

Canadian elite lauds Trudeau's courting of Trump

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Canada's ruling elite has responded with a collective sigh of relief to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's "successful" first meeting with US President Donald Trump. At the conclusion of last Monday's meeting, the two leaders reaffirmed the "indispensable" Canada-US alliance in a joint statement that commits the two countries to partnering in a US-led protectionist trade bloc and to expanding military-security collaboration so as to aggressively assert the interests of US and Canadian imperialism.

In its editorial on Trudeau's trip, the *Globe and Mail*, the traditional mouthpiece of Canada's financial elite, applauded the prime minister for doing "the country a favour" by practicing "diplomacy at its finest." "Canada," continued the *Globe*, "got what it wanted out of the meeting: the reassertion of our special friendship, a firm commitment to free trade across the 49th parallel, and recognition that an open border and the fight against terrorism are not mutually exclusive."

Chantal Hebert in the liberal *Toronto Star* said that the meeting went "about as well as could be expected," before noting, "many in this country—particularly in corporate Canada—will take comfort in the notion that Canada is not on the Trump administration's hit list."

Since the day after Trump's election, Trudeau and his ostensibly "progressive" Liberal government have mounted a full-court press to secure close cooperation with the new administration. Trudeau's White House visit was preceded by almost two dozen high-level meetings between Canadian officials and senior Trump advisers. On Monday he was joined in Washington by Canada's foreign affairs, defence, public safety and transport ministers. The government's approach has been endorsed by the official opposition Conservatives, who have called for bipartisan collaboration in championing and deepening the Canada-US strategic partnership.

To advance its own predatory imperialist interests, the Canadian bourgeoisie is eager to secure and strengthen its alliance with a US administration led by a cabal of billionaires, generals and ultra-conservative ideologues and

that is committed, in the name of "America First," to intensifying US aggression around the globe. Less than 48 hours after Trudeau met Trump, US Defense Secretary James "Mad Dog" Mattis delivered a blunt ultimatum to NATO members, saying Washington would "moderate" its commitment to the alliance unless other states spent more on defence.

This will have been music to the ears of Canada's ruling elite, which has long been pushing for a major hike in Canadian military spending from its current level of \$20 billion per year, or about 1 percent of GDP. A recent *National Post* editorial said Trump would have "truth" on his side if he criticized Canada's defence budget. "We do underfund our military," intoned the *Post*, "we do understaff units ... and our military remains, as it long has, too small for a country of our size and global responsibilities."

Asked yesterday about Mattis' ultimatum, Defence Minister Hajit Sajjan criticized the previous Harper Conservative government, which was notorious for its celebration of Canada as a "warrior nation," for its "low" military spending. Sajjan promised the Liberal government will soon announce significant "defence investments."

The Canadian ruling elite is also anxious to collaborate with Washington in implementing Trump's trade war policy, with the *Globe* forthrightly declaring Trudeau's task is to ensure that Canada is behind Trump's "walls." The Liberal government has welcomed the reopening of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and signaled it is ready to throw Mexico to the wolves to ensure Canada continues to enjoy privileged access to the US market. Yesterday the *Globe* reported that Trudeau has been successful in convincing the Trump administration to hold bilateral Canada-US talks on revising NAFTA before Washington confronts Mexico with its demands.

At Monday's joint press conference, Trump said he is looking only at "tweaks" to the trade arrangements with Canada, before stressing that he views the problems with US-Mexico trade to be much more "severe."

To cement the ties the Trudeau government has forged,

large parliamentary delegations are expected to leave Ottawa for Washington in the coming month. Representatives of the foreign affairs, defence, trade, agriculture, industry and environmental parliamentary committees already have trips scheduled to meet with their US counterparts.

From within the political establishment the only real criticism of Trudeau's trip has come from the trade union-backed New Democratic Party (NDP), the third largest party in parliament. Since Trump's inauguration, caretaker party leader Thomas Mulcair has repeatedly described the US president as a "fascist."

On the eve of Trudeau's departure for Washington, Mulcair addressed a letter to the prime minister in which he urged Trudeau to speak out against Trump's discriminatory and authoritarian executive order banning refugees, immigrants and others from seven Muslim countries from entering the US. "Canadians," wrote Mulcair, "are resoundingly opposed to Mr. Trump's travel ban and you are therefore duty-bound to express Canada's opposition to these policies."

Mulcair's pose of moral indignation lacks any credibility. This is, after all, a man who is an avowed admirer of hard-right British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and who oversaw the NDP's right-wing, Harper-lite campaign in the 2015 federal election.

The NDP's campaign was explicitly directed toward forming an anti-Conservative coalition government with Trudeau's Liberals, the very party now pushing for close collaboration with Trump. For years prior to the 2015 election, Mulcair and the entire trade union bureaucracy worked to suppress a working class challenge to the Conservatives and to channel opposition behind the Liberals, who they praised as fellow "progressives."

The NDP's criticism of Trudeau's courting of the Trump administration is, to say the least, extremely limited. It has said nothing about the plans for intensified Canada-US military collaboration, including the expansion of NORAD and Canada's potential participation in the US-led ballistic missile defence shield.

Meanwhile, the NDP's trade union allies, like Unifor's Jerry Dias and the United Steelworkers' Leo Gerard, have welcomed Trump's call for the renegotiation of NAFTA, seeing it as a means to push job losses onto Mexican and other foreign workers. Union officials have been meeting with Liberal government representatives to formulate a strategy to advance "Canada's interests" in the coming trade talks—that is to bolster Canadian big business and pit workers in Canada against their class brothers and sisters in the United States and Mexico.

Rachel Notley, the NDP premier of Alberta, the only province where the NDP currently forms the government,

has been holding a series of meetings to strategize with the oil barons and other big business leaders as she prepares her own trip to Washington to meet with senior Trump administration officials. Under the headline "Canadian politicians and business leaders unite in face of trade threats," the *Globe* published a column Tuesday which effusively praised Notley's consultations.

On Trudeau's return, the NDP criticized Trudeau for failing to criticize Trump's travel ban. Speaking in parliament, Vancouver East MP Jenny Kwan accused Trudeau of "letting down the country," and added, "From Vietnam to Iraq, Canada has a proud history of standing up to the US on issues of principle. Now that he is back safe and sound on Canadian soil, will the prime minister summon the courage to denounce Trump's immigration policies?"

In reality, Canada's "proud" record is anything but.

The claims—promoted by the NDP, no less than the Liberals—of a country open to people fleeing war and persecution are belied by the tiny number of Syrian refugees Canada has accepted over the past two years and by the deplorable conditions confronting those that have been let in. Many are now dependent on food banks and handouts from volunteers and charities.

As for the Canadian government's "opposition" to the Vietnam war, it was utterly hypocritical. As Washington rained death on the Vietnamese people, Canada remained a central pillar of the US-led Cold War alliance and Canadian big business made handsome profits supplying the US war machine.

During the past quarter century, Conservative and Liberal governments alike have repudiated the myth that Canada has a special "peacekeeping" vocation and joined virtually every US war of aggression, from the Balkans to Afghanistan, Libya, and now Iraq-Syria. These imperialist wars, which the NDP supported, have destroyed entire societies and are the principal reason the world now faces the worst refugee crisis since the end of the Second World War.



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