

Canada's Resources Minister threatens to use army against pipeline protests

Our reporter

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Federal Natural Resources Minister Jim Carr told a business gathering in Edmonton, Alberta Thursday that the Liberal government is ready to use the military and police to suppress opposition to the expansion of Canada's pipeline network.

Asked about the protests at Standing Rock, North Dakota and the potential that anti-pipeline protests in Canada could disrupt pipeline expansion plans, Carr declared, "If people choose for their own reasons not to be peaceful, then the government of Canada, through its defence forces, through its police forces, will ensure that people will be kept safe."

Carr's comments were greeted with enthusiastic applause by the business and political leaders in attendance at the Alberta Enterprise Group event. Ric McIver, the interim leader of the Alberta Progressive Conservative Party, which ruled Alberta for 44 successive years ending in 2015, declared, "We can't let the pipeline get held up by people that will never agree to any standard. The law of the jungle cannot prevail."

Canada's business elite and corporate media have hailed Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for giving the official regulatory go-ahead Tuesday for the construction of the Trans Mountain pipeline, which will bring diluted Alberta tar-sand bitumen to Vancouver, from whence it will be shipped overseas.

However, they are also insisting the Liberal government must take quick action to curtail popular opposition to the project and arrest those who resort to civil disobedience in an attempt to stop it.

On Wednesday, *National Post* columnist Kevin Libin headlined his comment on the Liberals' Trans Mountain decision, "It doesn't count as a pipeline approval unless Trudeau's prepared to arrest (Elizabeth) May." The leader of the Green Party, May

is among a number of political, environmentalist and indigenous leaders who have threatened to commit acts of civil disobedience to prevent the Trans Mountain project from proceeding.

Carr's comments are no idle threat. Canada's ruling elite has systematically moved to criminalize social opposition over the past two decades, including with a battery of strikebreaking laws. In 2012, striking Quebec students and their supporters were the target of massive police repression and an "emergency" law that not only effectively outlawed the strike but any demonstration across Quebec that was not expressly approved by the authorities.

Carr's reference in his remarks Thursday to "peaceful protests" being tolerated is particularly cynical. Governments routinely use court injunctions and emergency laws to "criminalize" protests, then set the police on the "unlawful" protesters.

Moreover, under Bill C-51, the draconian police-state law passed by the former Conservative government last year with Liberal support, the national-security apparatus have been given vast new powers to spy on and, under certain conditions, to "disrupt," using illegal means, "threats" to Canada's public and economic security.

The Canadian government has long engaged in mass surveillance of indigenous and activist environmental groups, particularly those opposing pipelines and other energy projects. In 2014, the Government Operations Centre (GOC), a division of Public Safety Canada, released a document in response to a Freedom of Information request that detailed 600 protests and events it had spied on over the preceding eight years.

When the Idle No More aboriginal protests erupted in 2013, the Canadian military conducted close surveillance of their activities on the pretext that they

might disrupt military shipments or personnel. According to a *National Post* report, the surveillance ran through “virtually all of 2013.”

Last year, the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association brought a complaint against the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) charging that it had illegally spied on peaceful opponents of pipeline projects and shared the information with other government agencies and even oil companies. But the Security Review Committee, the federal agency supposedly charged with ensuring CSIS doesn’t violate Canadians’ rights, insisted that all discussion of the complaint be held in secret.

The RCMP has also systematically spied on pipeline opponents. In 2012, when a coalition of First Nations groups, organized in the Yinka Dene Alliance, was protesting Enbridge’s Northern Gateway pipeline project, an RCMP unit was tasked with monitoring their actions.

Carr’s explicit threat to use the armed forces against political opposition must be taken as a serious warning by all workers and youth. While opponents of the Trans Mountain project may be the initial target of plans to deploy the military against those who get in the way of the plans of Canada’s capitalist establishment, they are ultimately aimed at the entire working class, which the Trudeau government and its big business masters rightly fear will increasingly resist their policies of austerity and war.



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