

“Four Corners” broadcasts further claims of “Chinese interference” in Australia

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10 April 2019

On the eve of a federal election being called, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) this week devoted its flagship documentary program “Four Corners” to again whipping up fears and concerns about Chinese activities and influence in Australia.

Entitled “Interference,” the program, produced in collaboration with the so-called liberal press—the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age*—was an effort to inject anti-Chinese hysteria into the election campaign and ensure that all political parties toe Washington’s aggressive line against Beijing.

In 2017, “Four Corners” produced an “exposure” of alleged Chinese interference in Australian politics based on unsubstantiated and unsourced claims from the Australian intelligence agencies. The program was part of a concerted propaganda drive that led to the passage of draconian “foreign interference” legislation.

The laws, which were rammed through with bipartisan support on the pretext of “defending democracy,” have sweeping anti-democratic ramifications. They could be used, for instance, to suppress anti-war opposition, illegalise international political co-operation and create the basis for the internment of “enemy aliens,” as occurred during the two world wars.

This week’s “Four Corners” program signals a push to implement the laws. Attorney-General Christian Porter complained that despite the legislation, “there’s evidence that covert Chinese Communist Party (CCP) interference is continuing”—implying that a crackdown was necessary to halt the CCP’s activities.

Porter provided no proof, nor did the ABC, despite its claims to have uncovered “fresh evidence,” of “covert Beijing-backed political activity,” Chinese “information gathering operations” and the stifling of dissenting voices in the Chinese-Australian community.

For the most part, “Four Corners” recycled the previous allegations.

The program featured right-wing Liberal Party parliamentarian Andrew Hastie, an ex-military officer who heads parliament’s joint intelligence and security committee and functions as a mouthpiece for the Australian intelligence agencies. Also featured was New Zealand academic Anne-Marie Brady, who has close connections in Washington and has been spearheading a similar campaign against “Chinese interference” in New Zealand.

A significant portion of “Interference” was devoted to claims that Chinese officials had leaned on companies in China to pull their advertising from *Vision China Times*, a Chinese-language newspaper published in Australia. It was also alleged that the Chinese consulate exerted pressure on a local council in Sydney last year to block sponsorship by *Vision China Times* of the council’s Chinese New Year event.

These incidents—which even if true hardly constitute a crime—were inflated into the sweeping claim the Chinese government dominates Chinese-language media in Australia and is seeking to stifle “independent” voices.

Vision China Times, which is highly critical of the Beijing regime, is hardly an “independent” newspaper. In 2016, its chief editor Yan Xia published an article in the conservative magazine *Quadrant* entitled “Beijing’s Running Dogs in Australia.”

In 2017, the newspaper published a book entitled *The Giant Awakens* that included contributions from those at the forefront of the anti-Chinese interference campaign such as John Garnaut, an adviser to former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull. Garnaut appeared on this week’s “Four Corners” declaring: “Essentially, Chinese language media platforms in Australia have

been co-opted largely, by the Chinese Communist Party.”

“Four Corners” also featured former Labor Senator Sam Dastyari, who was one of the chief targets of the anti-Chinese interference campaign. He was compelled to resign last year amid denunciations that he had “sold out Australia.” One of Dastyari’s chief “crimes” was to publicly suggest that Australia should not participate in Washington’s aggressive military challenges to Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea. Supposedly, he did so in return for donations from Chinese billionaire and Australian resident, Huang Xiangmo.

The charge against Dastyari is significant as it makes clear that the anti-China campaign is an integral component of the US-led confrontation and drive to war against China. For all the denunciations of “Chinese interference,” the US has for decades intervened repeatedly in Australian politics, including the 1975 Canberra Coup that ousted Labor Prime Minister Gough Whitlam and the 2010 inner-party coup that removed Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd.

A contrite Dastyari appeared on “Four Corners,” now following the script set by Washington and the Australian intelligence agencies. “I was too close to the big donors like Huang Xiangmo, I paid a very, very high price for that,” he declared, before pointing the finger at Peter Dutton, who currently holds the powerful home affairs ministry.

Dastyari noted that Dutton, then the immigration minister, had very rapidly pushed through the citizenship applications of Huang’s family in 2016. “Four Corners” went on to reveal that in 2016, as Huang was seeking citizenship for himself, he personally had a meeting with Dutton, facilitated by former Liberal minister-turned lobbyist Santo Santoro. The application was subsequently turned down, and in an extraordinary move this February, Huang was stripped of his right to reside in Australia and barred from re-entering the country. Following the airing of the “Four Corners” program, Dutton denied any impropriety on his part.

The only other federal politician directly targeted in this week’s “Four Corners” was former Liberal Prime Minister Tony Abbott, who, it was noted, attended special events organised for him by casino owner Jack Lam at a golf course. Lam and media tycoon Tommy

Liang were, without substantiation, both branded as participants in the Chinese Communist Party’s activities in Australia.

Former Turnbull adviser Garnaut told “Four Corners,” “Look, if I was a politician, I wouldn’t be taking money from somebody who is involved in a foreign propaganda outlet... Because there’s at least the risk of the perception of conflict of interest, of being tainted.”

Garnaut’s presence on “Four Corners” suggests that at least one aspect of the program is aimed against Abbott and Dutton, leading right-wingers in the Liberal Party, who were in the forefront of engineering Turnbull’s ouster last August. Garnaut co-authored a still-unreleased Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) report on alleged Chinese interference for Turnbull, designed to justify the introduction of the “foreign interference” laws. Garnaut would have had ready access to any intelligence on contacts between Australian politicians and Chinese businessmen.

The bitter factional feuding within the Liberal Party is continuing despite the imminent election campaign. However, the chief impact of the “Four Corners” program is that it once again brings lurid and unsubstantiated claims of Chinese interference to centre stage. That will only add to the anti-China hysteria and could pave the way for prosecutions under the “foreign interference” legislation.



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