

Sinophobia Sweeps Canadian Politics

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Paranoia, disregard for evidence and over-the-top rhetoric to encourage hate. And I'm not talking about Donald Trump's Republicans.

Progressive Canadian should counter a wave of McCarthyite Sinophobia sweeping this country's politics.

The over-the-top reaction to a recent "[Zoom](#) to Free Meng Wanzhou" highlights the issue. The event was [labelled](#) "Chinese Communist Party propaganda" in the House of Commons and criticized by numerous media. When interviewing Paul Manly about his participation in the event journalist Evan Solomon repeatedly accused the Green MP of being "[used](#) by Chinese authorities" and for "Chinese propaganda".

What's going on? As China became more prosperous, the US military began a "[pivot](#)" towards Asia a decade ago. More recently, some important US capitalists have become increasingly unhappy with the terms imposed by the Chinese government on their operations there. Simultaneously, labour costs in China have risen sharply in recent years, taking some of the shine off the country as a low-wage assembly hub.

Alongside these broader economic and geopolitical trends, Donald Trump has been railing against the "China disease" for months. This xenophobia is shaping Canadian politics as well. Most of the [front-page](#) of a February Vancouver *Province* read: "Second China Virus Case in BC" while in April Conservative leadership candidate, Derek Sloan, [said](#) Chief Public Health Officer Theresa Tam was working for China and advancing "Chinese Communist propaganda". Polls show a [sharp rise](#) in insults, threats and assaults targeting Canadians of Chinese descent since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

China bashing is central to new Conservative leader Erin O'Toole's political messaging. He harps on about standing up for "Canadian values" against the Communist Party of China. In April O'Toole [called for](#) a "new Cold War" with China and recently said there's "no greater threat to Canada's interests than the rise of China". (Greater than the climate crisis, COVID-19 pandemic, species collapse, opioid crisis, nuclear holocaust, economic inequality?)

To counter the Chinese "threat" the Conservatives openly appeal to British empire settler solidarity. In criticizing the "Free Meng Wanzhou" event in the House of Commons Conservative Shadow Minister for *Diversity, Inclusion and Youth* Raquel Dancho said, "[all Canadian](#) MPs need to stand with our Five Eyes partners and other like-minded allies to push back on Beijing's intimidation tactics." For his part, O'Toole recently declared, "[Canada](#) should work very closely with our Five Eyes allies" on countering the world's most populous nation.

Settler colonialism and empire unite the Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and US Five Eyes alliance that excludes wealthier non-white nations (Japan and South Korea) or those with more English speakers (India and Nigeria). It's not a coincidence that the only four countries that originally [voted against](#) the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007 are part of the Five Eyes.

There is a long history of stirring up Sinophobia in Canada as part of US/British conflict with that country. During the US-led Korean War in the early 1950s Canadian troops [denigrated](#) the "yellow horde" of North Korean and Chinese "chinks" they fought. At a time when a small number of Canadians helped the British suppress the boxer rebellion in 1900 newspapers labeled China the "sick man of Asia," which threatened European social mores. In opposing voting rights for "Chinamen" in 1885, Prime Minister John A. MacDonald said he feared their enfranchisement would lead to officials who "[represent](#) Chinese eccentricities, Chinese immorality, Asiatic principles altogether opposite to our wishes." He concluded, "the Chinese has no British instincts or British feelings or aspirations."

Progressives should resist the current 'Yellow peril' rooted in geopolitical competition and racism. To do so we should be clear eyed about Chinese power, which is significant and often authoritarian though somewhat exaggerated. That country's global influence has yet to reflect its share of the world's population. In 2019 the country's GDP per person was \$10,000 – equal to Mexico – while US GDP was \$60,000. The US has over [800 military](#) bases in 80 countries around the world while the UK has 145 military facilities in [42 countries](#). China has [one international](#) base in Djibouti. The US and UK have bases in numerous countries bordering China. (In June 2012 the Canadian Press reported, "[Canada](#) is seeking a deal with Singapore to establish a military staging post there as part of its effort to support the United States' 'pivot' toward Asia to counter a rising China.") How many bases does China have in Canada or Mexico?

Additionally, China rarely deploys troops internationally. The US, Canada and UK, on the other hand, have been involved in recent wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, etc.

As the oldest and most populous nation, a prosperous and united China unquestionably threatens the US Empire's dominance. Decision-makers in Washington have been concerned about that since at least 1949, which is part of the reason they invaded Korea after Mao's nationalist/communist victory.

The military and large sections of the ruling classes in those countries integrated into the US Empire want to prevent China from taking its rightful place in world affairs. They are pushing economic, political and military means to "contain" China.

But those of us who believe in equality for all people, who fight racism and xenophobia, must say no. Progressives need to resist the logic of empire and oppose the wave of Sinophobia sweeping Canadian politics.

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