

Canada's Liberal government stands by plan to use military against pipeline protests

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In a series of media interviews, representatives of the Liberal government have refused to disavow the pledge made last Thursday by federal Natural Resources Minister Jim Carr to use Canada's military to deal with "non-peaceful" anti-pipeline protests.

In an appearance Sunday on Global News' "West Block" TV show, Carr repeatedly evaded the question of whether the government would deploy the army against "non-peaceful" protesters, asserting that the Liberals encourage "peaceful" protests and expect protesters will abide by the law. He similarly ducked the question in a December 2 interview with CBC, merely stating that he had not intended his comments to be taken as a "threat."

But it is undeniable that that was the purpose of Carr's comments Thursday, along with reassuring big business of the government's resolve in implementing their socially and environmentally destructive agenda.

Asked at a business event in Alberta about the Standing Rock protests in the United States and the potential for similar action blocking the Liberal government-approved expansion of the Trans Mountain pipeline, he responded, "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."

These remarks, together with the persistent refusal of any Liberal minister to contradict them, make clear that active discussions have taken place at the highest levels of the state about deploying the military to suppress public protests.

Typical was the response given on CTV's "Question Period" Sunday by Transport Minister Mark Garneau. Asked if the army would be called out, he evaded the question entirely, commenting, "We are behind the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and support Canadians' right to express themselves."

The government's posturing as defenders of "peaceful protest" is a sham. The truth is that successive governments and under all major parties—the Conservatives, Liberals, NDP and Parti Quebecois—have increasingly criminalized

social opposition through the use of strikebreaking laws and court injunctions.

A court injunction against those trying to block expansion of the Trans Mountain pipeline would lay the legal basis for state suppression of the protest, including potentially through the deployment of the military.

Moreover, the vast array of police state measures implemented over the past 15 years in the name of the so-called war on terror have restricted the concept of peaceful protest to such an extent that mass protests can be readily outlawed on the basis that they threaten economic security or public safety.

As it is, Canada's national security apparatus routinely spies on protests and other initiatives of indigenous and environmental groups, particularly those against energy projects.

The repeated refusal of Liberal government ministers to directly address Carr's chilling comments must be taken as a warning by all working people. As the Trudeau government prepares to step up attacks on workers at home and to intensify Canadian military operations abroad, it is readying the repressive apparatus of the state to clamp down on popular opposition.

The Canadian bourgeoisie sees the construction of the Trans Mountain pipeline as essential toward realizing its ambitions to become an "energy superpower." The ability to transport diluted bitumen from the Alberta tar sands to tidewater on the Pacific coast will open up lucrative trading opportunities with Japan and China and enhance Canadian big business's ability to leverage its role as a major energy exporter on the world stage.

But ruling circles are now pressing for the Liberal government to press ahead on a wide range of fronts that go well beyond the building of a single pipeline. Later this month, the Liberals are expected to announce the destination to which 600 troops will be deployed in Africa to wage war on behalf of Canadian imperialist interests under the guise of "peacekeeping." Early in 2017, the government's defence policy review is due to present its findings. These are widely

anticipated to include demands for major hikes in military spending, the procurement of new equipment including killer drones, and Canada's participation in the US anti-ballistic missile shield.

On the domestic front, the Trudeau government is pressing ahead with a wholesale privatization program in collaboration with the big banks and international investors that will see public infrastructure become the source of new profits for the financial elite, financed through the imposition of user fees and tolls on working people.

The ruling class is well aware of the deepening social anger developing among workers internationally and the backlash that such an unpopular right-wing program will provoke. In a recent meeting with the *Toronto Star* editorial board, Trudeau warned that in the wake of the Brexit referendum and the election of Donald Trump, it can be expected that people in Canada will also "lash out" in the face of economic and social inequality.

Under such conditions, it is significant that political leaders of the protests against the Trans Mountain pipeline have rushed to downplay Carr's comments.

Particularly revealing was the response of Green Party leader Elizabeth May, who last month declared that she is prepared to participate in civil disobedience and go to jail to prevent the construction of the Trans Mountain pipeline. May was quick to come to Carr's defence. In remarks cited by the Montreal daily *Le Devoir*, she described the Liberal Resources Minister as her "friend" and justified the government's plans to suppress opposition, while omitting any mention of its plans to use military. Declared May, "He (Carr) said, if demonstrations are violent, the police will act. I'm in agreement: violence is forbidden."

May's implicit support for government's plans to deploy the military exemplify her role as a defender of the capitalist order and shill for the big business Liberals. During the 2015 election, she boosted the Liberals as a "progressive" alternative to the Conservative Harper government and offered to act as a go-between for the establishment of a Liberal-New Democratic Party coalition if the election results had necessitated it.

Stewart Phillip, the grand chief of the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, called Carr's remarks "stupid and clumsy" and said they would exacerbate a "volatile situation, (on) a deeply emotional issue." To indicate the depth of opposition to the Kinder Morgan project among First Nations' people in the province, Phillip referred to the 1990 Oka crisis in Quebec, during which 2,500 Canadian Armed Forces troops were mobilized against a Mohawk occupation opposing the building of a golf course on a native burial ground.

While the Oka crisis is the best known use of the military

against indigenous protests in recent decades, the military intervened at least indirectly in a confrontation five years later at Gustafson Lake, British Columbia, where indigenous warriors were seeking to reclaim an ancestral burial ground. The armed forces supplied the RCMP with armed personnel carriers and, according to some reports, Special Forces troops joined the RCMP in an inconclusive armed battle with the protesters.

The military, it should be added, has repeatedly "war-gamed" scenarios in which it has been called upon to suppress native protests.

New Democratic Party MP Randall Garrison questioned the government on Carr's statement in parliament Friday, stating, "What reckless, irresponsible and incendiary language from the minister and only two days since they approved this pipeline." He said Carr should be aware that the federal government does not have the legal authority to deploy the military to uphold "law and order" inside Canada and that such deployments "in aid of civil power" must be requested by a province.

Garrison's criticism notwithstanding, a key feature of the Trans Mountain project has been the close cooperation between the federal Liberals and the NDP, which currently holds power in Alberta. NDP Premier Rachel Notley met with Trudeau immediately after his pipeline announcement last Tuesday and has since pledged to travel to British Columbia to campaign in favour of the pipeline expansion.

This is no accident, but reflects the fact that both parties are equally committed to enforcing the agenda of big business at home and abroad. The NDP at the federal level made no secret of the fact that it would have been prepared to enter a coalition with the Liberals during last year's election and its leading personnel, including federal leader Thomas Mulcair, hailed the election of Trudeau as a victory because the Conservatives under Stephen Harper had been defeated. They thus bear considerable responsibility for the Liberals' ability to posture as a "progressive" government, even as they prepare to employ the full force of the capitalist state against social opposition.



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