, no evidence has ever been presented against the company. It was revealed in 2014, however, that the US National Security Agency, which collaborates closely with Australian intelligence agencies as part of the "Five Eyes" program, had spied on Huawei.

Despite UNSW's statements that it had conducted "due diligence," the article featured rabid allegations by prominent supporters of Australia's role in the US war drive against China.

Clive Hamilton, a professor at Charles Sturt University declared: "I think the Torch program will make UNSW in effect a client university of the People's Republic of China."

Rory Metcalf, head of the Australian National University's National Security College, stated: "The fundamental question to ask is if there is [a] prospect of technology discoveries being shared that could potentially give China a military advantage in the region over, for example, US and its allies, and therefore potentially Australia."

Their comments, which were not supported by any evidence, obliquely pointed to Australia's alignment with the US plans for conflict with Beijing. In 2011, the Greens-backed Labor government signed on to the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia"—a vast military build-up in preparation for war against China. Since the agreement, US basing arrangements have been expanded, and the Australian military has been ever more integrated into the US war machine.

This is why the *Guardian* article, while presenting strident denunciations of the involvement of Chinese companies, did not raise any concerns about the investment of Adani Solar, an Indian company, in the UNSW precinct. India, like Australia, is heavily involved in the US-led anti-China campaign.

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Australian universities are also centrally involved in Washington and Canberra's military and ideological preparations for war.

Last year, Lockheed Martin, the biggest US arms contractor, with close ties to the US government, established a new research centre at the University of Melbourne that will develop advanced military technologies. The centre is being funded by the Australian government to the tune of $13 million, as part of a $1.3 billion spend encompassing industry, academia, and defence, "to deliver innovative solutions for Defence capability."

In 2007, the United States Studies Centre was established at the University of Sydney with US and Australian government funding. Its explicit purpose is to overcome widespread opposition to Australian involvement in US-led wars and military preparations. Virtually every other major university hosts "think tanks" and "dialogues" which work closely with representatives of Australian and US military and intelligence forces.

The *Guardian* piece was part of a broader campaign coordinated with sections of the political establishment and the intelligence agencies. This was made clear by an "exclusive" in the *Sydney Morning Herald* yesterday headlined, "George Brandis considers new laws cracking down on Chinese spying in Australia."

The article reported that the attorney-general flew to Washington for talks with "US national security officials" in the aftermath of a series of unsubstantiated reports in Fairfax and the ABC carrying hysterical allegations of "Chinese spying" in May.

The government is planning to introduce new legislation that will target "sub-espionage" levels of foreign interference, according to Fairfax. In other words, the new laws are not targeting actual "spying," but will be aimed at creating the conditions for the authorities to brand any opposition to anti-Chinese aggression as the work of "agents of foreign influence."

This coincides with a dramatic ratcheting-up of tensions in Asia, including President Trump's fascistic speech at the UN this week, in which he again warned the US could wage total war against North Korea. This threat, supported by the entire Australian political establishment, is above all directed against China, North Korea's sole ally in the region.

In an ominous signal of how the planned legislation may be used, the Fairfax exclusive was preceded by strident denunciations of Chinese international students in the press. This follows the promotion of similar nationalist filth in previous anti-China campaigns, implying that the students were a "fifth column" of the Chinese government.

An article in the *Australian* on Wednesday featured a report by the organisation China Matters. It called on Education Minister Simon Birmingham to "give a high-profile talk outlining the advantages and risks of having such a large cohort of international students from China in Australia."

The board of directors of China Matters includes Jan Adams, the Australian government's current ambassador to China, and Allan Gyngell, who was director general of the Office of National Assessments between 2009 and 2013, a key intelligence agency that reports directly to the prime minister's office.

China Matters seized upon a series of hazy reports of disagreements between Chinese students and university lecturers, allegedly over how Chinese foreign policy is presented in classes. Despite the minor character of the disputes, the think-tank used it as the launching point to allege that there is a coordinated attempt by Chinese students to "stifle academic freedom."

It menacingly declared that Chinese students were involved in "activities [that] contravene Australian societal values and academic principles. They also undermine Australian interests." These, it claimed, included attempts to suppress criticism of the Chinese government and spying on other students.

These xenophobic and bullying allegations are part of a broader attempt to demonise the Chinese population. They are aimed at creating a political climate in which Australia can ever more directly participate in US-led military intrigues and wars in the Asia-Pacific, and drowning out mass anti-war sentiment.

The vilification of Chinese students is a warning that the advanced preparations for war will be accompanied by deepening attacks on democratic rights. In both world wars last century, Australian authorities ordered the mass internment of "enemy aliens." Similar measures are being prepared in the event of a major conflict today.

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