

Beijing warns against Australia's anti-China campaign

Oscar Grenfell
15 December 2017

Media reports this week revealed that the Chinese government took the unusual step of officially summoning Australia's ambassador to the country, Jan Adams, to a closed-door meeting for a "robust discussion" last Friday.

According to the Murdoch-owned *Australian* newspaper, Beijing officials issued a formal complaint to Adams, objecting to hysterical claims emanating from Australia's major parties, corporate press and intelligence agencies of "Chinese interference" in Australian politics.

The immediate trigger for the heightening diplomatic tensions was the revival late last month of accusations by the Liberal-National Coalition government that Labor Senator Sam Dastyari had operated as a Chinese "agent of influence."

Those claims form part of a year-long xenophobic campaign, particularly spearheaded by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and Fairfax Media publications, in close collaboration with ASIO, Australia's domestic intelligence agency.

The witch-hunt has presented activities ranging from political donations by Chinese-born businesspeople, lobbying, meetings of Chinese community groups, and the presence of large numbers of Chinese international students, as part of a coordinated plot by the Chinese Communist Party to "subvert" Australian democracy.

Dastyari, a right-wing powerbroker from the New South Wales Labor Party, was particularly targeted because of his role in soliciting donations from Chinese business figures. He was also denounced for delivering a speech two years ago, in which he tepidly warned against direct Australian involvement in US-led provocations against Beijing over territorial disputes in the South China Sea. Dastyari was forced to resign this week.

The campaign against Dastyari has been aimed at legitimising a battery of draconian laws announced by the Coalition government this month, directed against

"foreign influence" operations. The legislation will include the creation of a "foreign agents registry" and a complete ban on overseas donations for any political activities.

The *Global Times*, a Chinese state-owned newspaper with close ties to the country's military, declared on Wednesday that it was "disgraceful" that "in an era of globalisation, some countries exhibit all the symptoms of McCarthyism: suspecting Chinese businesspeople and students, framing China and harassing Chinese visitors on exchanges."

The paper stated that were China to adopt the "same attitude as Western countries," "communities of foreign expats in Beijing would fall under suspicion" and "Chinese with close ties to Westerners would be treated like informants to Western spy agencies and be accused of treason, like Australian lawmaker Sam Dastyari."

Last Friday, China's foreign ministry spokesman, Geng Shuang, similarly warned that the Australian anti-China campaign "poisons the atmosphere" between the two countries.

Geng was responding to Coalition Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's comments in parliament the previous day, in which he uncritically repeated media reports that China was "interfering" with "our media, our universities and even the decisions of elected representatives right here in this building."

Underlying the reaction in Beijing is a recognition that Canberra's stepped-up allegations of "Chinese interference" are one aspect of a diplomatic, military and economic campaign, led by the United States and its allies, including Australia, to isolate China in preparation for war.

They coincide with ongoing threats by the Trump administration to launch a pre-emptive strike against North Korea, an act that could trigger a broader conflict pitting the US and its allies against China. Washington is

also taking direct measures against Beijing, including the establishment of an alliance with the European Union and Japan this week to target alleged Chinese “unfair” trade practices.

The Chinese regime is fearful that the Australian campaign against “Chinese influence” will become a model for the US and its allies, as they seek to legitimise their aggressive actions against Beijing, and create a political climate in which war can be launched.

A senior US congressman hailed Australia’s anti-China witch-hunt at congressional hearings yesterday, hinting that a similar campaign would be required in the United States.

Chris Smith, co-chair of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, declared: “Australia in particular is in the midst of a national crisis and all like-minded democratic allies should be supporting their efforts to root out those elements intended to corrupt or co-opt Australian political and academic institutions.”

Republican Senator Marco Rubio warned that in Australia and elsewhere, China was seeking to “nurture officeholders, think-tanks, opinion-makers” and others.

In Canada, Conservative Senator Linda Frum likewise called this week for her country’s parliament to replicate the actions of the Australian government by launching an inquiry into the “extent of Beijing’s subterfuge in Canada,” and by changing legislation to “prevent China from meddling in Canadian political processes.”

A particular concern of the Chinese regime is that the Australian government’s proposed legislation goes further than existing “foreign influence” laws in other countries, including the United States and Britain, and could become a blueprint for measures targeting Chinese nationals and businesses elsewhere.

An Australian government media statement declared that the planned legislation will “criminalise covert and deceptive activities of foreign actors that fall short of espionage but are intended to interfere with our democratic systems and processes or support the intelligence activities of a foreign government.”

While the full details of the new laws have not been spelt out, the extraordinarily vague designation of “covert and deceptive activities” could potentially be applied to the public or commercial activities of virtually any foreign national.

An article in the *Australian* yesterday noted that the legislation “casts a cloud over all dealings between foreigners, their representatives and the government.” It suggested that foreign nationals or anyone advocating for

a foreign company, involved in “competition policy, foreign investment, regulatory reform or anything that requires a ministerial decision” would likely have to register as a “foreign agent.”

In an indication of the breadth of the measures being prepared, Peter Jennings, a former defence official and director of the government funded Australian Strategic Policy Institute warned today there was a “likelihood” that university research projects were illegally sharing military technologies with China. Jennings’ used the unsubstantiated assertion to call for the Defence Department to conduct an investigation.

Media reports have previously asserted that joint Chinese-Australian research projects in seemingly benign areas such as marine and solar technology could touch on areas with “military potential” at an unspecified point in the future.

Another academic, Clive Hamilton, who has been heavily involved in the media denunciations of Beijing, gave an indication of the extent to which the anti-China campaign is being waged in collaboration with the US government and intelligence agencies.

Hamilton said that the collaboration between Chinese institutions and Australian universities could damage relations with the US. “I know that our research is being carefully read in Washington and hard questions are being asked of the Australian government,” he stated.

Underlying the aggressive anti-China rhetoric is Australia’s central role in the US preparations for war in the region, especially against China. In 2011, the Greens-backed Labor government signed-up to the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia,” a vast military build-up directed against Beijing.

Since then, the Australian military has been ever-more integrated into the US war machine, while US “influence operations” targeted at the Australian political establishment, and the population, aimed at promoting Washington’s aggressive policies, have been vastly expanded.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact