

New Zealand suspends extradition treaty with Hong Kong

By John Braddock
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New Zealand's Labour Party-led government has suspended the country's extradition treaty with Hong Kong, saying it could no longer trust that the city's justice system is independent of China. New Zealand will no longer deport any citizen to Hong Kong if charged with a crime.

Foreign Minister Winston Peters, who leads the right-wing nationalist NZ First Party in the governing coalition, said New Zealand would also change how it controls the trade of sensitive goods—such as technology that could have military applications—with Hong Kong.

Australia, Canada and the UK—all members of the US-led Five Eyes intelligence-gathering network along with NZ—had suspended their extradition treaties with Hong Kong earlier this month. US President Trump ended preferential economic treatment for Hong Kong and in a highly provocative move shut down China's consulate in Houston.

Peters told Radio NZ on July 29 that he had not spoken to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo specifically about the issue, but “he would know exactly what we think, as a country that respects New Zealand's independent political stance and our willingness to state what our beliefs are.”

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern told media that Hong Kong's security legislation did not “sit well with New Zealand's principles,” which she described as the “basic freedom of association and the right to take a political view.”

All this is sheer hypocrisy. The Ardern-led government has strengthened New Zealand's integration into US war preparations since assuming office. A 2018 defence policy statement labelled China and Russia the main “threats” to the global order, echoing the Pentagon. It has also ramped up military

spending and recruitment.

Ardern meanwhile has been leading the call internationally for measures to censor the internet, purportedly to suppress “hate speech.” Nor has the Labour government raised the slightest protest over the Trump administration's assault on basic democratic rights in Portland and other US cities, which are under virtual martial law enforced by armed federal agents dispatched to suppress protests against police violence.

China's embassy in Wellington responded to Peters' announcement by charging the government with a “gross interference in China's internal affairs,” and describing the move as a “serious violation of international law and basic norms governing international relations.”

The standoff follows rising diplomatic tensions between the two countries, in line with the increasingly aggressive moves by Washington and Canberra to confront China diplomatically and militarily, including in the South China Sea.

At the annual NZ-China Business Summit in Auckland on July 20, Ardern told the 500 delegates that the bilateral relationship was in “good shape.” But she then declared that New Zealand had a “direct and resounding interest” in Hong Kong's new security law, as well as the situation of China's Uyghur people and Taiwan's participation in the World Health Organisation.

This prompted a sharp response from Ambassador Wu Xi, who told the gathering: “Issues related to Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Tibet all touch on China's sovereignty and security and these are all China's internal affairs.”

New Zealand's ruling elite is caught between the demands of Washington and its militaristic confrontation with Beijing on the one hand, and the

importance of the Chinese trading relationship, NZ's largest export market. Referring to these tensions, Wu warned "the future lies in cooperation rather than confrontation."

Underpinning the deepening rift, a long-running anti-Chinese propaganda campaign continues to gather momentum. A July 21 car crash on a highway near the town of Tokoroa that killed two Chinese dissidents was seized upon by their supporters to raise accusations of "sabotage" against Beijing, without the slightest evidence.

The collision killed Xi Weiguo, Federation of Chinese Democracy NZ chair and Wang Lecheng, a member of the Independent Chinese PEN Centre. A third victim, Yu Hongming, is in Waikato Hospital along with two New Zealanders from another car. The three men were among a group of 10 "activists" travelling to Wellington to petition parliament over so-called "infiltration" by the Chinese Communist Party in New Zealand politics.

Police said their initial assessment indicated that a vehicle travelling in the opposite direction had crossed the centre line, glanced a second car and collided head-on with the vehicle containing the Chinese occupants.

Chen Weijian, publisher of a Chinese-language newspaper *Beijing Spring*, called the men "martyrs of democracy and freedom," while Falun Gong practitioner Daisy Lee said the deaths and injuries would cause "vital damage for the Chinese democracy movement organisations in overseas China."

Pro-US academic Anne-Marie Brady, from the University of Canterbury (UC), wasted no time upping the ante. She told parliament's Justice Select Committee two days later that people were "very, very worried that there could have been sabotage involved in the accident" and demanded the Security Intelligence Security (SIS) investigate.

Brady's previous allegations, heavily promoted in the media, that Chinese agents "sabotaged" her own car and broke into her office have not been substantiated by police.

Security analyst and former US State Department operative Paul Buchanan also joined in. He told Radio NZ that "independent Chinese voices in NZ regularly experienced intimidation by pro-Beijing groups", and it was legitimate for them to suspect "more sinister

causes than a mere accident."

On July 27, Buchanan went on to target UC over its partnership with a Chinese institute that he claims has military links. In 2018, the university signed an agreement with Harbin Institute of Technology to collaborate on teaching and research on renewable energy generation, marine science, engineering and international finance and trade. In May, Washington targeted Harbin for tighter "controls" over its activities.

Brady recently published a paper attacking UC and every other New Zealand university for collaborating with Chinese institutions on research that "may have potential military applications." The same paper notes approvingly New Zealand's much more extensive military collaboration with NATO and the US, including its membership in the Five Eyes intelligence network.

Prior to the 2017 election, Brady branded National Party MP Jian Yang and Labour MP Raymond Huo, without any evidence, as Chinese Communist Party "agents." Both MPs recently announced that they will retire from politics after the September 2020 election, following an intense campaign particularly against Yang by Brady, NZ First, much of the corporate media, the trade union-backed *Daily Blog* and the fascist group Action Zealandia.

In fact, the influence wielded by individuals such as Brady and Buchanan points to the fact that the most significant "interference" in New Zealand politics comes not from China but from the US and its allies. Ardern's government was formed in 2017 as a coalition with NZ First following the unprecedented intervention of US Ambassador Scott Brown who publicly indicated that Washington wanted the next government to take a firmer stand against China.

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