Canadian establishment rallies behind Trudeau in trade war with US

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The collapse of last weekend's G7 summit into acrimony and recrimination has thrown the three-quarter-century-old Canada-US alliance into unprecedented crisis.

In response to US President Donald Trump's imposition of tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum and his threats to impose tariffs on Canadian auto imports—a move that would decimate the country's heavily US-integrated auto sector—the entire political establishment, from the New Democratic Party, its trade union allies, and the Greens to the most right-wing Conservatives, has rallied behind Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Trump denounced Trudeau as "weak" and "dishonest" shortly after leaving the summit, citing Trudeau's reaffirmation of his plan to impose retaliatory tariffs as reason to repudiate the summit communique. The following day, Trump's leading advisers attacked Canada in an extremely aggressive manner. Trump economic adviser Peter Navarro said Trudeau would have a "special place in hell" for daring to challenge the president.

The apparent trigger for Trump's outburst was Trudeau's closing press conference at the G7, during which the Canadian prime minister characterized the US imposition of tariffs on so-called national security grounds as "insulting," and vowed Ottawa would go ahead with the implementation of C$16 billion worth of its own tariffs against US products starting July 1.

Yet, even as Trudeau and others made comments highly critical of Trump, they sought to stress the Canadian bourgeoisie's long-standing and intimate military-security partnership with US imperialism, thereby demonstrating that despite the current spat, Canada's ruling elite is eager to cut a deal with Washington, so as to preserve Canadian imperialism's privileged access to the US market and close strategic alliance with the world's premier imperialist power.

The Canadian bourgeoisie is "insulted" because Trump's tariffs cut across Ottawa's desire to continue to serve as US imperialism's junior partner in upholding North American global hegemony. The Trudeau government, which has pledged to modernize the North American Aerospace Defence (NORAD) security partnership with the US and has further integrated Canada into US military-strategic offensives around the world, would be more than willing to assist Trump in imposing his tariffs if only they were restricted to China, Russia, and other common geopolitical rivals.

The eruption of trade war between two countries long considered among the closest of allies anywhere in the world is not due to Trump's eccentricities. As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote in its analysis of the G7 debacle, "Rather, this historical milestone is an expression of US imperialism's desperate attempts to resolve insoluble contradictions of world capitalism."

In addition to trade war, the conflict between the ever-more integrated global economy and the division of the world into competing capitalist nation-states is paving the way for wars of aggression, including military clashes between the imperialist powers themselves. As Trudeau, Trump, and the European leaders recklessly implement tariffs and counter-tariffs, they are all arming their respective militaries to the teeth.

The global capitalist crisis has undermined the Canadian bourgeoisie's long-standing strategy of advancing its own imperialist interests in close alliance with US imperialism, while at the same time relying on multilateral international institutions to offset the power imbalance that has always prevailed between Ottawa and Washington. As tensions between American and European imperialism mount, and with the collapse of the G7 summit serving as the latest proof that the multilateral institutions put in place to regulate inter-imperialist rivalries after the last world war are in an advanced stage of decay, Canada's ruling elite is being thrust ever more forcefully into the maelstrom of imperialist conflict.

Under these conditions, Canadian workers must oppose all attempts by the bourgeois political establishment to rally them behind the Trudeau government's trade-war tariffs on the basis of reactionary Canadian nationalism. Workers have nothing to gain and everything to lose in such an alliance, which will serve as cover for the intensification of the big business assault on workers across the country and pave the way for workers to be used as cannon fodder in Canadian imperialism's commercial and shooting wars.

The most nauseating display of the "national unity" being promoted by all sections of the establishment came Monday, when all the parliamentary parties came together in the House of Commons to pass a motion endorsing Trudeau's tariffs. "While Canadians stand together, President Trump stands alone," intoned NDP House Leader Ruth Ellen Brosseau. After extending "thanks" to the opposition parties, Liberal minister Dominic LeBlanc preposterously declared, "We will always stand for Canadian workers."

This is a fraud. Trudeau leads a government of big business and war, which has launched a massive plan to privatize public

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infrastructure in the interests of the financial elite, committed to hike military spending by more than 70 percent over the next decade, and maintained the fiscal framework of austerity social spending and ultra-low taxes for business and the wealthy established by successive Liberal and Conservative governments.

The Trudeau government has been striving to reach an accommodation with Trump since his election in November 2016, both to protect the vast corporate profits dependent on exports to the US, the destination for three-quarters of Canadian exports, and to enable Canadian corporations to continue to scour the globe in search of new markets on the coat-tails of US imperialism.

In addition to US tariffs on aluminum, steel, and softwood lumber, Canadian imperialism confronts Trump administration demands for major changes to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Talks on renegotiating NAFTA have effectively stalled since mid-April. During a one-on-one with Trudeau on the sidelines of the G7, Trump reportedly repeated his demand for a five-year NAFTA sunset clause and the abolition of the Chapter 19 dispute-resolution mechanism. Ottawa has declared these issues its two most important red lines.

Trudeau's immediate priorities in the Canada-US confrontation are to defend the multibillion-dollar profits of Canadian big business and claw back any losses by intensifying austerity measures on the working class.

Speaking on behalf of Canada's major oil corporations and the corporate elite as a whole, Trudeau told Trump during their G7 tête-à-tête, "Here's the essence of our trading relationship. We sell you a lot of oil and energy and you sell us a lot of food and manufactured goods. It is a trillion dollar relationship. We could pick any one of those things and argue over the numbers. But shouldn't we be talking about the relationship as a whole, which is an unmitigated positive for both of us?"

If these trillions are now at risk in a trade war, it will be the working class on both sides of the border who will pay the price. The consequences of the developing trade war were spelt out most clearly by the newly elected right-wing populist Tory premier of Ontario, Doug Ford, who has declared his whole-hearted support for Trudeau's tariffs. Speaking in the border city of Windsor, Ontario, on the day Trump imposed the US steel and aluminum tariffs, Ford declared, "Make no mistake about it, we're going to go after them full tilt—on reducing our taxes, making ourselves more competitive. ... We will go down to the street at the border and put up that big sign I've been talking about and tell our neighbour, 'Ontario is open for business'."

Cutting taxes and improving "competitiveness" to ensure Canada remains "open for business": this is the language of a ruling elite baying for blood from the working class. Ford's remarks confirm that the trade war measures will be accompanied by job losses, wage cuts, spending reductions, and further handouts to the super-rich and big business.

The trade unions and NDP are endeavouring to sell this reactionary, anti-working class agenda as a policy geared towards the defence of workers' interests. Their enthusiasm for promoting Canadian nationalism—the reactionary ideology of Canada's ruling elite—and for pitting Canadian workers against workers in other countries knows no bounds. The trade unions, declared a Canadian Labour Congress statement, "applaud the Canadian government's retaliation against the unjustified and unwarranted American tariffs on steel and aluminum."

This foul nationalist campaign expresses the unions' pro-corporate character. For decades, they have peddled the myth that Canadian workers can advance their interests on the basis of a nationalist strategy. From the emergence of the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) union in a nationalist split from the United Auto Workers in 1985, to the hailing by Unifor President Jerry Dias and other union bureaucrats of Trump's decision to reopen NAFTA as an "opportunity" for workers, Canada's union bureaucrats have served up nationalist demagogy to conceal their own role in decimating the jobs and living standards of the working class.

In close collaboration with big business governments—including the Trudeau Liberals, the McGuinty and Wynne Liberal governments in Ontario, and Parti Quebecois governments in Quebec—and the transnational automakers and other corporate giants, Canada's unions have been complicit in round after round of concessions and job cuts.

Workers must reject the unions' nationalist propaganda and the attempt by the entire political establishment to posture as defenders of workers' interests with contempt. In opposition to the nationalist, pro-capitalist policy of lending support to Canada's retaliatory tariffs, Canadian workers must link their struggles to the growing upsurge of the American and international working class.

It is impossible to advance the interests of Canadian workers in alliance with big business and its political representatives. Instead, Canadian workers must join forces with their class brothers and sisters in the US, Mexico, and around the world in a counter-offensive against the austerity, militarism, and nationalism promoted by the ruling elite in every country. In opposition to the imposition of tariffs and counter-tariffs, and the descent of the global capitalist system into trade war and military conflict, workers must make socialist-internationalism the axis of their struggles.

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