

New Zealand government intensifies campaign against Chinese “interference”

John Braddock
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New Zealand’s Labour Party Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, last week instructed the country’s Security Intelligence Service (SIS) to investigate claims that Chinese officials are directing a campaign of intimidation against academic Anne-Marie Brady.

The Christchurch-based professor told the Australian parliament’s Intelligence and Security Committee by video link on February 16 that two recent burglaries of her office were linked to her work on Chinese “influence” in New Zealand business and politics.

Brady said her campus office was broken into during December, and her home was later burgled after she received a threatening “warning letter.” She said laptop computers, phones and USB storage devices were stolen, while other valuables remained untouched. Brady also claimed that her associates inside China had been interrogated by state security officials.

At a press conference on February 19, Ardern expressed “alarm” over Brady’s claims, saying she first became aware of the accusations through media reports. Ardern said, as minister responsible for national security, she was following up the issue of “foreign interference.” If there was evidence “we should be taking stock of that and taking action.”

The episode represents a further intensification of anti-Chinese operations in Australia and New Zealand, aimed at aligning both countries more closely with US war preparations. Washington has exerted ever-greater pressure on the New Zealand ruling establishment to set aside its economic ties with China, its second most important trading partner, and strengthen its military and intelligence alliance with the US.

Calls on the government to boost military spending are growing. The Australian Strategic Policy Institute published a report this month, *New Zealand, Australia and the ANZUS Alliance*, claiming that New Zealand is

not meeting its share of the defence “burden.” TV3’s “Newshub” simultaneously posted an article declaring that NZ needs to “drop its pacifist outlook.” In fact, a Defence White Paper released by the previous National Party government in 2016 announced an extraordinary \$NZ20 billion allocation over 15 years to replace and upgrade military hardware.

The new Labour-led government will adhere to the militarist stance being demanded. In opposition, the party conducted a xenophobic campaign from 2012 onward to stir up anti-Chinese sentiment. It repeatedly attacked the National government’s business ties with China and scapegoated Chinese immigrants for the housing crisis and low wages. Following last September’s election, Labour and its anti-Asian coalition partner NZ First banned house purchases from overseas, promised to cut immigration by up to 40 percent and signalled restrictions on Chinese investment.

The Australian and New Zealand political establishments and media are promoting Brady as an academic “expert” and champion of democracy to further what is a xenophobic and racist campaign.

Brady is intimately involved with a US government-funded think tank, the Wilson Centre, being a co-founder of its Small States and the New Security Environment Project. This project is funded by the NATO military alliance, led by the US and European imperialist powers, to produce propaganda aimed at integrating countries such as New Zealand into the US-led war drive against Russia and China.

Days before the election, Brady published an inflammatory paper denouncing the National Party’s business links with China. Without any evidence, she accused two MPs, one each from the National and Labour parties, of being Chinese Communist Party

agents. Winston Peters, NZ First leader and now deputy prime minister, quickly demanded an “investigation” into National MP Jian Yang, denouncing him as a “Manchurian candidate,” i.e., a Chinese secret agent.

Then, in an extraordinary media interview, US ambassador Scott Brown rebuked Bill English, then prime minister, for failing to endorse President Donald Trump’s threats to annihilate North Korea. Post-election, Ardern quickly fell into line. Following high-level talks with the US, she declared that New Zealand was prepared to intervene militarily against North Korea.

Brady’s video appearance at the Australian parliamentary hearing, and Ardern’s response to it, bear the hallmarks of an intelligence operation, directed from the highest levels in Canberra and Washington. Brady’s claims, which are unsubstantiated, came in reply to a leading question from Australian government MP Julian Leeser. He asked if she had “felt any difficulties as a result of being outspoken about Chinese political influence.”

Brady released a “policy brief” in November demanding that the Labour-led government impose sweeping anti-China measures. She called for investigations by both the SIS and the prime minister’s department into China’s “subversion and espionage activities.” She demanded new laws on political donations and “foreign influence activities” and a Commerce Commission investigation into Beijing’s “interference” in the local Chinese language media.

The intelligence agencies have made similar demands. The SIS and the Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB), the external spy agency, stated in briefings to the new government that over the past year there were “attempts to access sensitive government and private sector information, and attempts to unduly influence expatriate communities.”

On December 11 the London-based *Financial Times* cited unnamed “security experts” who claimed the SIS and GCSB wanted “a more vocal government response to ... Beijing’s attempts to influence the country’s growing Chinese community.” The article implied that nearly 200,000 ethnic Chinese people living in New Zealand could be targeted as purveyors of Chinese Communist Party “influence.”

The anti-China campaign has generated extensive

media backing. Brady used an op-ed piece for the *New Zealand Herald* on February 21 to warn absurdly that New Zealand could become an impoverished Chinese client state. She called on Ardern to reverse the previous government’s support for China’s One Belt One Belt Road infrastructure investment initiative, and bring NZ “back in line with its allies and nearest neighbours,” i.e., the US and Australia.

Two days earlier, a *Dominion Post* editorial endorsed Brady’s claims and demanded a formal diplomatic protest from the government against Chinese “intimidation.” It suggested that New Zealand follow Australia and “overhaul” its intelligence and security laws. As the WWSWS has explained, the Australian government’s proposed laws are profoundly anti-democratic and have grave implications for free speech and political dissent.

The NZ Tertiary Education Union joined the promotion of Brady’s claims. Spokesperson Sharn Riggs said it was “very concerning to have a members’ personal safety put in danger.” Riggs called on university vice-chancellors to take a stand on “academics’ right to investigate and publish in these areas.”

The most vociferous endorsement of the anti-China witch-hunt has come from liberal and pro-Labour commentators, who have praised Brady as a brave “political dissident,” while denouncing China as an “imperialist” threat. The trade union-funded *Daily Blog* has posted nationalist and xenophobic commentaries, each more strident than the last. It demanded an inquiry by the spy agencies and declared that Beijing is preparing to “cause domestic havoc” in New Zealand “once the cold war with America gets hot.”



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