

Ultra-nationalist US demagogue Stephen Bannon hails Australia's new foreign interference laws

By James Cogan
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Stephen Bannon, the ultra-nationalist demagogue central to the 2016 US election campaign of Donald Trump, has hailed the passage of new “foreign interference” laws in Australia as critical to the escalating US offensive against Chinese “influence” in Asia and the world. Believed to still be in regular contact with the American president, Bannon gloated that the Trump administration had “started a war” with China on July 6, when it imposed huge tariffs on Chinese goods.

Bannon’s remarks make clear why the Liberal-National Party Coalition government and the Labor Party have gone to such efforts to keep the Australian population ignorant of the agenda behind the new legislation, which they successfully rammed through parliament, after just three days’ discussion, on June 28.

Having fully aligned with US preparations for war against China, the dominant factions of the Australian ruling class have already expanded the basing arrangements in Australia for US warships, submarines and long-range bombers capable of carrying nuclear weapons. Over the past several years, the Australian armed forces have been completely integrated with their US counterparts.

The new legislation creates an entirely new crime—“foreign interference”—which captures a broad range of criminal “offences” involving multiple types of collaboration between Australian individuals and organisations with their “foreign” counterparts. It also expands the number and type of offences deemed to involve treason, treachery, mutiny, sabotage, espionage, or violation of secrecy and massively increases the penalties such offences will attract.

The legislation’s fundamental purpose is to criminalise and politically suppress the mass opposition that will inevitably develop in the working class to a full-scale war with China, which would carry the danger of a nuclear catastrophe. Terrified of a rebellion from below, the Turnbull government and the Shorten Labor opposition are establishing the legal framework for a police-state and the complete illegalisation of political dissent.

The laws are also intended as the model for similar measures in the US itself, and in other countries, particularly those involved in the US-led Five Eyes surveillance network—the US, Australia, Britain, New Zealand and Canada—that have lined up behind Washington in its steadily escalating confrontation with Beijing.

Bannon, who is currently visiting Australia, was clearly eager to make public his support for the legislation and its underlying military and anti-democratic agenda. He was provided a platform for his fascistic views by the erstwhile “liberal” *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH), and more specifically by its international editor, Peter Hartcher.

Hartcher and the SMH shamelessly promoted Bannon’s rantings on July 10, in a lengthy report on the publication’s front page, replete with a large photo of Bannon himself.

Hartcher has played his own role in whipping up xenophobic sentiment in order to justify the “foreign interference” laws. In September 2016 he wrote a filthy, nationalistic column, calling for a purge of alleged Chinese-influenced “rats, flies, mosquitoes and sparrows” from Australian politics, business, universities and broader society. He has actively sought

to stoke hysteria over “Chinese interference,” while covering up the reality that the greatest “interference” in Australian politics emanates from Washington and the US embassy in Canberra.

Bannon made clear in his interview that the new legislation is admired by America’s far-right, the Trump administration and the US military-intelligence establishment.

Before he emerged as a prominent spokesperson for Trump’s presidential campaign, Bannon was a Goldman Sachs investment banker, California-based financial speculator, Hollywood movie executive producer and executive chair of *Breitbart News*, one of the main “alt-right” American nationalist publications.

In March 2016, he declared: “We’re going to war [with China] in the South China Sea in five to 10 years.”

American capitalism, he told Hartcher, represented Christian civilisation against a purported threat posed by China. His aim is to cultivate a nationalist and racist constituency in the US and internationally for a major war aimed at defending the global dominance of the American financial and corporate oligarchy against the rise of China.

Bannon commented: “Australia is at the forefront of the geopolitical contest of our time. If we continue on this path we’re down. China will control all of the countries of South East Asia and they will control Australia.”

The truth, of course, is that American-based corporations and investors have by far the greatest stake in Australia, followed by British-based interests. Moreover, Australian investment is above all concentrated in the US. The economic ties between the Australian and American financial and corporate elites underpin the US-Australia alliance and shape their military and strategic collaboration against China (see: “Report documents extent of US-Australia economic ties”).

Ignoring this fact, Bannon insisted: “You [Australia] are the San Andreas fault between China and the West. These are the two great systems that have built up over 2000 years. You are the representative of Athens and the democratic Western tradition, and China is a Confucian totalitarian system.”

Far from US imperialism and its Australian ally representing “democracy,” both are careering towards

authoritarianism and war, a process that Bannon both advocates and encourages, confirmed by his support for the new foreign interference laws.

These laws violate fundamental civil liberties and democratic rights, and have been neither explained to nor voted on by the Australian population.

The Socialist Equality Party (Australia) is holding public meetings over the next weeks, beginning on Sunday July 15 in Sydney, in order to inform workers and youth about the dangers inherent in these laws, and the necessity for the development of a broad-based movement demanding the repeal of the foreign interference laws and all anti-democratic legislation.

The meeting in Sydney this Sunday will be live-streamed via the SEP Facebook page to an Australian and world-wide audience. The SEP urges the greatest international participation.

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