New Zealand pseudo-left Daily Blog promotes Wuhan lab lie

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The trade union-funded *Daily Blog*, the most significant publication of New Zealand's liberal and pseudo-left commentators, last month posted the latest in a long-running series of blogs promoting the lie that the deadly COVID-19 virus originally escaped from the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) in China.

The August 29 post, by editor Martyn Bradbury, contains a breathtaking litany of falsehoods sourced from the US intelligence apparatus and right-wing media. It concludes that former President Donald Trump "might have been right all along" about the Chinese lab leaking the virus.

Bradbury, the blog's founder, has for years acted as a craven mouthpiece for Washington's escalating propaganda campaign against China and its preparations for war. That he has done so without any criticism from the *Daily Blog*'s self-described stable of "leading left/centre-left commentators and progressive opinion shapers," reflects what is in reality the right-wing and pro-imperialist politics of this entire milieu.

The Wuhan lab lie serves a definite political agenda: to divert attention from the failure of governments around the world to prepare for, and deal with, the deadly pandemic which has killed more than 665,000 people in the US and, by some estimates, more than 10 million worldwide. At the same time, Washington is whipping up anti-Chinese chauvinism as it escalates its confrontation with Beijing, which it views as the main threat to its global dominance.

In New Zealand, the Labour Party-Greens coalition government has strengthened its military and intelligence alliance with US imperialism since first coming to power in a coalition with the right-wing nationalist NZ First Party in 2017. It has called for a greater US military presence in the Pacific region to push back against Chinese influence, while at the same time boosting funding for NZ's military.

So far, the government has not voiced open support for Washington's Wuhan lab leak conspiracy theory, but has supported an investigation into the origins of the coronavirus. The ruling class remains anxious about causing too much damage to relations with China, which received 33 percent of New Zealand's exports in the first half of this year.

The *Daily Blog* supports the Labour-led government, while pushing for it to adopt a more vocal anti-China position in both trade and foreign policy.

Bradbury's latest entry, entitled "So Covid could have escaped from the Wuhan Lab after all?" proclaims: "Well, well, well. So the lab leak is plausible? The deep suspicion of China is legitimate."

The main "evidence" he provides is a link to a *Sydney Morning Herald* article, reprinted by New Zealand media outlet *Stuff* on August 28 with the headline "Covid-19: US intelligence report says coronavirus may have emerged from lab leak or animals." The article is based on an unclassified intelligence report commissioned by US President Joe Biden.

A classified version of the report prepared by the office of the US Director of National Intelligence was delivered to the White House earlier that week. While Bradbury uses the briefing to try to give credence to the lab leak theory, he fails to note that the *Stuff* article concedes that the report was "inconclusive" and that "most US intelligence agencies believe that SARS-CoV-2 was probably not engineered in a lab."

In other words, as the WSWS pointed out, despite a "giant" effort by the US intelligence agencies, their report failed to produce a shred of evidence to substantiate claims by the Trump and Biden administrations, and every major US media outlet, that a lab leak was a plausible scenario.

After presenting his dishonest misinterpretation of the report, Bradbury links to another tendentious article by

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the *Washington Post* dated April 14, 2020: "State Department cables warned of safety issues at Wuhan lab studying bat coronaviruses" by Josh Rogin.

Already in April 2020 Bradbury had seized on this article to declare the *Daily Blog* was "right" to target China over COVID-19. Under the headline "Oh look at that—China DID lie about the virus," he regurgitated false charges that Chinese officials had "secretly" determined they were likely facing a pandemic. Bradbury fulminated: "it's time to demand answers" from the Chinese, "not just ask them."

However, Rogin's article was completely undermined by the *Post* 's own reporting. When the diplomatic cable was released in July, the newspaper was forced to concede: "The full cable does not strengthen the claim that an accident at the lab caused the virus to escape." The cable says nothing that would support Rogin's—and Bradbury's—misleading slant on it.

The *Daily Blog* editor is consciously aligning himself with the extreme right. The Wuhan lab conspiracy theory was originally promoted in January 2020 by the fascist Steve Bannon, Trump's former chief White House strategist, and his allies among right-wing Chinese expatriates such as Miles Guo.

The fabrication quickly spread among far-right media mouthpieces before being picked up by top White House figures including Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who declared in May 2020 that there was "enormous evidence" that the virus originated in a Wuhan laboratory.

The corporate media has sought to legitimise the conspiracy theory. In May 2021, Nicholas Wade, writing in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, argued that US and Chinese scientists created SARS-CoV-2 through "gain of function" experiments at the WIV. Wade's story was embraced by editorials and op-eds in the *New York Times, Washington Post* and *Wall Street Journal*.

In May, President Biden sought to ramp up the offensive against Beijing, calling on the "intelligence community" to further investigate and report whether COVID-19 arose "from a laboratory accident."

The claims against the WIV have been totally discredited. The World Health Organization has described the claim that the virus was deliberately created, as well as the possibility of a laboratory leak, as "extremely unlikely."

In July, 21 of the world's leading experts on the origins of infectious diseases published a paper demolishing the conspiracy theory that COVID-19 was a man-made virus. "The Origins of SARS-CoV-2: A Critical Review," written by international biologists and virologists, led by professor Edward Holmes from the University of Sydney and professor Andrew Rambaut from the University of Edinburgh, concluded that SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19, is zoonotic—the result of a transfer from an animal source to humans. "Our careful and critical analysis of the currently available data provided no evidence for the idea that SARS-CoV-2 originated in a laboratory," Holmes said.

Bradbury ignores the scientific evidence because it does not suit his reactionary political agenda. His blog has for years vented chauvinist filth and xenophobia, ludicrously depicting China as New Zealand's economic "overlord" and portraying Chinese immigrants as a subversive threat. He regularly calls for turning NZ into a "fortress" with a "large scale increase in Navy, Army and Air Force" to keep migrants out.

The *Daily Blog* is backed by the Unite union, the Rail and Maritime Transport Union and the Dairy Workers Union. Its regular contributors include Unite leader Mike Treen—a former member of the opportunist Socialist Action League—former Unite leader Matt McCarten, liberal columnist Chris Trotter, former Alliance Party MP Liz Gordon, former Greens MP Keith Locke, and John Minto, formerly of the Maori nationalist Mana Party.

These individuals and organisations represent sections of the upper middle class that fully support New Zealand capitalism, which has for decades depended on a strong alliance with US imperialism in order to advance NZ's neo-colonial interests in the Pacific region. The blog's relentless promotion of nationalism stems from this layer's hostility and fear of any internationally unified movement of the working class against social inequality and war, which would threaten the profit system and the comfortable position of the wealthiest 10 percent of society.

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