

Australian establishment demands removal of alleged “pro-China” member of parliament

By James Cogan
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Newly-elected Liberal Party member of parliament, Gladys Liu, is the latest victim of the McCarthyite witch-hunt against all those in the establishment who are not considered fully supportive of Australia’s alignment with the US-led confrontation with China. In a vicious interview on Sky News on September 10, Liu was asked by right-wing commentator Andrew Bolt: “Are you a spokesman [sic] for the Chinese communist regime in Australia?”

Liu was first targeted that morning by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), which has spearheaded a nationalist and xenophobic three-year campaign over alleged Chinese “agents of influence” in Australian politics, business, universities and society as a whole. The hysteria over “Chinese influence” is the linchpin of a propaganda offensive alleging that China poses a threat and must be confronted with a massive military build-up by the US and its allies.

The ABC reported that Liu is listed as a “council member of the Guangdong chapter of the China Overseas Exchange Association between 2003 and 2015” and the “Shandong provincial chapter in 2010.” The association promotes Chinese economic interests internationally. In Australia, hundreds of businesspeople of Chinese background are members. Moreover, it is likely that many Australian politicians over last 20 or more years—as the country’s trade relations with China grew exponentially—have appeared at some corporate or cultural event sponsored by the association.

The ABC’s article also did not mention the fact that Liu has never been a Chinese citizen. She was born in Hong Kong and came to Australia as a student in 1985—12 years before the British colony was returned to China. She took out Australian citizenship in 1992. She owns pathology businesses and restaurants and has been an active member of the Liberal Party in Victoria since 2003. She was selected to stand for the seat of Chisholm in Melbourne’s middle-class eastern suburbs, in part because 20 percent of the electorate identifies as being of Chinese descent.

Liu has no history of commenting on foreign policy issues.

She nevertheless provides an easy target for the anti-China faction of the Australian establishment. As well as her ethnic background, she has been accused of making homophobic and racist statements, and engaging in controversial fund-raising within the Chinese émigré community.

The source of the attack on Liu is, with little doubt, the Australian intelligence agencies, which have previously fed the media with lurid allegations of “Chinese” interference.

According to media reports, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) has intervened on several occasions to portray Liu as an “agent of influence,” due to her association with figures who do business in China.

In February 2018, the spy agency advised the staff of then Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull not to allow him to attend a “meet-and-greet” fundraiser organised by Liu, due to its “concerns” over those who would be in attendance.

Liberal Party figures also alleged to the *Herald Sun* that “men in grey suits” had “warned a senior party official... that it would not be wise for the Liberal Party to preselect her” as a candidate for the 2019 federal election. They proceeded to do so, and now face a media storm barely five months after Liu was elected.

The ABC sought out comment from academic Clive Hamilton so as to paint Liu in the most sinister light. Hamilton is the author of the xenophobic book *Silent Invasion: China’s Influence in Australia*, which, without substantiation, labelled the majority of Chinese-born Australians and Chinese citizens in the country as a fifth column for Beijing.

In a chilling submission to a parliamentary committee on “foreign interference” in 2017, Hamilton publicly named 81 Australian-Chinese business and cultural organisations, 37 student organisations and 12 scientific associations as part of a purported web of Chinese influence.

Speaking to the ABC, Hamilton asserted: “The two bodies of which Ms Liu was a council member are explicitly created by the Communist Party of China in order to exert influence in countries like Australia.... I think parliament itself must now ask whether she is in breach of Section 44 of

the Constitution, which disqualifies any member who owes allegiance to a foreign power.”

In true witch-hunt fashion, Andrew Bolt’s Sky News interview with Liu on the evening of September 10 was intended to extract a confession from her about her “allegiance” to Beijing. As well as interrogating her over the China Overseas Exchange Association, Bolt demanded that a visibly flustered Liu publicly refer to China’s claims to territory in the South China Sea as “theft” and publicly label Chinese President Xi Jinping as a “dictator.”

Liu’s refusal to do so has been taken as evidence of guilt by the Australian Labor Party. Penny Wong, Labor’s Senate opposition leader, demanded that Prime Minister Scott Morrison “make a statement... that Gladys Liu is fit and proper to be in the parliament.” Labor frontbencher Joel Fitzgibbon declared that Liu’s “loyalties, at the very best, seem very confused” and also demanded she “reassure” parliament she is “fit and proper” to hold a seat.

The precedent by which Liu could be removed from her elected position was established in 2017 and 2018 by the High Court’s disqualification of 15 members of parliament on the grounds they were “dual citizens” with another country.

Section 44 (i) of the country’s 1901 Constitution proscribes anyone from sitting in parliament who has “allegiance, obedience, or adherence to a foreign power” or is “entitled” to the “rights and privileges of a foreign power.” This arcane language was utilised by the court to rule that any citizen who was born elsewhere, or whose parents, and in some cases even grandparents, were born elsewhere, is not eligible to sit in parliament unless they “renounce” their entitlement to foreign citizenship. At least 50 percent of the Australian population fall into this category.

Now, according to the pro-US militarists, any member of parliament who advocates peaceful relations with China, or who does not completely endorse all their anti-China assertions, should be denounced as having “allegiance, obedience or adherence” to Beijing and removed.

Labor brought the witch-hunt of Liu directly into the parliament yesterday and today. During question time, Labor MPs repeatedly demanded that the government answer whether she was “fit and proper” to hold office. They invoked the precedent of Labor Senator Sam Dastyari, who was pressured by his own party to resign after it was revealed he had allowed a Chinese businessman to pay travel and legal expenses and that had stated Australia should not take a position on the South China Sea disputes.

Labor’s frontbench, including its leader Anthony Albanese, has not bothered to explain how Liu—or Dastyari—is “disloyal” to Australia by declining to take a

position on competing territorial claims—which involve China, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines and Taiwan—or by refusing to provocatively label the Chinese president as a “dictator.”

The answer, however, is obvious. Gladys Liu, like Dastyari before her, has views that are at odds with the propaganda being used to justify Australia’s military alliance with the US and the open preparations for war against China.

Clive Hamilton spelled out the agenda behind the witch-hunt against Liu in a column published on the *Conversation* website today: “While many federal politicians have been disqualified from parliament because they have turned out to be citizens of another country, the question of allegiance to a foreign power is a far weightier reason for disqualification... If there is enough evidence to indicate she may owe allegiance to a foreign power, then parliament ought to refer her to the High Court.”

At this point, the Liberal-National Coalition government of Prime Minister Scott Morrison is standing by Liu, though some of the most ardent pro-US figures belong to it. Last month, Andrew Hastie, the rising star of the extreme right of the Liberal Party, compared China with Nazi Germany and is agitating for stepped-up Australian involvement in military provocations against China.

The anti-China hysteria has immense implications for broader democratic rights. Last year, draconian “foreign interference” laws were rammed through parliament by the Coalition and Labor, illegalising activity “on behalf of, or in collaboration with, a foreign principal.” The laws could potentially be used to criminalise collaboration with non-Australian groups or individuals on a host of political issues, including the opposition to the drive to war.

As the war danger grows, the “foreign interference” legislation provides the pseudo-legal pretext for untrammelled spying on opponents of militarism and the US alliance, police raids, mass arrests, and potentially the internment of Chinese-born Australian citizens as an “enemy” fifth column.

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