Canada’s ruling elite whipping up anti-China hysteria to pave way for repression, rearmament and war

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Canada’s political and media establishment has unleashed a hysterical anti-China campaign in recent months that is gathering pace ahead of this fall’s federal election. With trumped-up claims of Chinese bullying due to its detention of two Canadian citizens and its restrictions on Canadian agricultural imports, and allegations Beijing is threatening “Canadian democracy,” the ruling class is attempting to whip up anti-China sentiment and popular support for attacks on democratic rights and war preparations.

All the organs of Canadian bourgeois propaganda—government institutions, political parties, and corporate media outlets—have united to cast Ottawa as the beleaguered David confronting a Chinese Goliath. Never mind the fact that the sharp deterioration of Canada-Chinese relations over the past year has occurred above all due to the provocative actions of the Trudeau Liberal government and its US imperialist ally. Chief among these was the seizure by Canadian authorities last December of Meng Wanzhou, the chief financial officer of Chinese tech giant Huawei, in Vancouver on behalf of the US on bogus charges of illegally evading Washington’s sanctions on Iran.

Meng’s politically motivated arrest was timed to coincide with US President Trump’s meeting on the sidelines of the G-20 with Chinese President Xi Jinping, where Trump sought to strong-arm Beijing into making concessions on trade. This came in the wake of Canada’s agreement to an updated version of the North American Free Trade Agreement aimed at consolidating a US-dominated North American protectionist trade bloc to confront China’s economic rise, and US Vice President Mike Pence’s October speech declaring that Washington and its allies are engaged in a new Cold War with Beijing. In this context, the Canadian ruling elite wanted to send a clear signal with Meng’s detention: Canadian imperialism is lining up behind the US-led economic and military offensive against China.

Little more than eight months later, Washington’s aggressive confrontation with China has escalated into a full-scale currency war and is assuming an ever more explicitly military character. Last week, following Washington’s unilateral abrogation of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty, the US confirmed that it intends to deploy nuclear-capable missiles to the Asia-Pacific, turning the Chinese coastline and surrounding countries that are home to billions of people into a potential battlefield.

The US-China conflict is deeply rooted in the objective breakdown of the capitalist system. With its own global economic position rapidly eroding, Washington is determined to thwart China’s rise by any means necessary, including war. For its part, the Stalinist bureaucracy that in the 1980s and 1990s restored capitalism in China and now acts as the political guard dogs of the new capitalist oligarchy sees no alternative to continuing to expand Beijing’s economic and geopolitical influence, especially as the regime faces mounting pressure from an increasingly militant working class.

The Canadian bourgeoisie, which has relied on its close military-strategic partnership with the US for over seven decades to pursue its own predatory imperialist ambitions around the world, is fully on board with Washington’s war drive. Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland summed up the prevailing view in ruling circles when she remarked in her keynote address on the Liberals’ new defence policy in 2017 that the US should be praised for the “outsized role” it has played since World War II in defending the “liberal-democratic order,” and that Canada is now called upon to do more to support Washington. In that same speech, she identified China’s economic rise as one of the chief “global threats” confronting Canada in the years to come.

The war drive in the Asia-Pacific

Canada has long been a partner in the US military buildup against China and will be directly implicated in any buildup of nuclear-capable weaponry in the Asia-Pacific. Since 2013, the Canadian and US militaries have operated a secret agreement governing joint activities in the region. Canadian submarines and ships have frequently participated in so-called “freedom of navigation” exercises in the South China Sea and the Canadian military has declared the Malacca Strait of “strategic importance” to Canada.

The ruling elite plans to use the upcoming election campaign to press for an even more confrontational policy towards China, irrespective of which party emerges victorious. As the US was announcing its intentions to locate nuclear-capable missiles in the Asia-Pacific, Canada’s Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland held her first bilateral meeting with her Chinese counterpart, Foreign Minister Wang Yi, since the eruption of the diplomatic dispute. In a brief, tersely worded statement released August 2, Freeland’s office acknowledged that the pair had a “frank exchange of views” on the arrest of Meng by Canada and the detention by China of Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor.

Freeland’s meeting became the occasion for the opposition Conservatives to renew their attack on the Liberals for allegedly being “too soft” on China. Tory leader Andrew Scheer demanded that the Trudeau government file a complaint at the World Trade Organization against China for its restrictions on purchases Canadian beef and canola oil, retaliatory steps adopted by Beijing following Meng’s arrest. In a keynote foreign policy address earlier this year, Scheer declared that a government under his leadership would seek to join the American-led

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ballistic missile defence (BMD) shield, which is aimed at creating the conditions for the conducting of a “winnable” nuclear war.

Scheer is also sharply criticizing the Trudeau Liberals for their failure to immediately act on Washington’s demand that Ottawa ban Huawei from participating in Canada’s fledgling 5G network. Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale has indicated that a decision will not be reached prior to the October 21 federal election. However, he made clear that the purpose of the delay is to coordinate Ottawa’s policy as closely with Washington as possible, stressing that it is necessary to obtain more security information from the US concerning the risks associated with Huawei.

The ruling elite’s pro-war conspiracy

Corporate media outlets, from the right-wing *National Post* to the *Globe and Mail*, and the nominally Liberal *Toronto Star* have helped amplify the most hardline anti-China positions. In recent days the *Globe* has denounced Canada’s “passive playbook” against China and railed against Beijing for having “dropped the gloves.” Meanwhile, *Maclean’s* magazine last month carried a sensationalized opinion piece by right-wing columnist Terry Glavin entitled “The real election threat is China.”

These are sentiments that find broad support within the ruling elite. A recently released, secret report prepared for top intelligence officials last year revealed that the security-intelligence establishment has begun to view anyone of Chinese origin in Canada, which amounts to some 1.8 million people, as a potential threat. According to the Canadian Press, “Countering hostile state activity: the Canadian perspective” was prepared for deputy ministers attending a national security retreat in March 2018. The report’s authors declared, “Under the rubric of ‘hybrid or asymmetric or information warfare,’ adversarial states have increased the use of covert technical and human-based intelligence platforms to advance their security, defence, economic or foreign-policy objectives.”

By creating the impression of a malevolent China intent on bullying Canada and “interfering” in its democracy, the ruling elite is seeking to overcome the deep-seated popular hostility to militarism and authoritarian forms of rule in the working class.

A report entitled “Should Canada participate in ballistic missile defence?” that the Macdonald-Laurier Institute prepared last year found that fully 90 percent of defence policy experts, including former defence ministers, ambassadors and other senior politicians, support Canada joining a US-led missile defence shield. This overwhelming support confirms the analysis made by the *World Socialist Web Site* that the 70-plus percent military spending hike by 2026 the Liberals announced in 2017 was a mere down payment.

But the ruling elite confronts the problem that millions of Canadians, who have experienced decades of vicious social spending cuts and tax handouts to big business at all levels of government, are deeply opposed to billions of additional dollars being forked over to the military in preparation for a catastrophic war. Even former hard-right Prime Minister Stephen Harper was compelled to acknowledge in 2014 amid pressure for all NATO members to increase their military spending to 2 percent of GDP that Canadians would not understand why this was necessary. This is why the ruling class desperately needs to conjure up the spectre of a Chinese bogeyman out to get Canada.

This pro-war conspiracy is supported by the entire ruling elite, including the trade union-backed New Democratic Party, which has voiced support for the Huawei 5G ban and, through its complicit silence, backed the Liberals massive military spending hike. For their part, the trade unions have used their intimate alliance with the Trudeau government to push for the very trade-war measures that serve as the economic basis for the bourgeoisie’s war drive. When Trudeau was lobbying Trump to lift US sanctions imposed on Canadian steel and aluminum, the unions enthusiastically joined in, telling Trump and other top US politicians that they need Canadian steel to make warplanes, tanks, and weaponry, and that Canada and the US should jointly wage trade war against Beijing.

The ruling elite is also acutely aware that the upcoming federal election will take place under conditions of a growing upsurge of the working class internationally, which has found expression in Canada with the emergence of mass protests against the Ford government’s austerity measures in Ontario. Within this context, the demonization of China is also being used to justify ever more draconian attacks on democratic rights, handing new powers to the capitalist state to suppress freedom of speech and other core rights.

The Trudeau government has already implemented in conjunction with the social media giants a major program of internet censorship under the guise of preventing “foreign interference” in the election. And in the name of promoting “authoritative content,” the Liberals intend to make available some $600 million over the coming three years to media companies deemed to be reporting the news correctly. These latest steps build on the vast powers arrogated to the military-intelligence apparatus over the past 15 years in the name of fighting “terrorism,” including the expansion of mass surveillance and the gutting of fundamental legal principles like the presumption of innocence.

Working people across Canada and around the world must take these developments as a serious warning. Behind the backs of the population, the Canadian ruling elite, like its counterparts in the US and internationally, is erecting the scaffolding for a police state and planning for a catastrophic war against China or Russia that would put the lives of tens, if not hundreds of millions, at risk. Workers must decisively reject the demonization of China and the ruling elite’s effort to whip up a war fever in the population. They must turn to the building of an international antiwar movement in alliance with their class brothers and sisters in the United States, China, and internationally to expose the militarist conspiracies of the ruling class. To these, they must counterpose the fight for a socialist and internationalist program to put an end to war and the capitalist profit system that gives rise to it.

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