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Australian media promotes right-wing Steve Bannon and calls for confrontation with China

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC) premier current affairs program, "Four Corners," aired a lengthy interview last night with Steve Bannon, the nationalist demagogue who played a key role in the 2016 election campaign of Donald Trump and served for a time as his chief advisor.

The ABC interview was the second time in recent months that the Australian media has provided Bannon with a platform to elaborate his call for a full-scale economic and political confrontation against China to prevent it becoming a rival of US global dominance. His policies are largely being implemented by the Trump administration.

On July 9, the *Sydney Morning Herald* international editor Peter Hartcher published a feature highlighting Bannon's views.

Keynote presenter Sarah Ferguson travelled to Washington to interview Bannon for "Four Corners" in mid-August, ahead of the release of a documentary film he commissioned, *Trump@war*. The aim of the film is to mobilise the right-wing base of the Republican Party for the US congressional election on November 6.

Summing up his standpoint, Bannon stridently disagreed with Ferguson when she attempted to describe Trump's agenda as "trade war" to lower the trade deficit. He insisted: "This is not trade war ... Australia is at the frontlines of this. We are in an economic war with China, OK."

Australia, he asserted on several occasions, was the "tip of the spear in the Pacific" and the "canary in the mine shaft," in a clash of civilisations between what he alleged was the

“Judeo-Christian west” and Chinese “totalitarianism.” He mapped out a scenario in which the US and its allies seek to throw back decades of economic development in China, and bring global finance and production back under unchallenged American hegemony.

Trump, he asserted, was “trying to reset this economy to the economy that we’ve had since the American system came up in the 19th century.”

In the face of such megalomaniacal rantings of world domination, Ferguson did not raise the obvious issue. The logic of Bannon’s positions, and the manner with which it is being pursued by US imperialism, is a devastating military conflict with China, a nuclear-armed state.

Bannon’s views are being feted under conditions in which the Australia media has waged a near two-year xenophobic campaign against purported Chinese “interference” and “influence.” Hartcher in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the ABC have been among the most vociferous.

In late June, the anti-China campaign led directly to the Liberal-National Coalition government and the Labor Party opposition joining forces to push sweeping “foreign interference” laws through the parliament that will be used to prosecute alleged “agents” of the Chinese state.

Bannon has the highest praise for the anti-Chinese witch-hunt and legislation in Australia. He wants a similar campaign developed in the US and similar laws enacted.

The most dangerous aspect of Bannon’s politics is the consciousness with which he is attempting to forge a base for extreme nationalism and militarism. His anti-Chinese agitation is continually couched as a defence of the jobs and living standards of the “working class.” He works to channel workers’ anger and discontent behind a program of war, while denouncing the “globalist elites” and “Wall Street elites such as Goldman Sachs” over the destruction of large sections of manufacturing industry.

Bannon’s anti-China bashing and racist demagoguery is echoed by the American trade unions and significant sections of the Democratic Party. He boasted that he could win over to his alt-right movement up to “25 percent” of the supporters of Bernie Sanders.

Bannon has worked for years to fashion the Republican Party into a populist instrument to develop the US-led war drive against China. He was instrumental in Trump’s campaign to win the Republican presidential nomination, authoring much of the populist rhetoric that Trump employed. While he was sacked from the administration not long after it took office, Bannon remains a significant powerbroker within the Republican Party and is believed to still be in contact with both the president and Washington’s inner circle.

Bannon has developed close relations with nationalist formations and figures that he believes can be used to lurch politics to the right on a global scale. He has spoken in support of the United Kingdom Independent Party (UKIP) and Boris Johnson's anti-European Union wing of the British Conservative Party. In France, Bannon has been feted by the neo-fascist National Front. He has lauded the right-wing Italian government formed by the ultra-right League and Five Star Movement as a model for the world.

At various points in the interview, Bannon dismissed out of hand Ferguson's attempts to condemn his association with organisations that have long histories of racist and anti-Semitic positions. It was noteworthy, however, that she asked him nothing about the Trump administration's relentless persecution of so-called illegal immigrants, which is one of its chief nationalist appeals.

Nor did the ABC raise the glaring fact that the suspicion and hostility being developed toward China in both the US and Australia, and Bannon's continual reference to "Judeo-Christian" values, is stoking the most extreme anti-Chinese xenophobia.

Bannon did not answer directly when Ferguson asked about his connections in Australia. He has no shortage of co-thinkers, however, in the country's political establishment, trade unions and the media.

The Liberal Party faction that conspired to oust Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, including Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton and former Prime Minister Tony Abbott, share much of Bannon's outlook. Modelling themselves on the alt-right in the US and European right-wing movements, they are consciously seeking to refashion the Liberal Party into a far more economic nationalist movement, based on anti-immigrant and anti-Chinese sentiment.

"This revolution is global," Bannon declared. "It's coming to Australia."

The Bannon-Ferguson interview took place before the August 24 removal of Turnbull and installation of Scott Morrison as prime minister. It was significant that Bannon denounced Turnbull as "too much of an appeaser" of China.

The primary source of "interference" in Australian politics is the United States government and its agencies. To some extent, they had a hand in the political coup against Turnbull.

In both Washington and within the Australian military-intelligence apparatus, Turnbull's government had been considered "soft" on Beijing because, while generally backing all US actions and policies, it had refused to order Australian naval operations against

Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea and was critical of aspects of Trump's trade war measures.

Morrison will be under constant pressure of the extreme right of the Liberal Party and of Washington to take a far more bellicose stance, heightening the danger of conflict.

Bannon's rhetoric, and its promotion within the media, underscores the immense dangers that confront the international working class. Against economic nationalism and the attempt to defend the outmoded capitalist system, the fight for a socialist and internationalist perspective to unify workers around the world must be developed with the necessary sense of urgency.