

Anti-Chinese campaign escalates in New Zealand

By Tom Peters
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In recent weeks New Zealand's corporate media and sections of the political establishment and academia have ramped up a campaign against alleged Chinese political "influence" and "expansionism."

Last month, opposition National Party MP Jami-Lee Ross left the party after accusing leader Simon Bridges of concealing a \$100,000 donation from Chinese businessman Zhang Yikun in exchange for nominating an ethnic Chinese person for a seat in parliament. Bridges denied the allegation.

More sensationalist reports have followed, denouncing China's infrastructure investment in the Pacific and calling for restrictions on democratic rights of Chinese and other immigrants.

The aim of the xenophobic propaganda is to shift New Zealand into closer alignment with Washington's military encirclement and trade war against China. The anti-China campaign mirrors that of the Trump administration, which, without any evidence, accused Beijing of "meddling" in this month's US mid-term elections and seeking to remove Trump. In Australia, strategic think tanks and members of the governing Coalition and opposition Labor Party are pushing for the country to fully support the US threats against China.

On November 4, the *Sunday Star-Times* published a front-page article saying New Zealand's Labour Party-led government had been "blindsided" by a Chinese plan to invest \$15 million to upgrade roads and wharfs in the tiny Pacific country of Niue. The Niuean government signed a memorandum of understanding to join China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aimed at expanding China's trade and investment internationally.

Niue, which has a population of only 1,600, was annexed by New Zealand in 1900 and ruled as a brutal

dictatorship. The island suffered heavy losses of men sent to fight for New Zealand in World Wars I and II. While Niue was given limited self-government in 1974, the island remains a semi-colony. Its foreign affairs and defence policy is officially determined in Wellington.

Australia and New Zealand view the Pacific as their colonial backyard and are hostile to China's growing relations with the region. The *Star-Times* report quoted Niue opposition MP Terry Doe who accused the island's Premier Toke Talagi of being "anti-New Zealand at the moment." Doe noted that Chinese flags were waved at Niue's October 19 constitution day celebrations, while the New Zealand flag was not raised.

The newspaper declared "there are fears" in the Labour Party-New Zealand First-Greens coalition government that "the Cook Islands will be the next Pacific domino to fall." The Cook Islands, with just over 17,000 inhabitants, is another New Zealand semi-colony with some self-government. According to the report, "China has already paid the Rarotonga administration millions for pelagic tuna fisheries licences, and there is talk of Beijing funding the development of a deep-water port on Penrhyn Island."

The article noted that Foreign Minister Winston Peters, leader of the anti-Chinese New Zealand First Party, had met Cook Islands Premier Henry Puna and is understood to have warned him "be careful what you are getting into."

In an inflammatory comment to the newspaper, pro-Washington academic Anne-Marie Brady said China's BRI "has military-strategic aspects, it is not just an economic project... For example BRI partner states are being asked to host Beidou ground stations, China's equivalent of GPS used for military and civil purposes."

The nationalist *Daily Blog*, which is funded by a number of trade unions, quoted Brady's remark and asserted: "Chinese expansion into Niue will be followed by military bases."

Such claims are totally unsubstantiated. They are aimed at stoking fears of a Chinese invasion in order to justify war preparations. The *Daily Blog* previously endorsed the government's military policy, which is aimed at integrating the country into US and Australian military plans against China and Russia.

For more than a year, Brady and her supporters have stoked the anti-China campaign and given it a veneer of academic respectability. Brady has repeatedly called for New Zealand's spy agencies to investigate China's "influence" in politics, business, universities and the media. Without any evidence, she has accused Chinese-born National Party MP Jian Yang and Labour MP Raymond Huo of being Chinese Communist Party members.

While the media promotes Brady as a disinterested "expert," her research has been funded by the US government-sponsored Wilson Center and the NATO military alliance. Brady supports New Zealand's alliance with the US, including its membership in the US-led Five Eyes intelligence network, which carries out mass surveillance throughout the world. She has urged the government to join Washington's hypocritical denunciations of Chinese "expansionism" in the South China Sea.

Other academics are joining Brady. On November 6, Fairfax Media websites publicised a "policy briefing" by Dr Simon Chapple, from Victoria University of Wellington's School of Government, entitled "Building Democratic Resilience." It was published by a NATO-supported think tank, Small States and the New Security Environment, in which Brady plays a leading role.

The four-page briefing contains proposals for restricting democratic rights and promoting xenophobia and nationalism. Echoing the rhetoric of New Zealand First, Chapple wrote that one potential risk to democracy is "high and rising rates of immigration from diverse sources, including from countries where democratic norms and institutions are very different or in some cases completely non-existent."

Chapple called for New Zealand to diminish its economic reliance on China, which he called corrupt,

"economically unequal and authoritarian." He said nothing about NZ's support for the US, including its wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and preparations for war in Asia.

Chapple declared: "Democratic rights should be consciously limited to citizens." He proposed eliminating the right to vote currently held by permanent residents who have spent more than a year in New Zealand. Hundreds of thousands of people, mostly from China, India and other parts of Asia and the Pacific, would be denied this basic democratic right.

There has been virtually no criticism of Brady and Chapple's anti-democratic proposals in the media, academia or the political establishment. This includes the pseudo-left groups Socialist Aotearoa, the International Socialist Organisation and Fightback. Between 2011 and 2014, these three groups joined and campaigned for the Maori nationalist Mana Party, which sought to ally itself with NZ First and repeatedly demonised Chinese immigrants.

The anti-Chinese campaign underscores the correctness of the warnings made by the *World Socialist Web Site* that the Labour Party-led government is a right-wing nationalist formation. Far from being a "lesser evil" to the previous National Party government, Labour and NZ First have strengthened the alliance with US imperialism and named China and Russia the main "threats" to global stability.

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