

Australian Labor Party intent on ousting MP from parliament over “Chinese agent” claims

Mike Head
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Despite denouncing his “political lynching,” an Australian state Labor Party MP, Shaoquett Moselmane, today said he would seek leave from parliament during an investigation by Australia’s domestic spy agency into possible Chinese “agents of influence.”

Moselmane said he was not a “suspect” in the investigation and defended his democratic right to express his views on China. Nevertheless, he offered to stand aside from parliament, acceding to intense pressure from the Australian Labor Party and the corporate media.

New South Wales (NSW) Labor leader Jodi McKay yesterday declared that her party will move to suspend Moselmane from state parliament, simply because he is under investigation by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) and the Australian Federal Police (AFP).

Labor’s decision places it at the spearhead in Australia of the escalating US-backed anti-China campaign, which went to a new level on Friday when ASIO and the AFP raided Moselmane’s home and parliament house office in a large-scale operation.

The raids and the bid to remove Moselmane from parliament, all on the basis of unsubstantiated claims by the political police, are a direct attack on free speech and other basic democratic rights. They are a warning of a wartime-like atmosphere being whipped up by the political establishment and the complicit corporate media to intimidate opponents of the intensifying US offensive against China.

From the allegations splashed throughout the media, Moselmane’s only “offence” has been to visit China nine times since 2009, mostly for a wheelchair charity, and make statements calling into question Australia being placed on the frontline of Washington’s economic and military confrontation with China.

Moselmane is a low-profile Labor loyalist from the party’s right-wing machine who has sat in the state upper

house since 2009. He has been targeted now to fuel an underlying political agenda. This is bound up with preparations for war against China, triggered by US imperialism’s drive to maintain the global dominance it acquired through World War II.

Washington, the military-intelligence apparatus and the media regard the operation against Moselmane as the initial major public “test” of the precedent-setting “foreign interference” laws jointly pushed through parliament by the Liberal-National Coalition government and the Labor opposition in 2018.

Around the world, the raids on Moselmane were reported as giving a lead to US allies internationally for similar moves against individuals supposedly aligned with China. The *New York Times*, which is closely connected to the US state agencies, commented: “The case is the first high-profile criminal investigation of Chinese influence peddling to be made public since Australia passed foreign interference laws two years ago.” Similar articles were published in the UK and throughout Asia.

Soon after the raids last Friday, McKay orchestrated Moselmane’s suspension from the Labor Party. Now he faces removal from parliament. It is not even clear if an elected MP can be legally suspended from parliament.

Underscoring Labor’s support for the anti-China operation, McKay said the decision to seek Moselmane’s suspension from parliament had received unanimous support from senior Labor opposition frontbenchers, based on a briefing she received from the “investigating agencies” on Friday.

This is a bipartisan assault. The NSW Liberal-National government’s Treasurer Dominic Perrottet had said on Saturday that the government would move a motion for Moselmane’s suspension from parliament.

McKay admitted that Moselmane had not been charged with any offence. But she reportedly told her colleagues that she accepts the importance of upholding the

“integrity of the NSW parliament.” No such concern has been raised about the role of MPs and ministers who have made multiple trips to the US and made speeches backing its allegations against China.

Former Labor federal senator Sam Dastyari, who quit parliament in January 2018 after a similar anti-China operation, went even further. He called for a royal commission into “Chinese interference” in Australia, laying the basis for a wider witch hunt. Demonising China, he told Nine News that politicians needed to be made aware of the “consequences when you are dancing with these kinds of devils.”

The flimsiness of the allegations against Moselmane was highlighted by a much-promoted “special” on Nine TV’s “60 Minutes” last night. The brief segment produced nothing new about the accusations, just replays of some of Moselmane’s previously reported public utterances supporting aspects of China’s policies, such as its timely alerts to the world about the emerging COVID-19 pandemic.

So threadbare was the program that its main talking head was Neil Fergus, a former high-ranking intelligence officer. Fergus said ASIO would “not have taken this step lightly” in launching raids against a serving MP.

The other featured guest was Alex Joske, an “analyst” at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, a government-backed think tank that is sponsored by US weapons-making giants, such as Northrop Grumman, Lockheed Martin and Raytheon. Joske regurgitated material he produced for Clive Hamilton’s pro-war book, *Silent Invasion*, which called for Australia to join a US-led war against China, supposedly as the only way to stop Australia from becoming a “tribute state of the resurgent Middle Kingdom.”

There were two revealing aspects of the “60 Minutes” show. One was the presence of its reporter and camera crew during the early morning raid on Moselmane’s home. This showed how closely ASIO, the AFP and the government worked with the media in preparing and setting up the raids.

Another was photographs of Moselmane’s part-time staff member John Zhang at functions with Prime Minister Scott Morrison. This demonstrated how common it has been for parliamentary politicians, both Labor and Coalition, to appear at social and cultural events in Australia’s large Chinese diaspora. The photos also may have served as a message to the entire political elite to distance itself from the Chinese population.

An editorial in today’s *Australian* indicated another

widening of the anti-China net. It claimed that a one-time member of Victorian Labor Premier Daniel Andrews’s staff had attended a training course in 2007 at a Chinese institution where Zhang had studied in 2013.

On the basis of this alleged remote link, the Murdoch media newspaper declared: “Mr Andrews, whose government is a signatory to China’s controversial Belt and Road Initiative, cannot insult Australians’ intelligence by dismissing such connections as ‘conspiracy theories.’ All sides of politics, and other organisations with close ties to China, such as universities, should be careful of China extending its largesse.”

The editorial ended on threatening note, citing a warning issued last November by ASIO chief Mike Burgess, that ASIO would “continue to confront and counter foreign interference and espionage in Australia.” The editorial concluded: “Politicians and staffers have been warned. Protecting national sovereignty is paramount.”

The Labor Party, which forged the US alliance during World War II, has been in the forefront of the anti-China offensive since 2010, when US “protected sources” in the party’s inner cabal executed a backroom coup to install Julia Gillard as prime minister. She aligned the country completely behind the Obama administration’s anti-China “pivot to Asia.”

Both Labor and the Coalition are thoroughly committed to the anti-China offensive by Washington, on whose military-intelligence apparatus and financial investment, Australian capitalism relies heavily. As a result, Australia’s people have been placed in the vanguard of the conflict with Beijing. But concerns remain in Washington about deep anti-war sentiment, and the dependence of sections of Australia’s wealthy elite on exports to China. Hence the ratcheting up of the witch hunt.



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