New Zealand: Daily Blog ramps up anti-China campaign

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New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern told media on April 22 that she is "very, very open" to joining the US and Australia in an "independent" review into the origins of the coronavirus outbreak.

The US and Australia have targeted China, accusing it of causing the COVID-19 global pandemic. US President Donald Trump said China should face major consequences if it was found to be "knowingly responsible." Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne said Canberra would "absolutely insist" on a review into the origins of the disease.

Ardern said New Zealand would support such a review—although she said calling it an "inquiry" would be "too formal." Ardern had earlier distanced herself from Trump's defunding the World Health Organisation (WHO) over its alleged dependence on China. However, Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters, leader of the right-wing NZ First Party, pointedly echoed Trump's criticism that the WHO did not act early enough.

New Zealand's ruling elite has in recent years carried out a difficult balancing act between the increasingly bellicose demands of the US to join its military operations in the Asia-Pacific, while remaining on good terms with China, its major trading partner. The global pandemic is escalating tensions even further.

The false accusation that the Chinese government's policies are to blame for the pandemic and the intensifying economic catastrophe is being ramped up by governments and the media around the world. This campaign serves to divert attention from their failure to prepare for, and deal with, the pandemic, while simultaneously whipping up public opinion for war against China.

The US and European imperialist powers, along with their allies, are seeking to prevent China from emerging from the pandemic economically and geo-strategically strengthened, particularly in the Asia-Pacific. As it escalates the propaganda offensive against China, the Trump administration last week provocatively sent US warships, accompanied by an Australian Navy frigate, into the South China Sea near Malaysia, where China and Vietnam also have competing claims.

Leading media outlets have upped the offensive against Beijing by spreading the conspiracy theory that the coronavirus was made in a Chinese laboratory. They alternatively claim that the disease has only spread so widely around the globe because China failed to make information about it public for a crucial six days in January.

In New Zealand, a central role in vilifying China is being played by a layer of pseudo-lefts and Labour Party sympathisers in the trade union-funded *Daily Blog*. The editor, Martyn Bradbury, has for years vented chauvinist filth and anti-Chinese xenophobia, ludicrously depicting China as the New Zealand's economic "overlord" and portraying Chinese immigrants as a subversive threat. Notwithstanding occasional anti-American outbursts, the blog supports the Labour-NZ First government's push to further integrate New Zealand into US war plans.

In a post on April 16, Bradbury seized on a comment in the *Washington Post*—owned by Amazon CEO and billionaire Jeff Bezos—to declare the *Daily Blog* was "right" to target China over COVID-19 from the start. Under the headline "Oh look at that—China DID lie about the virus," Bradbury repeated verbatim charges that from January 14-20, Chinese officials had "secretly" determined they were likely facing a pandemic. According to Bradbury, following reports about the purported lack of safety at the Wuhan laboratory, "it's time to demand answers" from the

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Chinese, “not just ask them.”

Such attempts to foist responsibility for COVID-19 on Beijing are political lies. The fraudulent narrative contradicts US and international media reports from the time, which make clear that the emergence and character of the disease was being widely and accurately reported by early January.

As of December 30, Chinese authorities were publicly reporting cases of an unknown pneumonia. Beginning January 3, they regularly informed the WHO and the world on the progress of the disease and quickly identified the agent. On January 11, the WHO received the entire sequencing of the genome of the virus from China. On January 23, as Wuhan went into lockdown, over 800 people were contaminated, and only nine of them were abroad.

A month later, the epidemic began in Europe and the United States, where governments were criminally negligent in their response; downplaying the seriousness of COVID-19, comparing it to seasonal flu, opposing social distancing measures, and demanding that workers stay at work.

The *Washington Post’s* claim that COVID-19 was created in a Chinese laboratory is an unsubstantiated right-wing conspiracy theory that originated with Trump’s fascistic former campaign manager Stephen Bannon. Several reputable scientific studies have established that COVID-19 is not a laboratory construct, but a result of zoonotic transfer from animals to humans.

Scientific evidence is, however, of no concern to the *Daily Blog*. Contributor Chris Trotter turned to the issue in a post on April 24. Taking as his starting point the science fiction television miniseries *Devs*, which deals with themes of free will versus predetermination, Trotter invites the reader to consider the case of a biological research facility in Wuhan, where scientists create “a new, highly infectious and potentially deadly coronavirus.”

According to this scenario, “lax handling protocols” result in a number of the facility’s staff becoming infected, and with “terrifying speed” the virus spreads through Wuhan’s 11 million inhabitants. The Chinese government adopts a policy of “strategic inaction,” and delays informing the WHO. For Beijing, Trotter contends, “it was far preferable to have the whole of humanity” contending with COVID-19 than “only that fraction of humanity residing within the borders of the People’s Republic of China.” China took an “accident,” he concludes and “turned it into an opportunity to take over the world.”

Trotter ends with a disingenuous disclaimer: “There are plenty of other universes where this didn’t happen. We might even be living in one.” But by presenting this scenario uncritically without reference to known facts, his piece of fiction has simply served to legitimise the reactionary conspiracy around the Wuhan laboratory.

The responsibility for COVID-19’s spread in America, Europe and across Asia, lies not with China, but with the various governments and the economic order they defend—capitalism. The crisis has laid bare the state of social and economic relations that have been building up for decades, including the destruction of public services and unpreparedness for any government for a major health care emergency.

Far from defending the working class, the *Daily Blog* functions as an adjunct of the trade unions apparatus and glorifies the Ardern-led Labour government, which has slashed health spending and, like governments around the world, is intent on driving workers back to work despite the ongoing pandemic and the health dangers involved.

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