

Canada adopts anti-Russia Magnitsky Act

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With all-party support, Canada's Parliament adopted in late October a new sanctions law patterned after the US *Magnitsky Act*. Under the pretext of targeting so-called human rights violators, the legislation provides a ready mechanism for Ottawa to sanction leaders of, and ratchet up tensions with, Russia and other countries in the cross-hairs of Canadian and US imperialism.

The Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act (Bill S-226) enables the government to freeze Canadian assets of "corrupt" foreign officials" and prevent them from entering Canada. Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland, a self-avowed Ukrainian nationalist and notorious anti-Russian hawk, announced the first round of sanctions under the new law at the beginning of this month. They target 52 individuals in Russia, South Sudan and Venezuela, including Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

These sanctions were imposed only weeks after Canada targeted 40 other Venezuelan government officials and individuals under a different sanctions regime. Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza has labelled the sanctions as "illegal" and accused Canada of "absolute and shameful subordination" to Washington in its campaign for regime-change in Caracas.

Russian President Vladimir Putin responded to the passage of Bill S-226 by accusing Canada of playing "unconstructive political games." While not revealing any names, Kirill Kalinin, a spokesman for the Russian embassy in Ottawa told the *Globe and Mail* that a "large number of Canadians pursuing a toxic Russophobic agenda" were now prohibited from entering Russia. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova confirmed that the list of Canadians "contains dozens of names."

Canada's "Magnitsky Act" is only the latest step in its longstanding and growing strategic rivalry with Russia. Ottawa staunchly supported NATO's expansion to Russia borders, which was undertaken in violation of pledges given to Moscow at the end of the Cold War. It has played a major role in Washington's quarter-century long drive to bring Ukraine under western domination; and today is an integral part of the US-led military-strategic offensive to isolate, encircle and prepare for war with Russia.

Since coming to power in 2015, Trudeau's Liberal government has continued and even intensified Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper's anti-Russia agenda.

In Ukraine, Canada was deeply involved in the February 2014 fascist-spearheaded, US-orchestrated putsch that toppled the country's pro-Russian elected president, Victor Yanukovich.

Trudeau has continued Canada's close relationship with the far-right regime in Kiev. Last year Ottawa signed a free trade pact with Ukraine that facilitates arm deals between the two countries. When he travelled to Ukraine in the summer of 2016 visit, Trudeau boasted that Canadian troops are training Ukrainian forces to "liberate" eastern Ukraine from pro-Russian separatists. This was a reference to the 200 Canadian Armed Forces' personnel who are training Ukrainian Army and National Guard troops under a mission set to last until 2019.

The Canadian Armed Forces is commanding and anchoring a NATO "forward deployed" battlegroup in Latvia, one of four such battalions that have been established since 2016 in the three Baltic States and Poland. Canada also now routinely deploys battleships to the Black Sea and warplanes to patrol Russia's western border.

Another element in Canada's conflict with Russia is Ottawa's determination to expand its military presence in the Arctic, where the two countries have competing claims for the resource-rich Arctic seabed.

The original Magnitsky Act was adopted in 2012, with bipartisan support, as part of the Obama administration's increasingly hardline anti-Russia stance. The Obama administration seized on a persistent campaign waged by multi-millionaire financier and Hermitage Capital-founder William F. Browder for anti-Russia measures, following the 2009 death of his lawyer, Sergei Magnitsky, in a Russian prison. Browder, who made a fortune out of the restoration of capitalism in Russia, alleges Magnitsky was jailed on trumped up charges and refused proper medical care, because he had uncovered a US\$230 million tax fraud involving Russian government officials.

In addition to the US and Canada, Britain and Estonia have implemented Magnitsky-style sanctions legislation. The US

law enables the government to deny visas and block access to American banks to Russians and others accused of human rights “abuses.”

Browder has praised Canada’s adoption of like legislation, saying that “the fact that the government came out so quickly with this shows how serious they are. This is a demonstration of moral leadership in a world that’s sorely needing world leadership right now.”

In reality, the Canadian parliament’s unanimous adoption of a Magnitsky-style law is a further sign that the Canadian ruling class is determined to deepen the country’s already extremely close military-security partnership with Washington, while pressuring the Trump administration not to seek any accommodation with Moscow.

Since the election of Donald Trump, Trudeau’s Liberals and Canada’s corporate media have aligned themselves with the furious anti-Russia campaign mounted by the Democrats and a section of the Republicans, in league with the military-intelligence apparatus. Without providing any evidence, this campaign has baldly asserted that Russia, under the direct orders of Putin, covertly intervened in the 2016 US elections to undermine Hillary Clinton’s presidential bid and favour Trump’s victory.

This neo-McCarthyite campaign is increasingly being exploited to label all voices critical of the US ruling class as Russian stooges and demand that they be censored. It takes place in a context of fierce and ongoing conflicts within the US political establishment over matters of foreign policy. Specifically, the issue at stake is whether to prioritize Russia or, as Trump advocates, China for economic and military confrontation.

Although Russia is the prime target of Bill S-226, the Liberal government is seeking to invoke human rights to advance Canadian imperialist interests around the globe.

Trudeau’s “humanitarian” rhetoric is shot through with hypocrisy. Canada, as a long-standing ally of US imperialism, has for decades resorted to the most ruthless methods to enforce its predatory imperialist ambitions around the globe. This includes assisting in installing, arming and otherwise supporting right-wing dictatorships, backing US wars of aggression, and spying on the world’s population through Canada’s membership of the American National Security Agency-led “Five Eyes” surveillance network.

In tandem with Washington, Ottawa maintains a studious silence when western-aligned governments such as Saudi Arabia, Israel or Egypt commit gross human rights violations. Indeed, Canada recently concluded a \$15 billion arms deal with Riyadh, facilitating the absolutist sheikdom’s suppression of its own population and its brutal war against the Yemeni people, which has claimed tens of thousands of

lives in the Arab world’s most impoverished country. During his recent Asian tour, Trudeau declared his willingness to work with the fascist president of the Philippines Rodrigo Duterte as well as the Burmese government of Aung San Suu Kyi, which is carrying out an ethnic pogrom against Rohingya Muslims.

While claiming to uphold international law and human rights, Canada has engaged in virtually uninterrupted war over the last two decades, including NATO’s 1999 bombardment of Yugoslavia, the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan for a decade beginning in 2001, the 2011 war on Libya, and the ongoing conflict in Syria and Iraq. In its foreign interventions, Canada has shown no qualms in cooperating with far-right, fascist forces, such as in its 2004 toppling of the Haitian government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Trudeau is also indifferent to glaring human rights abuses at home, when not overseeing further encroachments on Canadians’ democratic rights. Trudeau preaches “native reconciliation.” But his government has refused to provide native people living on reserves with per capita health and education funding commensurate with that given other Canadians and has privately reassured Big Oil that it is ready to deploy the army to suppress protests against the building of environmentally and socially-destructive pipelines.

And while the Liberals do everything to prevent desperate asylum seekers from fleeing to Canada to escape the Trump administration’s brutal anti-immigrant crackdown, hundreds of refugees, including children, are left to rot in Canadian jails without trial, merely because they lack adequate identification papers. Since 2000, at least 15 people have died while detained by the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), including at least three since the Liberals came to power two years ago.



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