

Oppose Trudeau and Trump, the Canada-US alliance, and imperialist war!

For a working class counter-offensive based on socialist internationalism!|Part two

SEP (Canada)
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This is the second part of a two-part statement. Part one was posted on November 30.

The trade unions and the Trudeau government

30. The Trudeau government enjoys closer ties to the trade union bureaucracy than any federal government in decades. As Trudeau's Liberals pursue an aggressive militarist foreign policy and their closest provincial allies, the Quebec and Ontario Liberal governments, impose brutal austerity programs, Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) President Hassan Yussuff and Unifor head Jerry Dias boast of their unprecedented access to Trudeau and his ministers. "Justin Trudeau and the Liberal government view us as a stakeholder," exclaims Dias. "A legitimate stakeholder with a voice."

The unions' partnership with what has traditionally been the Canadian bourgeoisie's preferred party of government is the outcome of a decades-long march to the right on the part of the unions and their allies in the social-democratic New Democratic Party (NDP). The unions have repudiated all traditions of independent working class struggle, integrated themselves into management and tripartite union-government-company structures, and developed new sources of revenue giving them a direct stake in the exploitation of the working class. With more than \$10 billion in assets, the Quebec Federation of Labour's Solidarity Fund is far and away the province's largest venture capital fund. The NDP has actively participated in the dismantling of the public and social services it once held up as proof that capitalism could be "humanized" or even "grow over" into "socialism," and it has abandoned even nominal opposition to NATO and Canada's participation in US wars of aggression.

31. This is part of a global process. The unraveling of the post-Second World War boom and the bourgeoisie's turn to employing new computer, telecommunications and transport technology to globalize production—to maximize profits through the coordinated exploitation of the resources and workers of the world—pulled the rug out from under the unions' and social democrats' national-reformist perspective of "restraining" capitalism through state regulation, collective bargaining and social-welfare measures.

Trade union resistance to big business has collapsed, and with it, the percentage of workers enrolled in unions. Membership in the British Trades Union Congress has been more than halved, from 13 million workers in 1979 to 5.6 million today. In the US, unions are the bargaining

representatives for less than 7 percent of private-sector workers, and in Canada just 15 percent. The traditional reformist parties have become instruments for redistributing wealth from working people to the capitalist oligarchy. In Britain, it was the Blair-Brown Labour government that launched the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, privatized vast swathes of the public sector, and in response to the 2008 financial crisis, organized the largest bailout of the financial elite in history. In Germany, the Social Democrats enforced labour market reforms that created the largest low-wage sector in Europe and decimated the social welfare system, while at the same time organizing the first foreign intervention by the German military since World War II.

32. The union-Liberal partnership emerged directly out of the unions' scuttling of the mass movement against the Common Sense Revolution of Ontario Premier Mike Harris and his Tory government. Fearing that the strikes and protests that had brought hundreds of thousands into the streets in 1996 and 1997 were escaping their control and becoming a direct challenge to the government's rule, the unions shut them down. Soon after, they founded a network, subsequently renamed Working Families Ontario, to promote "strategic voting" on behalf of the Liberals. Since 2003, the unions have helped elect and prop up a succession of Liberal governments in the country's largest province that have slashed social spending, outdone Harris in cutting taxes on big business and the rich, criminalized job actions by teachers and other workers and mounted a privatization drive.

In tandem with its union allies, the NDP also moved closer to the Liberals. Shortly after becoming federal party leader in 2003, Jack Layton appointed a high-powered "scenarios" committee, headed by party elder statesmen like former federal leader Ed Broadbent and Saskatchewan Premier Allan Blakeney, to explore opportunities for, and the logistics of, a "progressive coalition" with the Paul Martin-led Liberals.

The unions and NDP responded to the 2008 financial crash with an abortive attempt to create a Liberal-NDP coalition government, pledged to "fiscal responsibility," implementing a \$50 billion corporate tax cut, and waging war in Afghanistan through 2011. When big business made clear its support for Harper's proroguing of parliament so as to prevent the opposition from voting no confidence in his government (a de facto constitutional coup), the NDP and unions meekly acquiesced.

33. The Conservatives are openly hostile to the unions and champion measures such as eliminating tax breaks for union-sponsored investment funds that encroach on the privileges of the union bureaucracy. Trudeau's Liberals, on the other hand, are seeking to shore up the union apparatuses, the better to use them to police the working class. They calculate that the competitive position of Canadian imperialism at home and abroad can

best be enhanced by incorporating the unions as “partners.” In her bellicose June 2017 foreign policy address, Foreign Affairs Minister Freeland made a revealing point in this regard. She characterized the loss of popular support for the capitalist world order due to ever-mounting social inequality as one of the two principal threats, along with the loss of US global dominance, facing the Canadian bourgeoisie. The Liberals rely on their union partners to exorcise the spectre of social unrest.

34. The unions’ and NDP’s opposition to any genuine working class challenge to austerity was exemplified by their sabotage of the 2012 Quebec student strike. The unions isolated the students in the face of mounting police violence, while the NDP failed to offer so much as verbal support for the fight against university tuition fee hikes or to condemn the provincial Liberal government’s draconian legislation outlawing the strike (Bill 78). Precisely at the point when the strike threatened to become the catalyst for a working class upsurge, with hundreds of thousands of working people taking to the streets to oppose Bill 78, the unions became their most adamant and energetic in shutting it down. Under the slogan, “*Après la rue, les urnes !*” (After the streets, to the ballot box), the unions smothered the incipient mass movement, while politically harnessing the burgeoning opposition to austerity to the big business Parti Québécois. Returned to power in September 2012 thanks to the backing of their traditional union allies, the PQ promptly and predictably continued the austerity drive of their ostensible federalist Liberal opponents.

35. No less revealing was the role that Unifor (the former Canadian Auto Workers or CAW) played in isolating and politically derailing this fall’s strike at GM’s CAMI car assembly plant, the first strike at a Detroit Three facility in Canada in more than two decades. Workers were eager to put an end to multi-tier wages and benefits and other concessions, but Unifor failed to raise, let alone fight for, their demands. Instead, it declared the strike a fight for “Canadian jobs” and made the sole issue its call for CAMI to be named “lead producer” of the Equinox, so as to ensure that Mexican workers who produce the same model would be the first to be laid off come the next economic downturn.

This reactionary demand represented a doubling down on the ruinous Canadian nationalist strategy that CAW/Unifor have pursued since splitting from the UAW in 1985 and severing the organizational bonds US and Canadian autoworkers had forged in the militant struggles of the 1930s and 1940s. For the past three decades, CAW/Unifor and the UAW have greased the blades of the auto bosses’ whipsawing strategy, pitting workers against each other in a race to the bottom.

Unifor’s nationalism—its vehement opposition to mobilizing Canadian, US and Mexican autoworkers against *all* job cuts and concessions—rendered the CAMI workers defenceless. When GM signaled it would permanently close the plant and transfer all production to Mexico if the strike continued, Unifor immediately shut the strike down and imposed yet another concessionary contract on the CAMI workers.

36. The unions’ role as agents of Canadian big business is epitomized by their integration into the NAFTA negotiations. CLC President Yussuff sits on the Trudeau government’s NAFTA advisory council, alongside NDP apparatchik Brian Topp, ex-interim Conservative leader Rona Ambrose, and Linda Hasenfratz, the CEO of Canada’s second-largest auto parts manufacturer, Linamar. Unifor’s Dias and Steelworker President Leo Gerard are “stakeholders” in the negotiations, meeting regularly not only with Canadian officials, but also with Wilbur Ross, Trump’s billionaire crony commerce secretary.

The unions have welcomed the NAFTA renegotiation, hailing Trudeau and even the fascist-minded Trump as workers’ allies in securing “fair trade.” They share Trump’s objectives of making NAFTA a more explicitly protectionist bloc aimed at the European and Asian competitors of North American big business and punishing Mexico, advocating measures to boost Canadian manufacturing at the expense of the impoverished Mexican workers.

NAFTA is a reactionary bloc of the imperialist rulers of the US and Canada and the venal Mexican bourgeoisie for waging class war at home and trade war beyond North America’s shores. But it must be opposed by the working class from the standpoint of socialist internationalism, not economic nationalism.

37. Just as workers the world over have no interest in becoming cannon fodder in the wars the capitalists wage for markets, resources and strategic position, so they must reject the unions’ attempts to incite nationalist divisions with their class brothers and sisters and ensnare them in trade war.

Were Washington, or for that matter the Trudeau government, to abrogate NAFTA, it would be with the aim of strengthening the national capitalist elite economically and politically. The latter would include whipping up nationalism so as to deflect mounting anger over social inequality, legitimize a more bellicose foreign policy, and justify further attacks on the working class in the name of supporting “our” companies. The first casualties in the trade war and reorganization of North American capitalism that would ensue from NAFTA’s abrogation would be the workers of Canada, the US and Mexico.

38. There can be no “fair trade” under capitalism, a social order that rests on brutal exploitation and plunder. Nor can there be any national solution to the crisis facing working people. The outmoded nation-state system with its rival capitalist cliques and their armies, borders, immigration controls and tariffs is itself a fundamental cause of the crisis.

The global integration of production and the technological revolution that has propelled it have immense progressive potential. Indeed, they have created the objective prerequisites for a global planned economy under the democratic control of working people in which the labour and resources of the world are systematically deployed to serve human needs. But under capitalism they are used to intensify the exploitation of workers the world over and to create more powerful instruments of war.

39. To defeat the transnational corporations, which scour the globe siting production where labour, taxes and other costs are the lowest, and the governments that act as their hirelings, workers need their own global strategy. Workers in Canada and across North America must unite with workers in Latin America, Europe, Africa and Asia in a common struggle against austerity and war.

The allies of Canadian workers are not Canadian capitalists and CEOs and their political spokespersons, but US and Mexican workers who, like them, face an unrelenting employer-state assault on their social and democratic rights and often toil for the same firms. In opposition to all factions in the ruling class struggle over NAFTA, workers in Canada, the US and Mexico must mount a joint struggle for workers’ governments in Ottawa, Washington and Mexico City and the Socialist United States of North America.

40. Workers must beware: those who today wave Canadian and Quebec flags, inciting workers to align with their bosses against Mexican and Chinese workers, will on the morrow be the recruiting sergeants for war. The unions, like the NDP, are complicit in the revival of Canadian militarism. When NDP leader Thomas Mulcair sought to score some political points in the 2015 election by criticizing Canada’s \$15 billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia, Unifor demanded he shut up.

The pseudo-left and the NDP

41. With the unions and NDP increasingly exposed as pliant tools of big business, the pseudo-left plays an ever more prominent role in propping up their authority and, above all, preventing the development of an independent political movement of the working class. A key element in

this is the pseudo-left's promotion of identity (gender and "racialized") politics, which, as the rhetoric and actions of the Trudeau government underline, have become a mainstay of bourgeois politics. Through Québec Solidaire they seek to breathe life into Quebec *indépendantiste* nationalism, which has been largely discredited as a result of the Parti Québécois' imposition of savage austerity. The pseudo-left is indifferent and hostile to the struggle against imperialist war and Canadian militarism.

Whilst they mouth "radical," even "socialist" rhetoric, the pseudo-left speaks not for the working class but for disgruntled layers within the top 10 percent of society. They seek a redistribution of wealth and power within the top echelons of society, including through the use of identity politics to secure a "fair share" of capitalism's managerial and professional jobs. In tandem with these wealthy and egotistical layers, the pseudo-left has moved sharply to the right, integrating themselves ever more completely into establishment politics and emerging as a new constituency for "human rights" imperialism.

42. The pseudo-left functions as apologists and advocates for the pro-capitalist trade unions and are themselves oriented to and embedded in the trade union bureaucracy. They have systematically covered up the unions' support for the Trudeau and McGuinty-Wynne Liberal governments. Organizations like Fightback and the International Socialists hailed the "Stop Hudak" campaign that culminated in the reelection of Ontario's Liberal government and served as the dry run for the unions' "Anybody but Harper" drive in 2015; and they blacked out any mention of the unions' pro-Liberal "strategic voting" campaign, let alone their systematic suppression of the class struggle, from their appraisals of Trudeau's 2015 election victory.

Forced to concede that workers are alienated from the unions, the pseudo-left seeks to corral them into futile efforts to pressure the union apparatuses to the left. They are viscerally opposed to the SEP's call for workers to build rank-and-file committees independent of, and in opposition to, the ossified pro-capitalist unions so as to give organizational expression and politically leaven workers' striving to assert their class interests.

43. The pseudo-left has responded to the growth in anti-capitalist sentiment by seeking to politically rehabilitate the NDP. Placing all blame for the NDP's "Harper lite" 2015 election fiasco on Mulcair and a small coterie of his advisors, they used the race to choose a new federal NDP leader to promote the lie that this wretched social-democratic party can be an instrument for opposing austerity and even fighting for socialism.

Fightback, Socialist Action and a myriad of other groups promoted the candidacy of NDP frontbencher Nikki Ashton. They claimed she could be "Canada's Corbyn"—a reference to the left-talking leader of the British Labour Party—and revive the NDP's electoral fortunes. When Ashton finished a distant third, they swiftly transitioned to promoting the supposed virtues of the winner and favourite of the party establishment, Jagmeet Singh. Fightback thundered against any break with the NDP, saying Singh is not "a rightwing Blairite" and can be pressured to the "left," while the International Socialists enthused that Singh's victory will "raise the confidence" of "racialized activists."

44. Corbyn's evolution graphically demonstrates whose class interests are served by the pseudo-left's attempt to revive illusions in social democracy and a national-reformist perspective. Elected Labour's leader in 2015 on the basis of false promises to roll back austerity, oppose war and tackle social inequality, Corbyn has conceded to the Blairite right wing on every major issue. He allowed Labour MPs to vote for war in Syria, ensured that the party backed the renewal of Britain's nuclear weapons arsenal, and ordered Labour-controlled local authorities to implement austerity programs in cooperation with the Tories. The essence of Corbyn's agenda was summed up recently by his closest ally and Labour's shadow finance minister, John McDonnell. To fervent applause,

McDonnell told a meeting of Labour officials and pseudo-lefts that the party's principal task is to "save capitalism."

45. An even more devastating exposure of the politics of the pseudo-left is provided by Greece. In Canada, as around the world, the pseudo-left hailed the January 2015 election of their co-thinkers in Syriza (the Coalition of the Radical Left) on a program that combined pledges to end austerity with support for the European Union and NATO. Utterly opposed to the mobilization of the Greek and European working class against austerity and the big business EU, Syriza turned viciously against the working class when the EU spurned its appeals for modest changes to the Greek debt repayment schedule. Six months after coming to power and just days after workers had massively rejected the EU's austerity measures in a referendum vote, Syriza imposed a program of draconian social spending cuts and privatizations that went far beyond the austerity measures imposed by all previous governments. Underscoring their role as defenders of capitalism from any revolutionary threat from below, Socialist Project leaders Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, who acted as advisors to Syriza in 2015, staunchly defend the Syriza government to this day as an uncompleted "experiment" in "alternatives to neoliberalism."

46. For decades, the pseudo-left has promoted Quebec nationalism, labeling as "progressive" the program of creating a capitalist République du Québec that would be a member of NATO, NORAD and NAFTA. Under the banner of Québec Solidaire (QS), they seek to provide a "left" face for the PQ-led Quebec independence or sovereignty movement. A "new left" party that touts Syriza as an ally, QS makes no pretense to being socialist or a party of the working class. Rather it defines itself as a feminist, environmentalist, pro-sovereignist and anti-globalization "citizens party."

QS has repeatedly sought electoral alliances with the PQ and has lent support to the PQ's ever-more explicit promotion of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim chauvinism, declaring the PQ's antidemocratic Quebec Charter of Values "legitimate," albeit poorly formulated. It played a significant role in the unions' derailing of the 2012 Quebec student strike with its appeal at the strike's height for a PQ-QS electoral alliance. It assisted the unions in ensuring that the 2015-16 Quebec public sector struggle was contained within the straitjacket of collective bargaining and did not become the spearhead of a mass challenge to the austerity measures of the Couillard Liberal government. As a bridge to still closer ties with the PQ and the pro-PQ trade union bureaucracy, QS is currently finalizing a merger with Option National (ON), a tiny rightwing split-off from the PQ that urges QS to abandon "social issues" so as to focus exclusively on the push for an independent capitalist Quebec.

Québec Solidaire is the political voice of petty-bourgeois strata that are in the thrall of the faction of the Quebec bourgeoisie eager to secure greater autonomy from Ottawa and Bay Street so as to make its own deals with Washington and Wall Street. But its politics serve to bolster the Canadian bourgeoisie as a whole. QS supported both the abortive 2008 NDP-Liberal coalition and the 2015 "Anybody but Conservative" campaign. More fundamentally, with its promotion of nationalism, with its claims that Quebec workers should define themselves politically as Québécois and align with Quebec capitalists like Pierre-Karl Péladeau rather than workers in English Canada, QS helps quarantine the struggles of the Quebec working class and perpetuate the political divide between Québécois and English-Canadian workers that has always served as an important mechanism of bourgeois rule in Canada.

While championing an independent Quebec, QS is thoroughly provincial, seldom commenting on international questions. Nevertheless, it has repeatedly endorsed Canadian imperialism's foreign policy and wars, including the neocolonial war in Afghanistan, the US-led regime-change war in Libya, and its denunciations of alleged Russian aggression in Ukraine.

47. Over the past quarter-century, the pseudo-left in Canada, as

internationally, has emerged as an increasingly explicit pro-war and pro-imperialist tendency, as exemplified by their labeling of various US regime-change operations from Libya and Syria to the Ukraine as “revolutions.” They conspired with the NDP top brass to keep the issue of war almost entirely out of the leadership campaign. Fightback was outraged when the *World Socialist Web Site* revealed that Nikki Ashton had shamelessly lied about twice voting, along with the rest of the NDP parliamentarians, for Canadian participation in NATO’s war on Libya.

Oppose war and nationalism! Build the Socialist Equality Party!

48. In the coming struggles, workers in Canada, as around the world, must be guided by the lessons of the immense revolutionary struggles of the last century, above all the October 1917 Russian Revolution. One hundred years ago, the Russian workers, under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party of Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, demonstrated in practice that the working class could provide a way out of imperialist war and capitalist exploitation: that it could conquer state power, establish a workers’ government, and organize society on socialist principles.

The Russian Revolution arose out of the breakdown of world capitalism and triumphed because, under the Bolsheviks’ leadership, it was infused with a socialist internationalist perspective. World Socialist Revolution was the answer of the working class to the impasse and failure of capitalism, to a breakdown that would convulse the world for the next three decades and give rise to the Great Depression, fascism and a second world war. That the first workers’ state remained isolated and political power was subsequently usurped by a privileged bureaucracy led by Stalin in no way lessens the revolution’s historic significance, nor the contemporary relevance of the program that animated it.

49. The bourgeois pundits seized on the Stalinist bureaucracy’s dissolution of the Soviet Union to declare the “end of history” and the impossibility of any alternative to the profit system. A quarter-century later, the fatuous claims of a new golden age of capitalist progress stand as a mockery. World capitalism is mired in systemic crisis. The imperialist bourgeoisies, Canada’s among them, are lurching ever further to the right, reviving militarism and recklessly steering a course toward a third world war. Bourgeois democracy is breaking down, as the rival ruling elites, unable to find a popular base of support for their program of war and austerity, turn to criminalizing social opposition and stoking bellicose nationalism, xenophobia and all forms of social reaction.

But as a century ago, capitalist breakdown is also producing the objective conditions for socialist revolution. Millions of people are being thrust into bitter class battles to defend their jobs and hard-won social and democratic rights. Hostility among working people to the squandering of vital resources on rearmament and the war intrigues of the capitalist elite is palpable. The globalization of production has been associated with a dramatic increase in the size and social power of the world working class and has created the technical means for coordinating the international struggles of the working class as never before. It is the political task of socialists to translate these objective tendencies into a revolutionary program and organization that can guide the working class in the struggles ahead.

50. The imperative of revolutionary leadership was demonstrated by the Russian Revolution and the role the Bolshevik party played in actualizing the creative power of the working class. Mighty as the revolutionary explosion in 1917 was, a vanguard party armed with a scientific Marxist perspective was needed to reveal the revolution’s class logic in the struggle for workers’ power and to guide and organize that struggle.

The Socialist Equality Party is dedicated to building such a party

today—the Canadian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International. The SEP bases itself on the historic struggle of the Fourth International, founded by Leon Trotsky and led since 1953 by the International Committee. The ICFI has conducted a decades-long struggle to defend the heritage of orthodox Trotskyism, opposing all efforts to mislead the working class through the promotion of Stalinism, bourgeois nationalism, social democracy and the anti-Marxist, subjective idealist conceptions associated with postmodernism and the Frankfurt School.

51. We fight to rally the working class to the program of world socialist revolution. This requires an unrelenting struggle for the political independence of the working class from all the capitalist parties and organizations. This includes those like the pseudo-left who seek to keep workers in the thrall of the pro-capitalist unions and NDP and who promote Canadian and Quebec nationalism and identity politics. In conjunction with our comrades in the ICFI, we place the struggle to build a working class-led international movement against imperialist war at the centre of our political work.

The SEP fights for the unity of the working class—English and French-speaking, immigrant and First Nations—and to fuse all its struggles—against the dismantling of public services, job cuts and concessions, police violence and attacks on democratic rights, and the predations of Canadian imperialism—into a mass mobilization for a workers’ government committed to socialist policies.

Into all of the struggles of the working class, we systematically strive to infuse the understanding that Canadian workers must link and coordinate them with the mounting resistance of the international working class.

52. Flowing from this socialist internationalist perspective, the SEP insists, in opposition to the entire official and pseudo left, that a strategic orientation to the struggles of the American working class must be a fundamental element in Canadian workers’ class strategy.

The defeat of US imperialism, which emerged from the world wars and the Great Depression of the last century as the banker and policeman of world capitalism, is a strategic task of the world working class. By fighting intransigently against their “own” bourgeoisie and to fuse their struggles with those of their US class brothers and sisters, Canadian workers can make a mighty contribution to the development of the American working class as an independent political force and protagonist for power. Likewise, Canadian workers will be enormously strengthened in their struggles against war and the assault on their social and democratic rights by the eruption of class struggle in capitalism’s greatest bastion.

As the US Socialist Equality Party has explained in a recent statement, “Class Struggle or Palace Coup,” the “relentless deterioration of the conditions of life for the working class within the United States, and the pointless violence of the endless wars waged by the ruling class” are producing a “profound change in the social consciousness of masses of people... The decades-long suppression of the class struggle by the trade union bureaucracy, the Democratic Party and the affluent sponsors of various forms of identity politics is coming to an end. The social counterrevolution of the ruling elites is about to encounter an upsurge of the American working class.”

53. The possibility for joint revolutionary action by the North American proletariat is lodged in its history and social being. All the major upheavals of the working class in North America—from the Knights of Labor through the sit-down strikes of the 1930s and the social upheavals of the 1960s—galvanized support on both sides of the Canada-US border, including among the French-speaking workers of Quebec. During the past half-century, there has been a concerted attempt, spearheaded by the union bureaucracy and pseudo-left, to denigrate and efface this history of common struggle. In implacable opposition to this, and as part of its systematic exposure of Canadian and Quebec nationalism as the main ideologies of the Canadian bourgeoisie, the SEP fights, in collaboration

with the US SEP, for the objective unity of North American workers in a highly integrated continental economy to become a conscious revolutionary strategy.

54. The SEP urges all our supporters, WSWs readers and those looking for a means to oppose war and reaction to study this statement. We invite questions and comments. Those in agreement should make haste to join and build the SEP as the revolutionary party of the Canadian working class.



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