

“Name names”—Canada’s anti-China foreign interference furor reaches new McCarthyite frenzy

Keith Jones
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In recent days the reactionary, trumped-up furor within the Canadian political establishment over allegations of Chinese interference in Canadian politics has reached fever pitch.

The opposition leaders and much of the corporate media are demanding that the “traitorous MPs” Canada’s intelligence agencies are said to have identified be publicly named, expelled from their respective parties, and criminally prosecuted.

Moreover, in true McCarthyite style, the failure of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Public Security Minister Dominic LeBlanc to “name names” is being invoked as proof that Canada’s Liberal government is recklessly naïve about the threat to “Canadian democracy,” if not itself colluding with “the enemy.”

Trudeau and LeBlanc have argued that the intelligence cited in a report from the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians (NSICOP)—a heavily redacted version of which was released to the public June 3—has not been verified. They have also cited the spy agencies’ own warnings that were the intelligence that led them to assert some parliamentarians are “semi-witting or witting” participants in foreign states’ efforts “to interfere in our politics” made public, it would compromise their surveillance methods and jeopardize “national security.”

But none of this has calmed the lynch-mob atmosphere. On Thursday, the *Globe and Mail*, which for well over a year has served as a conduit for intelligence agency leaks alleging the government has been remiss in countering Chinese “interference,” published an editorial that demanded Trudeau “blow away” the “smokescreen” his government has created and “name names in Parliament.” The prime minister, the *Globe* insisted, has the unique power “to make classified information public,” and he should use it now to “name names in Parliament.” “Let those facing allegations defend themselves there.”

On June 13, Jagmeet Singh, the head of the trade union-sponsored New Democratic Party (NDP), gave a semi-hysterical, quivering-voice press conference, after he read the full, un-redacted version of the report that NSICOP drafted on the basis of the “intelligence” provided it by Canada’s spy agencies. “I am not relieved after reading this report,” said Singh. “I am more concerned.”

The NDP leader claimed “a number” of MPs “have knowingly provided help to foreign governments, some to the detriment of Canada, and Canadians.”

“What they’re doing,” Singh asserted, “is unethical. It is in some cases against the law. They are indeed traitors to the country.”

Singh’s remarks were, at least in part, a direct retort to Elizabeth May, the long-time leader of the tiny Green Party. The day before, May had effectively said the opposite, after reading the same un-redacted report from the NSICOP—a specially vetted committee of MPs and Senators that

works with and scrutinizes the actions of the national security and intelligence agencies, and reports to the government on how their operations can be made more effective while remaining “lawful.”

Declaring herself “relieved,” May said she had seen no evidence in the nearly 100-page report of anything that “could be considered disloyalty to Canada.” A group of MPs, numbering “fewer than a handful,” may “have been compromised by foreign influence,” yet none, she insisted, “could be described as setting out to knowingly betray Canada in favour of a foreign government.”

But Singh, Pierre Poilievre (the far-right leader of the Conservative official opposition), and a clamorous chorus of media commentators are having none of it. One week on, Canadians continue to be barraged with lurid, unsubstantiated claims of “traitorous” MPs colluding with China and whose public naming is proclaimed vital to Canada’s “national security.”

Spurious “intelligence” and an ever-widening definition of what constitutes “foreign interference”

The reality is the allegations outlined in NSICOP’s “Special Report on Foreign Interference in Canada’s Democratic Processes and Institutions” are a mess of pottage.

Not only is the report based entirely on the say so of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and the Communications Security Establishment Canada (CSE), Canada’s two premier spy agencies. Central to its conclusions is an ever-evolving definition of what constitutes “foreign interference”—one that has rapidly been expanded to include much of what has hitherto been considered normal diplomatic efforts at persuasion and the deployment of “soft power.”

NSICOP and the government have urged the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to investigate any claims of illegal activities contained in the report. But its authors and current and former CSIS officials concede there is little to no chance any criminal charges will be laid, let alone convictions secured. While they offer several reasons for this, a pivotal one, from which they have sought to deflect attention, is that much of the “intelligence” supplied by CSIS and the CSE on which the claims of “disloyal” and “traitorous” MPs are based does not reach the level of “evidence.” That is to say, it is based on rumour, innuendo, conjecture, and attributing the most malign interpretation to facts, and would, therefore, not withstand legal scrutiny.

The intelligence agencies have also claimed that much of the so-called intelligence could not be presented in court because to do so would

endanger their sources and methods and upset their colleagues in the US-led Five Eyes global spy network.

Like everything else in the China interference imbroglio, the media have scrupulously avoided interrogating these claims and what precisely it is that the intelligence agencies are seeking to hide.

Among these clearly are that they are routinely spying on elected officials and politicians, whether on their own or in cahoots with their Five Eyes partners. Canada's principal signals intelligence agency, the CSE, is legally barred from spying on Canadians in most instances. However revelations by Edward Snowden, among others, have shown that the Five Eyes partners get round such prohibitions by spying in each other's country and sharing intelligence.

Manipulating public opinion and pushing official politics sharply to the right

Workers must beware. For close to a year-and-a-half now, Canada's national political establishment has been embroiled in a furor—initiated and whipped up by a campaign of illegal leaks by unknown CSIS operatives—over supposed Chinese interference in Canadian politics, including in the 2019 and 2021 federal elections.

From the outset, this campaign has served as a means to manipulate Canadian public opinion and push official politics and government policy sharply further right.

It has been aimed at poisoning popular attitudes toward China, so as to legitimize and provide justification for Canada's ever-more complete integration into Washington's all-sided diplomatic, economic, and military-strategic offensive against China, and more generally massive increases in military spending.

The claims of foreign and especially Chinese interference are also being used as the pretext for a massive assault on democratic rights. Last week, little more than a month after its tabling in parliament, the House of Commons unanimously adopted Bill C-70, *An Act respecting countering foreign interference*.

The bill, which the Senate has similarly agreed to stampede into law, will create a new vaguely-defined category of "foreign interference" crimes. It will make illegal political activity carried out at the direction of a "foreign entity," including, except within strictly defined limits, lobbying government officials. So sweeping and catch-all are these provisions, that even the country's fifteen major research universities have expressed fear that they will be caught in its ambit.

But there is more, much more. The furor over "foreign interference" is also being used to rush through legislation that dramatically increases CSIS's powers, including to access information about on-line users and sift through internet data without, or at most scant, judicial scrutiny. It also expands the legal definition of the crime of "sabotage" to include "interference" with public infrastructure or infrastructure building projects. Civil liberties groups have warned this change will provide the state with the means to impose draconian penalties on those protesting pipeline projects or engaging in "illegal" political strikes.

A third aim of the ruling class hullabaloo over foreign interference, which has been brought into sharper focus in recent weeks with the demands for the naming of the supposed traitors in parliament, is giving the security-intelligence agencies a much enhanced role in public political life, including in vetting the "loyalty" of the political elite.

The media, led by the *Globe and Mail*—the property not incidentally of Canada's richest billionaire family, the Thomsons—has treated the information provided by the intelligence agencies, whether via illegal leaks or through official channels, as if it were the gospel truth. No matter

that CSIS has been called out on multiple occasions for lying to the courts charged with overseeing its activities.

As for the politicians, so eager have they been to dance to the intelligence agencies' tune, that the latter have been able to give themselves democratic airs, the better to press forward with preparing the Canadian capitalist state for global war and suppressing mounting working class opposition. Thus Richard Fadden, a former CSIS Director and National Security Adviser to the prime minister and among the most strident voices within the national security establishment in warning of Chinese efforts to infiltrate Canadian politics at all levels, has come out in opposition to the McCarthyite campaign to name the "traitors in parliament." Said Fadden, "I don't believe that a person's career and life should be ruined on the basis of some piece of intelligence."

Oppose the Canada-US alliance of war and reaction

Three further interrelated points need be made.

First, the corporate media and political establishment, including the Trudeau Liberal government, have constructed a reactionary false narrative in which Canadian imperialism is depicted as the innocent victim of larger hostile powers. This has found graphic depiction in the multiple cartoons showing an amiable beaver menaced by a Chinese dragon, sometimes accompanied by a Russian bear.

The reality is that Canadian imperialism is tied at the hip to Washington, as US imperialism wages global war. The corporate media and the opposition parties have roundly denounced the Trudeau government for ignoring and dilly-dallying in the face of Chinese interference. The reality is that under its leadership, and with the full support of the union-sponsored NDP, which has pledged to keep the minority Liberal government in office until June 2025, Canadian imperialism is intimately involved in all the major fronts in what is a US-initiated global war to reassert western imperialist hegemony and re-divide the world's resources—against Russia and China, and in the Middle East.

As for foreign interference, Canada and its US ally devote vast resources to spying on and interfering in the political life of every country of the world and on a daily basis. This includes everything from talent spotting and grooming rising political leaders and funding networks of NGOs and purportedly independent trade unions, to organizing splits within political parties and creating opposition alliances and, when necessary, orchestrating scandals, coups, and other intrigues.

Second, the furor over foreign interference has *indeed* demonstrated that outside forces are intervening in and seeking to manipulate Canadian public opinion and political life. Only those directing that interference are to be found in the headquarters of the intelligence agencies in Ottawa, Washington and other Five Eye capitals.

Third, this points to the fact that Canadian democracy is on its last legs, but not because Canadians have access to what are claimed to be Chinese and Russian-orchestrated social media campaigns. No, the real threat to the democratic rights of Canadian working people arises from the crisis of world and Canadian capitalism. Impelled to defend their predatory interests through aggression and war abroad and ever intensifying worker-exploitation at home, the Canadian ruling class, like its imperialist counterparts, is increasingly turning toward authoritarian methods of rule, building up the repressive apparatus of the state and cultivating far-right forces.

A powerful faction of the ruling class, many of whose political and media representatives are to be found in the front ranks of those demanding the naming of the "traitorous" parliamentarians, are eager to see Trudeau replaced forthwith by Pierre Poilievre, the strident supporter

of the fascistic “Freedom” Convoy, and his Conservatives. Like the Trump-led Republicans and the British Conservatives, the Canadian ruling class’ traditional right-wing party of government is morphing into a far-right political formation.

To oppose war and defend their social and democratic rights, workers must resolutely oppose the trumped-up furor over “Chinese interference”; repudiate the reactionary union-NDP-Liberal alliance, which for decades has been used to smother working class opposition and impose the class war agenda of big business; and make the struggle for workers’ power and socialist internationalism the axis of the class struggle.



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