

Canada falls in line behind US war drive

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Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien told an audience of high school students October 10 that Canada would join a US-led war against Iraq.

Asked by a student whether he thought the US should wage war on Iraq “the United Nations notwithstanding,” Chrétien sidestepped the issue of a US invasion of Iraq not sanctioned by the UN Security Council. Instead, the prime minister gave his most emphatic statement to date of Canadian support for a war against Iraq mounted under the cover of a UN resolution: “If the United Nations were to come to the conclusion that we have to go there to destroy the armaments of mass destruction that [Iraqi President Saddam Hussein] might have, we will go there.”

Later in the day, Chrétien’s aides tried to downplay the significance of his remarks, saying that they did not represent a change in the government’s position. One unnamed official even claimed, despite the verbatim record, that Chrétien had been referring to the possibility of Canadian weapons inspectors—not troops—being sent to Iraq.

Chrétien and his Liberal government have been criticized by the corporate media and the opposition Canadian Alliance for failing to elaborate a clear and coherent policy on the US drive for “regime change” in Iraq. In fact, the Liberals are working to prepare public opinion for Canadian participation in a US-led war against Iraq. But, as in the case of other key right-wing policy shifts, such as the adoption of the five-year \$100 billion program of tax cuts or Canadian participation in the war on Afghanistan, Chrétien is proceeding cautiously till events or an overwhelming ruling class consensus force him to act.

Till September, Chrétien and his ministers were insisting military action against Iraq was unwarranted unless a clear link could be established between Saddam Hussein’s regime and Al Qaeda. Now they parrot the Bush administration position that urgent

action, up to and including war, is required to ensure that Iraq is stripped of any weapons of mass destruction.

The Canadian government has strongly endorsed US and British demands for a new Security Council resolution on Iraq. Declared Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham October 4, “We will be behind the United States and the British through a UN Security Council resolution which is clear, which indicates to Iraq that it has to admit inspectors without any limitation whatsoever, and that there would be consequences in case this is not done.” Graham’s claim that Canadian support for a US/British sponsored resolution is aimed at paving the way for a diplomatic resolution to the US-Iraq conflict is double-speak. Washington and London have made clear that their only motive in seeking a Security Council resolution is to provide UN legitimacy for a war against Iraq and that if the UN does not provide them with a resolution so framed as to make Iraqi compliance impossible and authorizing military action, they will act without UN sanction to forcibly impose their will on Iraq.

Defence Minister John McCallum has been even more forthright in indicating Canadian support for Washington’s war threats. On October 1, he declared, “Let no one think Canada will hesitate to provide military support” if diplomatic efforts fail. “Canada is sometimes known as a peaceable kingdom but never as a pacifist kingdom.” The next day, McCallum dismissed media and opposition suggestions that the Canadian Armed Forces, due to its participation in the war against Afghanistan and ongoing commitments in the Balkans, lacks the personnel and resources to make a significant contribution to military action against Iraq. “If the government calls upon us,” declared McCallum, “we will make a sizeable commitment.” While insisting no decisions had been made, McCallum indicated that Canada could contribute a force at least on the scale of

the 2,000-strong army, navy and air force contingent deployed to the Afghan war theatre.

There are two reasons the Liberal government remains skittish about explicitly backing a US war against Iraq without UN sanction, although in 1999 it was quite ready to dispatch Canadian planes and pilots to participate in the non-UN authorized, NATO bombing of Serbia.

Neither of these two reasons have anything to do with the fate of the Iraqi people.

The Chrétien Liberals recognize there is widespread popular opposition to the war. With even the opinion polls commissioned by the corporate media showing a majority of Canadians opposed to a war against Iraq, they believe it important to gain the imprimatur of the UN, so as to give the war and the planned seizure of Iraq's oil reserves a pacific fig leaf.

Second, there are deep reservations within the Canadian ruling class over their US rivals' increasingly aggressive international posture and willingness to discard the system of multi-lateral institutions and relations through which inter-imperialist rivalries have been managed since World War II.

For decades a principal tenet of Canadian foreign policy has been to promote so-called multilateralism as a means of offsetting US economic and geo-political power and pursuing Canadian big business' own predatory interests.

With the Canada-US Free Trade Pact and then NAFTA, the Canadian bourgeoisie was forced to concede that its attempt to diversify its trading relationships had failed and that under conditions of intensified global competition it had no choice but to join a trading bloc with its traditional US rivals. Now with the Bush administration embarking on a policy of Fortress North America, recklessly pursuing its own interests in disregard of traditional alliances and institutions, the Canadian ruling class faces the loss of an important means of influencing and tempering US policy.

The Liberals recognize that in the event of a rupture between the US and Europe economics and geo-politics dictate that the Canadian bourgeoisie must stand with the US. Nevertheless, they cling to the hope that a means can be found to avert such a break and the old geo-political order resurrected. Thus they are pressing for some deal to be made through the Security Council

that will reconcile the Bush administration's plans to conquer Iraq with the interests of the other great powers.

In the long run, however, the antagonisms between the US and the other aspirant great powers are irrepressible. As Jeffrey Simpson, the senior political commentator at the country's most influential newspaper wrote in response to the Bush administration's *National Security Strategy*: "The United States' real or imagined enemies are served notice by this new doctrine ... But Washington's friends too, need to reconsider their traditional approaches to the US, because the new doctrine challenges many of their old assumptions about how to deal with this country."

Another faction of the Canadian bourgeoisie, associated with the ultra right-wing Canadian Alliance, believes Canadian capital can best preserve the means to assert its independent interests by working to solidify Fortress North America and aggressively supporting the global ambitions of their US partners. Last month Alan Gotlieb, Canada's Ambassador to the US from 1981-89, proclaimed the traditional Canadian foreign policy aim of promoting common action by so-called middle powers obsolete. "In the heyday of the Cold War and Canadian diplomacy, Europe consisted largely of a collection of middle powers. Today Europe is a single economic super-power but incapable of effectively exercising power on the world stage, because of its military weakness. ... China is a nascent great power, not a middle one. What is the role of middle powers? Who are they?"

"Rather than eschewing further integration with the United States, shouldn't we be building on NAFTA to create new rules, new tribunals, new institutions to secure our trade? ... Are there not elements of a grand bargain to be struck, combining North American, defence and security arrangements within a common perimeter."



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