

UK: Corbyn and Owen Jones line-up with anti-China campaign

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Anti-China measures are being stoked up in the UK in response to the human and economic catastrophe caused by the global Covid-19 pandemic—which has seen Britain record amongst the highest death rates—and the inauguration of US President Joe Biden.

A sign of how advanced this is was indicated by the government only narrowly defeating an amendment last week that would have required it to reconsider a trade deal with any country deemed to be committing genocide.

The amendment to the government's post-Brexit trade deal legislation originated in the House of Lords with cross-party support. Though not mentioned explicitly, it was devised to support measures against China over allegations that it is responsible for genocide against Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang province. It would have enabled the British High Court—rather than any international body—to determine if a country is guilty of genocide.

Despite an 80-seat majority, the government only defeated the amendment by 319 to 308, after 34 Tory MPs voted with the opposition. The narrow result means it is expected that the Lords will return the amendment to the House.

This is part of internationally co-ordinated moves. As the debate in parliament was underway, outgoing US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo declared, “I have determined that the PRC [People’s Republic of China], under the direction and control of the CCP [Chinese Communist party], has committed genocide against the predominantly Muslim Uyghur and other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang.”

His declaration—part of a US-led economic warfare and military build-up against China under the cynical pretext of human rights abuses—has the full support of the Biden administration. The Democrats are

continuing the Trump administration’s reckless provocations, with the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt and its strike group entering the South China Sea on Saturday.

In addition to cross-party backing, the anti-China campaign in Britain has the support of the Conservative Muslim Forum, the International Bar Association, the Jewish Board of Deputies, and a host of think-tanks. These include the neo-con Henry Jackson Society, the newly created Conservative Human Rights Commission, the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China and the Intraparty China Research Group.

In addition to human rights abuses, they accuse Beijing of concealing and enabling the spread of Covid-19. But those denouncing China on these spurious grounds are the greatest advocates of letting the virus rip. Nigel Farage of Reform UK, formerly the Brexit Party, has pronounced “stopping China is the next big battle to fight.” He champions the murderous Great Barrington Declaration and the eugenicist policy on which it is based, courting fascists such as Donald Trump ally Steve Bannon and neo-Nazis across Europe.

But the lead role in the anti-China measures is played by the Labour Party. The amendment was pioneered in the Lords by Labour peers Ray Collins and Helena Kennedy, and overwhelmingly backed by the party in parliament as it seeks to outflank the Tories on the issue.

Especially significant given this right-wing line-up is the support of Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour left for the amendment. Corbyn now sits as an independent after the party whip was removed from him over bogus allegations of anti-Semitism. Given these trumped-up charges, one might assume Corbyn would exercise some caution as to allegations of ignoring or abusing human rights. But Corbyn voted in favour of the

amendment as did Labour's so-called left in the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs, including Diane Abbott, Richard Burdon and John McDonnell.

The Labour left's stance has nothing to do with defending the rights of Uighur Muslims, much less the super-exploited Chinese working class. It articulates the interests of a layer of the upper middle class, represented by the Labour and trade union bureaucracy, which advocate economic protectionism as a means of defending British capitalism.

This was summed up by Labour apologist Owen Jones in the *Guardian*. Writing two days after the vote under the headline, "The right condemns China over its Uighur abuses. The left must do so too", Jones acknowledged that "western hawks", such as Pompeo, were "playing global power games", and that "the oppressed [in this instance, the Uighur Muslims] are mere chess pieces in a global power struggle."

For this reason, "some people worry that condemning a rival power's human rights abuses risks providing cover for those aiming to foment a new cold war", he wrote, before accusing such people of sacrificing "oppressed Muslims on the altar of geopolitics". The "left" must not "cede a defence of China's Muslims—however disingenuous—to reactionaries and warmongers", he insisted, but must show "it is possible to walk and to chew gum; to oppose western militarism and to stand with victims of state violence."

Jones' claims are an apologia for imperialism. No reference is made to the Iraq war, and the criminal invasion and destruction of that country by the US/UK, nor the host of similar illegal actions under the cover of human rights abuses. The omission is deliberate because Jones is writing to prepare the way for worse crimes.

The genuine left opposes "western militarism and... stand with victims of state violence", based on the independent mobilisation and unity of the working class against capitalism and imperialism. They do so in irreconcilable hostility to the likes of Corbyn and Jones and their efforts to subordinate this class unity to the warmongering of Tory and Labour alike, and bourgeois institutions from parliament to the United Nations.

On this occasion, the Lords amendment was opposed by the Foreign Office, officially on constitutional grounds. More pressing were fears of capital flight given that, over the last years to counter its declining

global position, the UK had actively sought out Chinese investment. China now ranks as the UK's fourth-largest trading partner, its second-biggest investment destination and London is the world's biggest offshore trading centre and the second-largest offshore clearing centre for Renminbi, worth more than 50 trillion yuan (\$7.74 trillion).

But a sharp shift is underway. Notwithstanding differences within the ruling elite, the UK is increasingly lining up with the US and its confrontational stance in the Pacific. This is not only driven by the need to strengthen the so-called "special relationship" post-Brexit. Just as imperative is the vast growth in social inequality, accelerated by the pandemic, and the efforts of the ruling elite to direct class tensions outwards, against an external enemy.

UK foreign policy is now officially for a "tilt to the Indo-Pacific" —backing US efforts to assemble a new "coalition of the willing" against China. The UK is hosting the G7 summit that will incorporate India, South Korea, and Australia. It has signed trade and security deals with Japan and is anticipated to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) as part of a US-led bloc aimed at economically isolating China. In the next months, it will publish its post-Brexit integrated Foreign, Defence, Security and Development policy review, with China at the centre.

The only way to halt the descent into a bloody global conflagration is the international unification of the working class against trade and military war, and the connected policy of herd immunity, in a common struggle against capitalism and for socialism.



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