

# Canada invokes “jihadi threat” to pursue agenda of war and reaction

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Canada’s Conservative government is steamrolling its new “anti-terrorism” bill through parliament—legislation that tramples on core democratic rights and dramatically augments the power of the state and its national-security apparatus.

The Conservatives, who last fall sent Canada to war yet again, this time in Iraq, are also plotting to involve Canada still more deeply in US imperialism’s global offensive.

In both instances, the government is justifying its actions with the claim that Canada is under attack from Islamist terrorism.

This has been a constant refrain of Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his ministers since the killing of two members of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) last October in separate incidents in St.-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Quebec and Ottawa.

Harper and his Conservatives seized on these killings—the work of deeply troubled individuals who had no connection with each other, let alone any terrorist group in Canada or the Middle East—to advance a pre-planned right-wing agenda.

The claim that Bill C-51 is an anti-terrorist measure is a brazen lie. Running to well over 600 pages, it amends numerous laws to give vast new powers to Canada’s spy agencies and the police.

Canada’s premier spy agency, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, or CSIS, is to be empowered to break virtually any law when disrupting what it deems threats to Canada’s national security, including ostensible threats to Canada’s economic stability and infrastructure, territorial integrity, and diplomatic relations.

The only provisos are that when employing illegal measures against opponents of the government, CSIS must not kill people, cause bodily harm, or impugn their “sexual integrity.” They also will require a judge acting in secret and on the basis of secret jurisprudence to grant them a “disruption warrant.”

No one should be taken in by the government’s pretense that “lawful dissent” will be protected from CSIS dirty tricks and provocations. Canada’s national security apparatus is notorious for spying on socialist, labor, anti-war, environmental, and aboriginal groups and justifying it on the grounds that one of their members “may” engage in unlawful activity sometime in the future.

Moreover, governments across Canada have increasingly criminalized the struggles of the working class and political dissent, passing one anti-strike law after another and employing police violence against the anti-G20 protesters and striking Quebec students.

Those who organize or participate in worker job actions in defiance of strikebreaking laws, student sit-ins, or other acts of civil disobedience, or whom CSIS claims “may” do so in the future, would all be potential CSIS “disruption” targets.

Bill C-51 builds upon the Chretien Liberal government’s 2001

“Anti-Terrorism Act.” It created a new category of “terrorist” crimes subject to “exceptional” rules and penalties and based on a catch-all definition of terrorism in which any “unlawful” action aimed at compelling a government to do something—such as for example a political general strike or even a blockade of a highway—could be designated a terrorist act.

Bill C-51 expands the power of preventive arrest introduced under the 2001 law and reduces the evidentiary threshold at which it can be employed. Police will now be able to detain a person whom they suspect “may” commit a terrorist act for up to a week without charge. In the name of protecting Canadians, the state will also be able to much more readily place restrictions on the movements and actions of people who have never been charged let alone convicted of any crime.

Under Bill C-51 the government is also creating a new crime of advocating or promoting terrorism “in general” for which the punishment will be up to five years in prison. Even the big-business mouthpiece the *Globe and Mail* noted that this measure could potentially result in the prosecution of someone who expressed sympathy with the Palestinian group Hamas (which the government has designated as “terrorist”); and, precisely because it is so sweeping and deliberately vague, will, by way of intimidation, greatly restrict free speech and public debate even in the absence of widespread prosecutions.

Bill C-51’s undemocratic character is underscored by the methods the government is using to speed it into law. The Conservatives have responded to opposition queries and criticism with half-truths, lies and smears. Harper has himself led the charge, calling the NDP’s concerns over the bill “ridiculous,” “extremist” and grounded in “conspiracy theories.”

Although the House of Commons only began its deliberations on Bill C-51 on February 19, the Conservatives—joined by the Liberals, who have pledged to support its passage—effectively adopted it in principle this past Monday when they voted to send it to the Public Security committee for review.

Initially the government proposed this committee hear just four days of “expert” testimony on the bill, the first of which would be given over to presentations by Public Safety Minister Steven Blaney and Justice Minister Peter MacKay. In the face of an NDP filibuster, the Conservatives later conceded that nine sessions can be devoted to hearing “expert” reaction to Bill C-51. But the government is insistent that the entire committee process be terminated by the end of March so that Bill C-51 can be passed into law in early April. The NDP has bowed to this demand, saying it shares the government’s view that adoption of the bill is a matter of urgency.

The government is also preparing to extend and expand Canada’s

combat mission in the Middle East, which is currently slated to come to an end at the end of March. In his first public address since becoming defence minister, Jason Kenney declared the government “committed to playing a meaningful role in the fight against ISIS” because “it’s a matter of national interest” and “Canadian security.” A few days later Kenney told CBC the Canadian military mission could be expanded to Syria and Libya, adding that nothing has been ruled out.

As with the government’s claims that Bill C-51 is directed against jihadi terrorism, its attempts to present Canada’s growing involvement in war in the Middle East as a response to the threat of jihadi terrorism is completely disingenuous. The latest US-led war in the Middle East, like those that have preceded it, is aimed at strengthening US imperialism’s strategic dominance of the world’s most important oil exporting region. The Canadian elite, for its part, has responded to the deepening crisis of world capitalism and the emergence of new rivals to US global dominance by strengthening its decades-long military-strategic partnership with Washington and signing up for one US-led war after another.

While Harper rails against the “international jihadist movement,” the reality is that until recently the US and its allies were using Islamist forces, including those comprising ISIS, as their proxies in “regime change” wars in the Middle East, first in Libya, then Syria. Last fall, when the Harper government announced that CAF aircraft would be bombing ISIS in Iraq, even sections of Canada’s corporate media noted that they might well end up bombing Islamist fighters with whom the CAF coordinated bombing raids in Libya in 2011 during NATO’s campaign to oust Muammar Gaddafi.

With the government set to present its budget and steamroller Bill C-51 through parliament in April and announce an expansion of Canada’s role in the Mideast war sometime in March, the Conservatives are putting everything in place for a possible spring “jihadi” election. The Conservatives would seek to frame such an election around their false narrative of a Canada under attack, presenting themselves as the only ones prepared to confront jihadi terrorism at home and abroad and to resolutely defend “Canadian values.”

Through this bellicose, nationalist appeal, laced with anti-Muslim chauvinism, the Harper government hopes to divert attention from the deepening economic crisis—the collapse in oil and other commodity prices, a plunging dollar, and growing unemployment and underemployment—and divert the social frustration produced by mounting economic insecurity and social inequality behind war and reaction.

They also hope to rally the support of the ruling class by demonstrating their ruthless determination to implement big business’ agenda at home and abroad and their readiness to run roughshod over democratic norms and rights to suppress opposition, especially from the working class.

This is a high-risk gamble. There is mass disaffection from the entire political establishment, broad hostility to war and bigotry, and mounting working class resistance to years of concession contracts and the systematic dismantling of public services.

In mounting their right-wing campaign of lies and reaction, the Conservatives are dependent on the spinelessness and complicity of the opposition parties and the trade unions. Their differences with the government over its program of war, austerity and attacks on democratic rights are entirely tactical: over how best to ensure the competitiveness of Canadian capitalism and its global strategic

interests.

The Liberals, the Canadian elite’s traditional alternate party of government, blazed the trail for the Harper government. The 12-year Chretien-Martin Liberal government (1993-2006) implemented a fiscal counterrevolution that included the greatest social spending cuts in Canadian history and massive tax cuts for big business and the rich. They led Canada to war against Yugoslavia and Afghanistan, launched the rearmament of the Canadian Armed Forces, and presided over a massive expansion of the national-security apparatus, including authorizing the Communications Security Establishment to systematically spy on Canadians’ electronic communications.

Although it withheld approval for the CAF combat mission in Iraq, the NDP has otherwise repeatedly supported Canada’s participation in US-led wars and Harper’s aggressive foreign policy. Just this week, the social democrats signaled they would be ready to support the CAF training troops of Ukraine’s right-wing government, which came to power through a fascist spearheaded, US-German fomented coup, if NATO approves such a step.

Similarly, while it claims to oppose Bill C-51, the NDP has agreed to help secure its speedy passage. Moreover, NDP leader Thomas Mulcair has said that in the event the NDP forms the government it will amend, not repeal, this omnibus assault on democratic rights. (See: Canada’s NDP belatedly opposes Conservatives’ draconian “anti-terror” bill)

As for the NDP’s union allies, they have systematically suppressed working class resistance to the austerity agenda of big business and ordered compliance with the anti-union laws. While they claim to oppose austerity, they encouraged the NDP to prop up an Ontario Liberal government as it imposed massive social spending cuts and illegalized teacher strikes.

Now, in the name of defeating Harper, the unions are seeking to channel the opposition to the Conservatives behind a campaign to elect a Liberal or Liberal-NDP government. Were such a government to come to power it would simply give a new, “progressive” face to the Canadian elite’s program of aggression abroad and sweeping attacks on workers’ democratic and social rights.

Workers and youth can only assert their interests through the building of new organizations of struggle, independent of the pro-capitalist unions and NDP—above all a workers’ party, animated by a socialist-internationalist program to put an end to capitalism.



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