

Canada's Liberals spending tens of billions on battleships, warplanes

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Nothing exposes more the bogus character of the campaign mounted by Justin Trudeau and his trade union allies to promote the Liberals as a “progressive” alternative to Andrew Scheer’s Tories in next month’s federal election than the Liberal government’s drive to “modernize” Canada’s military for war.

The Trudeau government is spending tens of billions on weapons purchases, including on new fleets of warships and combat aircraft, drones and other surveillance devices, and armored vehicles. This vast rearmament program is part of a more than 70 percent hike in military spending over 10 years that the Liberals announced in 2017.

In the context of a surge in inter-imperialist and great power tensions that has seen all the major powers—including the United States, Japan and Germany—announce rearmament programs, Canada’s ruling class is determined to defend its predatory global interests by arming itself to the teeth.

“The use of force... is part of our history and must be part of our future,” declared Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland in unveiling the Liberals’ new national defence policy (see: “War must be part of Canada’s future, foreign minister declares”).

A major belligerent in the two imperialist world wars of the last century, Canada has been at war almost continuously for the past two decades, including as a participant in the 1999 war on Yugoslavia, the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, and NATO’s 2011 regime-change war in Libya.

Canadian Armed Forces personnel are deployed alongside US forces in the three regions where the Pentagon is most active: in the Asia-Pacific, in military operations targeting China and North Korea; in Eastern Europe, where Canada is involved in operations against so-called “Russian aggression”; and in the oil-rich Middle East. Any of these regions could quickly become the scene of major military wars—wars that could ignite a global conflagration.

Canada’s capitalist ruling elite views the strengthening of Canada’s military as essential to maintaining its nearly eight decades-old military-strategic partnership with Washington. Through this partnership, it has gained heft on the world stage, enabling it to advance its interests and secure a share of imperialist plunder.

Traditionally, Ottawa has been able to offset the power

imbalance with its southern neighbour by participating in various multilateral imperialist alliances, such as NATO. But the decline in American imperialism’s relative economic and geopolitical power is driving Washington to act more unilaterally and aggressively, and to demand more from its “allies.”

Canadian imperialism, which has also seen its share of world economic output and trade fall and is similarly threatened by the rise of new powers, has been shaken by these developments. Its response, like Washington’s, has been to adopt an even more aggressive foreign, military and geostrategic policy, while intensifying the assault on the working class at home.

The major military procurements announced by the Liberal government in recent months include:

- The purchase of 15 warships at an estimated cost of \$70 billion over 26 years, the largest military expenditure in Canadian history. The ships, to be built by the military contractor Lockheed-Martin Canada, will be based on the Type 26 frigate design of the British firm BAE Systems. Ultimately, Canada will have the world’s largest fleet of this type of warship.

- In mid-August, the government contracted with General Dynamics Land Systems Canada (GDLS) to manufacture 360 light armoured vehicles. Located in London, Ontario, the company is also manufacturing \$15 billion worth of light armoured vehicles for Saudi Arabia as part of Ottawa’s close partnership with the despotic Middle Eastern regime.

- The Trudeau government has unveiled a \$19 billion tender for 88 warplanes to replace its 77 CF-18 fighter jets, in what it is touting as “the most significant investment in the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) in 30 years.” The government has also purchased 18 used fighter jets from Australia for \$500 million, claiming that increased military commitments mean it can’t wait till 2025, when the first of the new fighter planes are to be inducted, to increase the size of the RCAF. In addition, Ottawa is investing \$1.5 billion to modernize its existing fleet of CF-18s.

- Canada’s Special Forces, which are playing an important role in Canada’s military missions in Ukraine and Iraq, are to receive three new surveillance aircraft at a cost of \$188 million.

- The government has also allocated \$250 million to modernize the Primary Reserve Forces, whose total personnel is being increased from 28,500 to 30,000.

Governments at all levels and of all political stripes incessantly declare that “there is no money” for hospitals, schools, infrastructure and public services, yet Trudeau’s Liberals are willing to spend billions to replenish and modernize Canada’s military arsenal.

Large sections of the bourgeoisie are pushing for an even more aggressive rearmament program. The constant refrain from the *Globe and Mail*, the representative of the country’s most powerful financial circles, the ultra-right-wing *National Post*, and the entire corporate-controlled media is that procurement and manufacturing times are too long, that there is too much “monitoring” of tenders, and that the huge sums invested are insufficient.

Such criticisms were also leveled at the previous Stephen Harper-led Conservative government. Harper, with the support of the CAF high command, was determined to put paid to the 1970s liberal Canadian nationalist myth that Canada is a peacekeeping nation. Harper publicly celebrated Canada’s militarist tradition, dubbing Canada a “warrior nation,” expanded Canada’s role in the Afghan war, and deployed the Canadian Forces to wage war in Libya, Iraq and Syria. But due to the widespread popular opposition to rearmament and war, the Conservative prime minister balked at implementing NATO’s decision that all member states increase their military spending to at least 2 percent of GDP. Canadians, Harper conceded, would not “understand” such a dramatic hike in the defence budget.

The Trudeau government’s military spending hike—which goes far beyond that announced by Harper in his government’s last year in office—will increase the military budget from \$18.9 billion in 2017 to \$32.7 billion in 2026. While the Conservatives celebrated Canada’s military prowess, including staging a “victory” parade to mark the Canadian Armed Forces’ role in the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime, the Trudeau government is using “humanitarian” and “democratic” demagoguery to try to bamboozle the public into accepting their pro-war policy.

The “renewal” of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), a central element in Ottawa’s geostrategic partnership with Washington, could boost military spending even further, since it is not part of the spending plans already unveiled.

According to James Fergusson, a NORAD research associate at the University of Manitoba, replacing the North Warning System, a chain of radar stations in the far north, would alone cost \$11 billion. Under an existing agreement, such costs are shared 40–60 with the United States.

Canada’s military-security establishment has signaled that it intends to use NORAD’s “modernization” to push for Canada to join the US anti-ballistic missile defence shield. Its name

notwithstanding, this initiative is aimed at making a nuclear war “winnable.” Scheer and his Conservatives are already committed to Canada joining the missile defence shield.

Canada’s social democratic New Democratic Party (NDP), which has supported every war Canada has participated in since the bombardment of Yugoslavia in 1999, maintains a studious silence on the rearmament program. This is a silence that bespeaks consent. In Quebec, the pseudo-left Quebec Solidaire, which generally avoids making any statement on events that take place beyond Quebec’s borders, including military conflicts, is equally complicit.

Neither the NDP nor QS are doing anything to mobilize the broad opposition that exists among the population to rearmament and Canada’s foreign military interventions and war.

If these pro-capitalist organizations have their way, the working class will be made to pay the price for Canada’s massive military build-up. In the first instance, this will be through further devastating cuts to public services, so as to provide the vast sums required to put the armed forces on a war footing. However, this will pale in comparison to the death and destruction working people and youth will face when the Canadian bourgeoisie, sooner rather than later, uses them as cannon fodder in its criminal policy of supporting Washington in the drive to uphold North American imperialist hegemony through aggression and war.

But an alternative is emerging. From the Yellow Vest protests in France, to the mass movements in Hong Kong, Algeria and Sudan, and the mass strikes by workers in North America and Europe increasingly mounted in explicit opposition to the corporatist trade unions, the working class is demonstrating its immense social power.

A mass working class-led, anti-war movement that links up the struggle against militarism and imperialism with the fight against capitalist austerity, precarious employment and social inequality must be built on a global scale. In opposition to the demands of the major corporations for ever greater profits, which are ultimately backed up by the military forces of every capitalist state, the working class must advance a socialist and internationalist program to put an end to war and the capitalist system that gives rise to it.



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