

Biden visits Ottawa to promote Canada-US alliance

Roger Jordan, Keith Jones
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Outgoing US Vice President Joe Biden visited Ottawa Thursday evening and most of yesterday. There he met with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and, in what is no doubt a first for a US VP, the heads of all thirteen of Canada's provincial and territorial governments.

Biden's hastily organized trip was aimed at promoting the longstanding economic and military-strategic partnership between the US and Canadian bourgeoisie, and, above all, at addressing concerns within Canada's political elite about the impact Donald Trump's impending presidency will have on that partnership.

The election victory of the billionaire demagogue and strident economic nationalist has rattled Canada's ruling elite. This is especially true of Trudeau and his Liberals, who in the six months preceding the Nov. 8 US election did little to conceal their eager anticipation of working with a Hillary Clinton administration.

Publicly both Biden and Trudeau sought to portray the US vice-president's trip as nothing out of the ordinary. But when asked if Biden would have visited Canada had Clinton, not Trump won the election, Wayne Easter, the Liberal chair of the parliamentary committee on Canada-US relations, conceded, "Quite honestly, I'd be very doubtful he would have."

Canada's ruling elite is deeply troubled by Trump's threats to tear up NAFTA and his championing of America First protectionist policies. Although Mexico and China have been the principal targets of Trump's claims of "unfair" trade practices, Canadian big business fears it will be sideswiped if and when Trump begins to implement protectionist measures.

Three-quarters of all Canadian exports go to the US, making Canadian big business highly dependent on the privileged access to the US market that NAFTA provides.

The Canadian ruling elite is also apprehensive about Trump's suggestions he could back away from NATO and pursue rapprochement with Russia. The Canadian bourgeoisie is heavily invested in the NATO build-up against Russia, which it views as a competitor in the Arctic

and world energy markets. And for decades it has viewed its military-security partnership with the US and participation in NATO and other US led alliances as critical for pursuing its own predatory interests on the world stage.

In remarks at a dinner Thursday evening, Biden stressed the importance of the US-Canada partnership, then urged Trudeau to promote the US-led alliances through which Washington has asserted its global predominance and suppressed challenges to the world capitalist order since World War II.

In making this plea, the U.S. Vice President warned that there are more threats to the "liberal international order" today than at any time since 1945 and that Europe is in disarray.

Expressing the concerns of sections of the US ruling elite that fear Trump's America First policies will trigger a trade war that will damage world capitalism as a whole and destabilize, if not destroy, the US-led alliances, Biden said that the world now looked to Trudeau and German Chancellor Angela Merkel to champion "a liberal economic order, liberal international order, where there's basic rules of the road."

In fact, both Merkel and Trudeau are pursuing ever-more aggressive policies on behalf of their respective capitalist masters at home and abroad.

Not only has Merkel spearheaded the imposition of brutal austerity measures across the European Union, she has overseen a policy of rearmament and participation in foreign wars aimed at reviving Germany as a world power. This week, in a speech at her party's congress, she openly embraced reaction, calling for the banning of the burka and the mass deportation of refugees.

Trudeau similarly heads a government of austerity and war. While employing different rhetoric, the Liberals have taken up, in all essentials, where the Conservatives left off. This has included launching a vast infrastructure privatization program, pressing forward with environmentally and socially destructive pipeline projects, and expanding Canada's participation in Washington's

major military-strategic offensives—in the Middle East and against Russia and China.

Biden made mention of the last point in his remarks. He lauded Canada's contribution to the war in Syria and Iraq, where the Trudeau government tripled the number of Special Forces soldiers earlier this year. The US VP also cited Canada's role in NATO's military mobilization on Russia's borders, making specific mention of Canada's newly-accepted commitment to lead and maintain a NATO "advanced force" in Latvia.

Trudeau and Biden studiously avoided mentioning Trump directly in their public remarks.

But since the very day of Trump's election, the Liberal government has made clear that it is ready and willing to work with what will be the most right-wing US administration in history.

Indeed, under conditions where Trump has signaled that he intends to pursue confrontation not just with states like Russia and China that the US has long identified as adversaries, but even ostensible allies, Trudeau is seeking to position Canada as the billionaire president's most faithful friend. In so doing, the Liberals will implicate Canada still more deeply in ruinous economic and geopolitical conflicts, militarism and war.

The only note of caution during Biden's visit was sounded by Conservative MP and former Trade Minister Ed Fast, who expressed concern that the meetings with the outgoing Vice President might jeopardize future relations with the Trump administration. "The only thing I would be worried about," Fast told the *Globe and Mail*, "is that no steps are taken to somehow sabotage the Canada-U.S. relationship."

Large sections of Canada's ruling establishment are seeking to use Trump's victory to press the big business Liberal government to move even further to the right. Commenting on Trump's proposal to massively cut corporate taxes, former Bank of Canada Governor David Dodge urged the Liberal government to follow suit so as to ensure Canada remains "competitive." "It's an enormous problem when you get effective tax rates which are wildly out of line," claimed Dodge, even though Canada's corporate tax rates are at historic lows. "And that's what's going to happen to a much greater extent in the spring if Mr. Trump and the Republican Congress proposals ... go forward."

In the wake of Trump's victory, the corporate media has also stepped its long-running campaign for Canada to double its military spending from the current level of 1 percent of GDP to NATO's 2 percent target, or more than \$40 billion per year.

Former Progressive Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney commented this week that Trump's presidency

offers Ottawa an opportunity to strengthen its relationship with Washington so as to better pursue Canada's—that is Canadian imperialism's—interests. Mulroney fully embraced Trump and his ultra-right-wing campaign, describing the know-nothing, who repeatedly made racist appeals, as a "gentleman." Arguing that Trump's attacks on NAFTA and pledge to build a "wall" had all been directed at Mexico, he continued, "I don't think Mr. Trump or the administration views Canada with any hostility at all. On the contrary. My impression is that he views Canada with favour."

The idea of renegotiating NAFTA is also finding growing support. Colin Robertson, an analyst at the Canadian Global Affairs Institute, wrote in the *Globe and Mail* that with the abandonment by Trump of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), reopening NAFTA "makes sense." Saying that Canada should aim for more freedom of movement for people and services throughout North America, Robertson went on, "Let's be bold. Let's put our costly dairy supply-management, a perennial U.S. target, on the table in return for better procurement access, including shipbuilding."

The reference to procurement reflects hopes in ruling circles that Canadian big business can profit from Trump's proposed \$1 trillion infrastructure investment program, which will in reality be nothing more than a corporate boondoggle. Such hopes could be dashed, however. Only after strenuous lobbying did the Obama administration amend the rules of its post-2008 stimulus package to allow Canadian companies to bid on some contracts. Speaking at a rally Thursday Trump declared, "My administration will follow two simple rules — buy American and hire American."

The Canadian bourgeoisie intends to accommodate itself to this reactionary nationalist agenda by, as the *Globe and Mail* put it last month, making sure that Canada gets inside Trump's "walls." This amounts to an appeal for a fortress North American—an economic bloc and military-strategic alliance led by a Trump administration, which would strive to advance US and Canadian imperialist interests at the expense of their rivals. Robertson referred to this in his piece as the "North American advantage." A second *Globe* comment, this one co-authored by Derek Burney, a top Mulroney aide when he was prime minister, urged Trump to support a "stronger, more deeply integrated North America to serve as a bulwark against China."



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