

Australia: Pro-US ideologue brands student groups as China's "useful idiots"

By Oscar Grenfell
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Clive Hamilton, a Greens member and pro-US ideologue, has denounced student groups as "useful idiots" of the Chinese regime because they criticised protests that hysterically alleged that Beijing is taking over Australian universities.

Hamilton's statements, which he provided to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, are only the latest in a string of comments and speeches he has made over the past two years, claiming that there is pervasive "Chinese influence" in virtually every aspect of Australian society.

Last year, Hamilton published *Silent Invasion*, a book which asserted that almost every Australian institution was "being penetrated and shaped by a complex system of influence and control overseen by agencies serving the Chinese Communist Party."

Hamilton's denunciation of domestic student groups as patsies of Beijing demonstrates the anti-democratic logic of this xenophobic campaign, which has been conducted by the major political parties, the corporate media and the intelligence agencies. It is another warning of the steps being taken to criminalise opposition to Australia's involvement in the US preparations for conflict with China.

Hamilton's outburst was a response to a statement issued by the student club of the pseudo-left organisation Socialist Alternative at the University of Queensland (UQ), along with the Greens and Lam Chi Leung from Left 21 in Hong Kong. The Greens, apparently under substantial pressure, subsequently distanced themselves from the statement.

The statement had branded a planned July 31 protest on campus against "Chinese interference" as a "nationalistic, and therefore racist, demonstration against Chinese students at UQ which will have ramifications beyond the campus." It warned that "this demonstration will further entrench nationalist divisions both among Australian and Chinese students."

According to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Hamilton said words to the effect that "students who accused protesters of racism and demanded their event be shut down... [had] failed to understand the threat to Australia's democratic freedoms." The students were "naive radicals who are playing with fire," adding the menacing warning, "and they will get their fingers badly burned."

Hamilton claimed that the student groups had adopted an attitude of "I'm more anti-racist than you are, I'm so anti-racist I'm going to defend a communist party organisation on campus because it's Chinese and I'm appalled at Australia's history of anti-China racism."

In reality, Socialist Alternative has remained largely silent about the US military build-up against China and adapted to the anti-China campaign by falsely characterising China as "imperialist." For their part, the Greens have actively promoted claims that China is an expansionist power that must be countered.

Both organisations on campus felt compelled to issue the statement because of the transparently right-wing and xenophobic character of the demonstrations.

The controversy at UQ began last month, when students called protests ostensibly in support of the mass demonstrations in Hong Kong. At a protest on July 24, scuffles broke out between students who backed the mass movement of workers and youth in Hong Kong, and others who were allegedly Chinese students supportive of the Beijing regime. The corporate media in Australia and internationally immediately reported on the clashes.

Students have also reported that "Lennon Walls" on campus, featuring comments supportive of the Hong Kong demonstrations, have been vandalised repeatedly.

Such acts are undoubtedly anti-democratic and should be opposed. Some student groups, however, have branded them as evidence of a Chinese government plot to subvert "democracy" at universities and of the presence of "Chinese Communist Party thugs" on campus. No

evidence has been provided to support these claims.

The most recent protests on campus, to which Socialist Alternative and the Greens were responding, have been organised by right-wing students under the banner of “Transparency 4 UQ.”

These protests have focused on opposition to a Confucius Institute at UQ. Such institutes, which are funded by the Chinese government and promote Mandarin courses, along with cultural and student exchange programs, exist at a number of universities in Australia and internationally.

“Transparency 4 UQ,” however, has presented the centre as a threat to “Australian democracy” and proof of the university’s complicity in the repressive actions of the Chinese regime.

At the July 31 protest, one of the organisers of “Transparency 4 UQ,” Maddy Taylor declared that “UQ is selling out our personal freedom for blood money.”

Another speaker warned that the presence of the Chinese cultural institution threatened “free speech and free expression” throughout Australia, which she said had been “a cornerstone of our democracy for 100 years.”

Speakers cynically referenced the repression of the Tibetans and the Uighurs by the Chinese regime. While the democratic rights of both minorities undoubtedly have been trampled upon, their plight has been exploited by the US and its allies to legitimise an aggressive military build-up against China, and to try to foment right-wing separatist tendencies.

Speakers at the rally chanted “Free Tibet, free the Uighurs and free UQ,” absurdly implying that Queensland University students were living under some form of Chinese occupation.

Speakers at the protest were silent on the pervasive influence of the US government and its agencies on Australian campuses and more broadly, including through the establishment of pro-US think tanks and institutes at many universities. They said nothing about the partnership between UQ and Lockheed Martin, a US arms manufacturer implicated in American war crimes.

The transparent purpose of the group is to incite Australian nationalism, and to further the anti-democratic campaign against supposed Chinese influence. The group has carried out provocations, including “occupying” the Confucius Institute.

That is why “Transparency 4 UQ,” despite its small numbers, has been extensively promoted by the *New York Times*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and commercial television programs in Australia.

It also accounts for the enthusiastic backing of the protests by Hamilton, who has positioned himself as one of Australia’s most aggressive anti-China hawks. In his book *Silent Invasion*, Hamilton denounced Confucius Institutes and Chinese students as instruments of Chinese influence. He is using the controversy at UQ to push for an expanded assault on Chinese students and organisations.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* article reported: “The outspoken author has also called on intelligence authorities to investigate whether mainland Chinese students who clashed with Hong Kong students at a University of Queensland protest were acting at the behest of the Chinese consulate, in breach of foreign interference laws.”

In other words, Hamilton is calling on the intelligence agencies to launch prosecutions of Chinese students as “foreign spies” because of their political views and actions.

The foreign interference legislation, introduced last year by the Liberal-National government with Labor’s backing, is aimed at illegalising internationally-coordinated political activity, and creating the conditions for the banning of anti-war organisations.

In *Silent Invasion*, Hamilton suggested that the majority of Australia’s 1.2 million people of Chinese descent were not “loyal” to Australia. The logical conclusion is that mass repression is required, especially under conditions of Australia’s escalating involvement in the US drive to war with China.

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