

Mass protests to greet Bush in Canada

Oppose US imperialism by mobilizing the international working class

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30 November 2004

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Two types of reception await US President George W. Bush when he comes to Canada this morning for a two-day state visit.

From Canada's ruling elite, Bush can expect red-carpet treatment and fulsome applause.

The popular reaction will be altogether different. Thousands, possibly tens of thousands, of angry protestors, will take to the streets to denounce Bush, giving voice to the deep-rooted popular opposition to the US's illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq. Polls have consistently shown that if Canadians had had the opportunity to vote in the US presidential election considerably less than a quarter would have backed Bush.

Fears of this popular opposition finding an echo in Canada's legislature led White House officials to turn down a Liberal government request that Bush address parliament. The US president will instead deliver the main speech of his Canadian visit in the provincial town of Halifax, where some US-bound airline passengers were diverted after the attacks of September 11, 2001. In "thanking" the town for its hospitality, Bush will no doubt trot out his well-worn "war on terror" mantra—the pretext his administration has used to mount aggressive actions around the world and to curtail civil liberties at home.

That Bush's handlers feel compelled to hustle him off to Halifax speaks volumes about the fear and isolation of his administration. In Canada, like virtually everywhere else in the world, Bush is reviled for he heads a government that has raped Iraq, promoted Christian fundamentalism, lavished the rich with tax cuts and presided over the rampant growth of corporate criminality.

Above all, Bush handlers don't want working people in the US to learn of the extent of the global opposition to the current administration, for fear it would stimulate the opposition at home. Bush was returned as president not because a majority of the American people approve of his militarist, neo-conservative agenda, but because he faced no real opposition. Democratic contender John Kerry ran a campaign in which he portrayed himself as "Bush lite."

From Washington's standpoint, Bush's visit to Canada has largely to do with the need to muster international support for his failed Iraq policy. As was noted by the *Globe & Mail*, Canada's leading financial daily newspaper, "the trip is part of a broader plan to smooth out bumpy relations with Washington's key allies after a first term marred by discord over international affairs, particularly the war in Iraq."

Prime Minister Paul Martin is expected to greet Bush with a promise to send Canadian personnel to Iraq to help oversee the planned January 30 Iraqi election. This would serve to provide some international legitimacy to what will be a charade—given that the elections are to be staged-managed by the US and even as its military employs deadly, indiscriminate violence against ordinary Iraqis who dare raise their voices

against the foreign occupation.

Having secured political support from Canada, a country that at the eleventh hour balked at joining the US-led invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration hopes to be in a better position to pressure its weightier critics on the Iraq question, above all France and Germany.

Canada is also expected to bolster its military presence in Afghanistan, another front in Bush's all-encompassing "war on terror."

In return, the Canadian government hopes to win favors from Washington. For Canada's ruling elite, maintaining good relations with the United States—Canada-US trade accounts for 40 percent of Canada's GNP—is a necessity. With increasing anxiety, the most powerful sections of Canadian capital have been urging Ottawa to enter into a new economic, military and geopolitical partnership with the US, so as to ensure that Canada is within the Fortress America that the US political and economic elite is erecting.

Former Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chrétien headed the most right-wing, pro-big business government since the Great Depression. His government cut tens of billions from public spending, slashed jobless benefits, reduced corporate and personal taxes by \$100 billion over five years, embraced NAFTA, gave the police and the courts a battery of new powers in the name of fighting terrorism, and in support of the US invasion of Afghanistan launched the biggest Canadian military operation since the Korean War. Yet because Chrétien occasionally took foreign policy stances different from that of Washington and clung to a Canadian nationalist rhetoric tinged with anti-Americanism, Canadian big business grew concerned that bilateral relations with the US were being put at risk.

Those concerns reached their high point after September 11 2001, when tightened US security measures led to long line-ups at the border, disrupting two-way trade and integrated production lines between the two countries. Another vexing issue for Canada's corporate elite has been the lingering trade conflicts, including the hefty anti-dumping and countervailing duties imposed by the US on Canadian exports of softwood lumber and the long delay in reopening the border to Canadian cattle exports following a case of Mad Cow Disease found on a ranch in Alberta in May 2003.

Ultimately Chrétien was forced to resign and replaced by his long-time finance minister Paul Martin, who promised that repairing relations with the Bush administration would be among his top priorities.

There was an element of self-delusion in the Canadian elite's obsession to get rid of Chrétien—as if the deteriorating relationship with the US was simply the result of Chrétien's inability to get along personally with Bush or his too-strident nationalist rhetoric.

The truth is the frictions in Canada-US relations and the calls from the likes of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE) for Canada to abandon its traditional multilateralist posture and ally even more closely with the US are product of a sea change in inter-state relations that is

rooted in the ever-intensifying struggle among corporations and capitalist nation states for markets, natural resources and pools of labor to exploit. If the US has repudiated its decades-old policy of leading alliances of the major capitalist powers and now seeks to use its military might unilaterally to assert its control over the oil reserves of the Middle East and Central Asia, it is because the US is increasingly hobbled by gargantuan trade, budget and current accounts deficits. The US elite hopes to use the Pentagon's military superiority to offset its eroding economic power.

In response to this new situation, the elites of France and Germany are striving to develop the European Union as an economic and military challenger to America on the world arena. Others, such as British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Australian Prime Minister John Howard, have joined the US-led war in Iraq in the hopes of securing a privileged relationship with the US, including support for colonial-type operations of their own in their "spheres of influence."

The options before Canada's ruling class—because of its geographic proximity to, and unparalleled economic dependence on, the US—are more restricted. While the Liberals continue to talk about the need for Canada to chart its own course, they are rapidly moving toward implementing the CCCE's demand for a new partnership with the US, although their hope is that Mexico can be included as well, so as to partially offset US power. As for the Official Opposition Conservatives, they routinely attack the Martin Liberals for not imitating Blair and Howard.

Working people in Canada must oppose the Martin Liberal government's support for the US occupation of Iraq and the plans of Canada's elite to tie Canada even more tightly to a US-led economic, military and geopolitical bloc.

But in opposing US imperialism working people in Canada must carefully distinguish between those who fight for the unity of the international working class against capitalism and those who oppose Washington and Wall Street from the standpoint of defending their own predatory interests or who would channel the working class into the blind alley of nationalism.

Take the case of such imperialist rivals of the US as France and Germany. To the extent that they opposed American policy in Iraq, they did so for their own purposes. They are not opposed to the imperialist principle of invading weaker countries, plundering their resources and oppressing their peoples—as long as *they* stand to benefit from it and *their* economic interests are secured. France's current intervention in its former African colony of Côte d'Ivoire is a case in point.

In Canada, the social-democratic New Democratic Party is making an appeal to the popular hostility to the Bush administration. Canada's social democrats, like their counterparts in the British Labour Party and France's Socialist Party, hurtled toward the right during the 1990s and where they were in government—especially Ontario and British Columbia—imposed massive social spending cuts and antiunion laws. They used last year's colossal antiwar demonstrations to try to refurbish their left credentials. But for a decade the NDP had supported the UN sanctions regime that punished Iraq's civilian population and ultimately helped pave the way for the US-British invasion.

Now, bending to the Canadian elite's demands for Bush to be treated with respect, NDP leader Jack Layton has ordered his MPs to mind their manners, pleaded for a face-to-face meeting with the US president, and virtually dropped any mention of Iraq. No doubt to raise such delicate matters as the lies Bush used to launch his war on Iraq, the US torture of Iraqis at Abu Ghraib, or the massacre of thousands of civilians in Fallujah and other Iraqi cities would be "disrespectful."

Various "left" groups that call themselves socialist, but work hand in glove with the union bureaucracy and the NDP, have a more radical-sounding prescription: to the Bush administration, and the corporate elite's "sell-out" of Canada, they counterpose the fight for "Canadian

sovereignty," on the grounds that the Canadian nation state is the incarnation of "progressive values."

This is a retrograde and reactionary perspective that would turn Canadian workers away from the struggle to unite their struggles with those of workers in the US, Mexico and across the globe and instead lead them to make common cause with sections of Canadian capital.

The Canadian nation state was forged by the Canadian bourgeoisie through an alliance with the greatest colonial empire in history. It has served as the platform from which Canadian capital has advanced its own imperialist interests on the world stage, including through enthusiastic participation in the two world wars of the last century. The moderately better social benefits workers enjoy in Canada as compared with those in the US are not due to progressive Canadian values. They are rather a product of the titanic struggles of the working class in the 1960s and 1970s—struggles that the union bureaucracy and NDP ultimately were able to politically derail. In so doing they promoted a remodelled Canadian nationalism that, unlike the until then prevailing Tory version of a British North American nation not infected by US republicanism and egalitarianism, cast Canada as a liberal, pacific counterpoint to US imperialism.

Last but not least, the perspective of Canadian sovereignty cuts across the objective logic of economic development, which is creating an ever-more economically integrated world.

Under capitalism and the nation-state system in which it is historically rooted, the development of global production has become an instrument for corporations to slash wages and working conditions and fuels economic and military conflicts among the various rival national capitalist cliques. The answer to the assault on the social position of the working class and militarism lies, however, not in seeking to restrain the productive forces within the narrow confines of the nation state, but to create the basis for a rational use of the resources of the world economy by freeing them from the shackles of private ownership and nation states.

All those in Canada—workers, young people, artists, professionals and intellectuals—who are genuinely horrified by the barbaric actions of the US government in places such as Iraq must never forget there are two Americas. There is the America of the top 1 percent which owns 40 percent of the country's wealth. And there is working and struggling America, whose sons and daughters are being sent far away from home to kill and be killed.

A genuine struggle against US imperialism and its ally, Canada's financial and corporate establishment, must be based on a conscious alliance with the one force that is more powerful than US tanks and missiles—the US working class. And it must be aimed at the root of the crisis, the failed capitalist profit system and the outmoded nation-state political structures. This requires a new political strategy based on the international unity of the working class and the struggle for social equality. This is the perspective of international socialism fought for by the Socialist Equality Party.



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