

Why is Nine promoting war with China?

Australian broadcasting conglomerate Nine Entertainment has of late become so caught up in vicarious US jingoism that it is now using both its flagship current-affairs program *60 Minutes*, and its daily newspapers *The Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* to promote the idea that Australia is morally obliged to go to war with China at the USA's behest in the name of defending "freedom" and "democracy". Opponents of the Anglo-American-Australian establishment's drive towards war, notably including former Labor Party Prime Minister Paul Keating, have singled out Nine's papers for criticism over and above those of its rival News Corp, for the very good reason that whereas pro-war propaganda is as natural to Rupert Murdoch's News Corp as breathing, the former are regarded as bastions of the "left" that had traditionally opposed Australian participation in America's wars. But in fact Nine's current crop of China-bashers are merely the latest in a long line of nominally left-wing journalists to be co-opted as propagandists for Anglo-American world empire, by puppeteers with a direct ideological lineage to US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) front groups established early in the Cold War, to indoctrinate the so-called West's own populations under the pretence of fighting communism.



Peter Coleman, seen here in 2012, was a CIA-connected Liberal politician whose son-in-law Peter Costello chairs the Nine media that champions the US-UK war agenda against China. Photo: Wikipedia

Nine has been a favoured outlet for anti-China reporting based variously on selective leaks and disinformation by the Anglo-American intelligence apparatus, mostly via Canberra's domestic spying agency the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), ever since the Australian government took its deliberate turn towards antagonising Beijing in 2017. Many of these stories have been fronted by *Age* reporter and *60 Minutes* presenter Nick McKenzie, who continues in his starring role despite several of his stories having resulted in Nine being successfully sued for defamation. After a year of increasingly hysterical stories promoting the "China threat hypothesis", which holds that "authoritarian" China poses an existential threat to freedom and "democracy" everywhere, simply by existing and doing alright for itself, *60 Minutes* graduated from alarmism to full-blown cheerleading for war with its 21 May 2023 episode, in back-to-back segments titled "Weapons For Peace" and "What the Five Eyes See". Aptly described by Australian independent writer Caitlin Johnstone as "as jaw-droppingly propagandistic as anything I have ever seen", the first is a paean to US militarism in the Asia-Pacific, in which presenter Amelia Adams claims that Australia going to war with China alongside the USA to prevent the reunification of Taiwan is "crucial to maintaining democracy in the region", because "gaining control of Taiwan is [the] key for China to unlock the entire Pacific". And never mind the fact that Taiwan is an island located just over 100 kilometres off the coast of mainland China, whose surrounding waters the Chinese navy has already proven it can control at will, and possession of which the USA's own military intelligence agencies say would make no difference to China's "force projection" capabilities further afield. In the second, as Johnstone accurately summarises, McKenzie "unquestioningly regurgitates talking points from the western intelligence cartel and gives supportive interviews to Five Eyes spooks. ... 'Tonight they want you to know what they see', says McKenzie, which is the same as saying 'We're telling you what the Five Eyes intelligence agencies told us to tell you.'" Five Eyes is the global "intelligence-sharing" alliance between the USA, UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. It is noteworthy, however, that no NZ and only one Australian official (Australian Federal Police Commissioner Reece Kershaw, who refused to condemn China outright) was featured, with most of the airtime given to US and British operatives.

New Cold War, same old culture war

So much for Nine's sources for its latest bout of insane warmongering; but whence the apparently reflexive antipathy towards China that would predispose it towards such lunacy in the first place?

First, McKenzie is not the only Nine/Fairfax journalist with intelligence connections; for example Chris Uhlmann, the political editor in 2017-22, was officially confirmed in 2020 as one of several Australian journalists to have received briefings directly from ASIO, which in at least one case appear to have informed his personal attacks on politicians who challenged the anti-China agenda. The chairman of Nine's board since 2016, meanwhile, is former federal Treasurer Peter Costello, whose late father-in-law, former New South Wales state and federal Liberal MP Peter Coleman, was not only a major intellectual influence on Costello himself, but a key ideological warrior of the Cold War.

Born in Melbourne in 1918, Coleman studied at Sydney University under the (in Costello's words) "ex- and anticommunist Professor John Anderson", and then at the London School of Economics. In 1967-78 and 1981-90 he was editor of *Quadrant*, a monthly magazine which bills itself as having a "bias towards cultural freedom, anti-totalitarianism and classical liberalism". Most accounts have it that *Quadrant* was founded in 1956 by Coleman's friend and mentor, the right-wing Catholic anti-Marxist agitator and poet James McCauley. As historian Cassandra Pybus explained in an article published in 2000 by the *Australian Book Review*, however, it was actually "the brainchild of [publisher] Richard Krygier, the founding secretary of the Australian branch of the Congress for Cultural Freedom [CCF], which was established by the CIA in 1950" in Berlin, Germany for the express purpose of alienating the European (and later global) "left" from the Soviet Union and socialist thinkers generally.

In 1951, Pybus recounted, Krygier had approached CIA Berlin office chief Michael Josselson "and offered his services as [the CCF's] antipodean representative. ... Just as *Encounter* had been established in England as a counter to *The New Statesman*, so Krygier sought funding from Josselson for a magazine to challenge *Meanjin*, which he insisted was pro-communist. On advice from Bob Santamaria, Australia's most virulent anti-communist campaigner, Krygier chose James McCauley as editor." *Quadrant* was one of 20 such magazines the CCF established worldwide for such purposes, and the only one that survives today—though it would not have without various government hand-outs over the years. Until at least the mid-1960s, at which time it was propagandising in favour of the USA's war on Vietnam, it was kept alive entirely by CIA funding laundered through the CCF. Ironically, McCauley was too rabidly anti-communist for the CIA's liking. "The whole point of the covert operation was subtlety", wrote Pybus; "to win over the left-leaning intellectuals to the American position, not further alienate them."

The CIA's funding of the CCF was exposed by the *New York Times* in 1966, after which it rebranded as the International Association for Cultural Freedom, and continued under that name until 1979 with funding from the Ford Foundation (which may well also have come originally from the US government). After Coleman took *Quadrant's* editorial reins in 1967, by his own account he set about to "rehabilitate" the CCF by writing what became the closest thing to its official history, *The Liberal Conspiracy*, published in 1989. Pointing towards Coleman's own liberal-imperialist fanaticism, one reviewer observed in 1990 that "His sole criticism of the CIA, that the agency forced the Congress to retain a sterile leftist liberalism that prevented it from taking the step towards neoconservatism, will surprise many readers. I know of no other document that accuses the CIA of excessive sympathy for the left."

Coleman died in 2019, aged 90, but his influence survives him—both via Costello and co. at Nine, and more importantly through the Australian-American Leadership Dialogue (AALD), founded in 1992 by his former chief of staff Phil Scanlan (then an executive at Coca-Cola-Amatil), which brings together leading politicians, government officials, journalists, and business executives from Australia and the USA for secretive annual talks. In a 10 November 2016 ABC 7.30 interview, former PM Keating blamed the AALD for making Australian politicians of both parties subservient to the USA: "the [AALD], which by the way I never attended ... is a sort of a cult thing ... and I don't know what the Americans put in the drinking water, but whenever the Australians come back, they're all bowing and scraping and going on." The AALD's CEO since last April is former Liberal MP Tony Smith, the Speaker of the House of Representatives in 2015-22, who was Costello's chief of staff from the mid-1990s before entering Parliament in 2001.

By Richard Bardon, Australian Alert Service, 7 June 2023