

# New Zealand First pushes anti-China witch-hunt in coalition negotiations

Tom Peters  
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Coalition negotiations are continuing following the inconclusive result of the September 23 New Zealand election. Final figures announced on Saturday, after the counting of votes by people who enrolled late and overseas votes, narrowed the gap between the major parties. The incumbent National Party lost two seats and the opposition Labour and Green Parties each gained one.

Labour and the Greens now have 54 seats compared to National's 56, but neither side has the 61 seats needed for a majority. All three parties are courting the right-wing, anti-Asian New Zealand First Party, which, with just 7 percent of the votes (9 seats), has said it will decide the next government by October 12.

A major factor in the coalition talks is NZ First's hardline anti-Chinese stance. The party ran a Trump-style campaign calling for economic protectionism and, along with Labour, scapegoated immigrants for the housing crisis and low wages. It is also demanding an investigation into Chinese "influence" on the National Party government, a call which dovetails with efforts to align the country more explicitly with the US military build-up against China.

The National government, like the 1999–2008 Labour government, has strengthened military and intelligence ties with the US and sent troops to the neo-colonial wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. At the same time, it has so far tried to avoid alienating China, New Zealand's second-largest trading partner.

Now, under conditions where US President Donald Trump has made reckless threats of nuclear war with North Korea, and is threatening trade war against China, New Zealand's ruling elite is being warned that to keep its alliance with US imperialism it must line up unequivocally behind this drive towards war.

On September 27, NZ First leader Winston Peters told the media he would insist on "an inquiry" into anonymous allegations, made 10 days before the election,

that National MP Jian Yang is a spy for the "Chinese Communist Party." No evidence has been presented that Yang is a spy, but Peters has called for him to step down on the basis that he taught English more than 20 years ago at military training institutions in China.

A *New York Times* article on October 4, voicing Washington's interests, echoed NZ First's position. It stressed New Zealand's importance as member of the "'Five Eyes' intelligence sharing partnership along with the United States, Britain, Canada and Australia." While noting that Yang had not been charged with anything, the newspaper quoted former CIA agent Nicholas Eftimiades, who asserted that many Chinese former military personnel were "still actively engaged in espionage."

The article also referred to a witch-hunting report by academic Anne-Marie Brady, "Magic Weapons: China's political influence activities under Xi Jinping," which accused Beijing of an "aggressive campaign of using soft power to influence New Zealand's politics, economy and society, including through campaign donations."

While the newspaper described Brady as a New Zealand-based professor, her report was actually published by a US government-funded think tank, the Wilson Centre, just days before the election. It was widely reported in the international and New Zealand media, with the aim of realigning the country's politics in favour of the US.

This is far from the first time Washington has intervened directly in the region's politics. In 2010 elements in the Australian Labor Party, described as "protected sources" by the US embassy, organised the removal of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd because he was regarded as insufficiently committed to the Obama administration's military and economic "pivot" against China.

Brady wrote that a new Labour-NZ First government would likely distance New Zealand from China and further strengthen the alliance with Washington. She

noted that while National supports New Zealand participation in China's major One Belt One Road (OBOR) trade and investment initiative, NZ First is "adamantly opposed" and Labour has no official policy but was "likely to have concerns about the extent of New Zealand involvement in the OBOR and the implications for economic independence."

Brady pointed to business ties between Chinese companies and banks and numerous retired National Party politicians. Without any evidence, she also accused Yang and Labour Party MP Raymond Huo, as well as Labour candidate Chen Naisi, of being "agents" of Beijing. She also made the claim, again with zero evidence, that Chinese-owned farms in New Zealand may have been used to test military technology.

Brady advocates the surveillance of Chinese immigrants, and any New Zealander with any links to China. She suggested that the Security Intelligence Service (SIS) investigate Chinese "influence" in politics, as well as businesses, community organisations and student groups. She noted with approval the agency's sweeping, anti-democratic powers to investigate "foreign capabilities, intentions, or activities within or relating to New Zealand that impact on New Zealand's international well-being or economic well-being... [and] the protection of New Zealand from activities... that are influenced by any foreign organisation or any foreign person."

NZ First's Winston Peters praised Brady's report, while Labour leader Jacinda Ardern told the *New Zealand Herald* she wanted "to take a closer look" at an investigation into Chinese "influence" carried out by the Australian spy agencies, suggesting she would support a similar witch-hunt in New Zealand.

The Labour Party and NZ First, along with the Greens and the Maori nationalist Mana Party, have attacked National for years for encouraging Chinese investment, and sought to whip up anti-Chinese xenophobia to divert from the responsibility of governments for the worsening social crisis. Prior to the election, Mana leader Hone Harawira, who has been falsely portrayed as "left wing" by various pseudo-left groups, made a racist demand for Chinese drug smugglers to be "executed."

A significant role supporting the anti-Chinese campaign is played by the ultra-nationalistic *Daily Blog*, funded by the Unite Union, the Rail and Maritime Transport Union (RMTU) and the New Zealand Dairy Workers Union.

The blog is calling for a Labour-Green-NZ First coalition and declared after the election that Chinese "influence" would become "the major issue." Its editor

Martyn Bradbury praised Brady's report in a blatantly racist article on October 5. He stated that "the Asian-NZ population will overtake Maori" in 20 years and demonised Asian immigration as a new "wave of colonisation" threatening "the bi-cultural framework of our country" and "the special relationship Maori have as the indigenous people of NZ."

The *Daily Blog* also published a direct attack on the *World Socialist Web Site*, on September 29, by the pseudo-left Communist Workers Group. While admitting that Brady supported "US warmongering," the blog post rejected the WSW's analysis that the source of the war danger in Asia is the aggressive build-up by US imperialism and its allies, including Australia and New Zealand, against China.

The group echoed NZ First's position that "China's reborn imperialism... is invading NZ" and ludicrously described New Zealand as "an oppressed neo-colony" of both China and the US.

In fact, New Zealand is a minor imperialist power, whose ruling class depends on its alliance with the US to advance its own predatory imperialist interests in the Pacific region and elsewhere.

The *Daily Blog* articles, reminiscent of the "Yellow Peril" racism peddled by the Labour and trade union apparatus in the early 20th century, reflect the anti-socialist and pro-imperialist politics of the union bureaucracy today. It seeks to weaken the working class and divert it from a political struggle against New Zealand capitalism by fomenting racist divisions and projecting social tensions outward.

Whatever party leads the next government, the anti-Chinese hysteria of NZ First and its allies, including Labour and the trade union bureaucracy, is setting the stage for a major escalation in attacks on immigrants, on political dissent and democratic rights generally, and stepped-up preparations for war.



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