

Canada's media join Conservatives in pushing for RCMP to play key role in election outcome

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16 September 2019

The opening days of Canada's federal election campaign have been dominated by the attempt of the Conservatives and much of the corporate media to frame the election as a referendum on "corruption." They are demanding that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) be given free rein to investigate whether the Liberal government's actions in the SNC-Lavalin affair constituted "obstruction of justice."

That Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his top aides went to extraordinary lengths to shield the Quebec-based transnational engineering and construction from criminal prosecution—including by rewriting, and subsequently seeking to bend and manipulate the law—is beyond doubt.

The SNC-Lavalin episode has exposed Trudeau and his Liberals for what they are—pliant servants of big business. While they posture, with the support of the pro-capitalist trade unions, as "progressives" preoccupied with the concerns of working people, the Liberals are at the beck and call of corporate Canada.

However, the Tories and the media, led by the *Globe and Mail*, the traditional voice of the Bay Street financial elite, are cynically and hypocritically seeking to use the SNC-Lavalin affair to shift politics still further right. Particularly sinister is their insistence that the RCMP must be empowered to investigate the SNC-Lavalin affair, and the actions of Trudeau and the Prime Minister's Office in particular, in the midst of the election campaign. This would effectively give Canada's national police—a force notorious for its right-wing sympathies and repeated violations of Canadians' democratic rights—a powerful say in the election's outcome.

The SNC-Lavalin scandal broke last February, when it emerged that Jody Wilson-Raybould had been sacked as Trudeau's Justice Minister and Attorney General because she refused to halt the company's criminal prosecution for paying tens of millions of dollars in bribes to secure Libyan contracts. In 2018, the Liberals had passed a law allowing the Attorney General to offer Deferred Prosecution Agreements (DPA) to companies facing criminal charges. This move was so transparently connected to the impending case against Canada's largest engineering firm that Ottawa insiders labelled it the "SNC-Lavalin bill." Under a DPA, charges are stayed in exchange for fines and a pledge to abide by the law in the future.

No sooner had Wilson-Raybould indicated that she was not ready to use her new powers to shield SNC-Lavalin, than the Prime Minister's Office, led by Trudeau, initiated a campaign of pressure and intimidation. For four months, beginning in September 2018, senior Trudeau aides colluded with SNC-Lavalin representatives, advising

them on how to argue their case with Justice Department officials. At the same time, they browbeat Wilson-Raybould to reverse her decision; although, in order not to violate the letter of the law, they couched this as urging her to take a fresh look at the case and seek expert advice.

When Wilson-Raybould persisted in defying Trudeau's wishes, the prime minister demoted her to Veterans Affairs Minister in a January cabinet shuffle, and after she resigned from cabinet and demanded Trudeau apologize for bullying her, expelled her from the Liberal caucus.

From the outset, Andrew Scheer's Conservatives and the right-wing media have exploited the scandal to destabilize the government and try to make "Liberal corruption" a key, if not the decisive, question in the October federal election.

The renewed push for an RCMP investigation, just as the election campaign begins, marks a dangerous escalation of this right-wing conspiracy. It is being spearheaded by the *Globe and Mail*, which is owned by David Thomson, Canada's richest billionaire.

The role of the *Globe*, the mouthpiece of Canada's financial elite

Last Wednesday, the day that Trudeau chose to formally initiate the election campaign, the *Globe* published as its lead story a sensationalized report on the SNC-Lavalin affair. It offered little new in the way of facts, but asserted that the Prime Minister's Office was blocking attempts by the RCMP to investigate what took place. Buried in the story was the admission that Canada's national police has, as of yet, not even opened a criminal investigation into the affair.

Then on both Thursday and Friday, the *Globe* again led its printed edition with further stories alleging the government and Trudeau personally are impeding an RCMP investigation of the SNC-Lavalin affair. Indicating the powerful forces behind the anti-Trudeau push, Wilson-Raybould suddenly dropped her previous opposition to a police investigation. On Wednesday, she told the *Globe* she had been interviewed by the RCMP at length the previous day and now believes a full police inquiry must be mounted to determine whether obstruction of justice charges are warranted.

Globe columnist John Ibbitson summed up the reactionary character of the campaign, declaring, "We have to know what Mr. Trudeau is hiding from parliament, the ethics commissioner, the police and us..."

The national interest demands it, and that comes before all.”

The Trudeau government is a pro-austerity, pro-war government that must be implacably opposed by the working class. But in doing so, it must lend no support to the reactionary intrigues of the Tories and the *Globe*. Their attempt to make the RCMP the arbiter of the election's outcome is part of a breakdown of democratic forms of rule in all the advanced capitalist countries.

As social inequality deepens, inter-imperialist and great-power tensions rise, and working-class resistance grows, the capitalist ruling elite is increasingly turning to authoritarian methods of rule and the cultivation of the far-right: from the rise to the US presidency of the fascist billionaire Donald Trump, to Boris Johnson's proroguing of Britain's parliament, and Emmanuel Macron's vicious state repression of Yellow Vest protesters and rehabilitation of the Nazi collaborator Marshal Pétain.

An RCMP announcement that it was investigating whether Liberal insiders had illegally profited from a leak of tax measures contained in the Nov. 2005 budget provided a major boost to Stephen Harper and his Conservatives in the January 2006 election. Now, as they did then, the Conservatives rail against “Liberal corruption” the better to obscure their own hard-right agenda.

However, the replacement of another Liberal Prime Minister by his Tory challenger with the aid of an RCMP investigation would not mean a mere return to the policies of Harper, who during his decade in office imposed savage social spending cuts, gutted the right-to-strike and further integrated Canada into Washington's wars in Central Asia, the Mideast and North Africa and its strategic offensives against Russia and China.

The ever-widening assault on the working class

The world capitalist crisis has deepened considerably since 2015, let alone 2006, and the ruling elite is baying for a corresponding intensification of the assault on the working class.

In Ontario, Doug Ford's Progressive Conservative government has slashed billions from public services, including education. Ford has vowed to criminalize teachers' strikes and, in preparation for unleashing state repression, has sought to portray much of the opposition to his government as violent.

In Alberta, the United Conservative government of Jason Kenney commissioned a recently released report that calls for a 20 percent per capita cut in public spending. This will include state-imposed pay cuts and mass lay-offs. Well aware that this agenda will meet strong popular opposition, the report's authors raise the possibility of invoking the Canadian Constitution's reactionary “notwithstanding clause,” which allows governments to run roughshod over constitutionally guaranteed rights and freedoms.

A federal Tory government brought to power through intrigues involving the police and intelligence apparatus would adopt equally ruthless policies at the federal level. Scheer has already pledged that a Conservative government would join the US ballistic missile defence shield, which is aimed at making a nuclear war “winnable;” collaborate more closely with the US against China; and send Canadian Forces to the Persian Gulf to help the US bully and threaten Iran.

The re-election of Trudeau would result in a government no less

hostile to the working class. Far from being the exception, the subservience of the Liberals to corporate interests revealed in the SNC-Lavalin case is standard operating procedure for the Canadian bourgeoisie's traditional party of government.

In his four years in office, Trudeau has committed tens of billions of dollars to equipping Canada's armed forces with new warplanes and battleships, launched a multibillion-dollar privatization program to hand public infrastructure to the financial elite, joined Trump in witch-hunting of immigrants and refugees, and slashed federal funding for healthcare.

Under conditions of a threatened global recession and the intensification of the US-led war drive against China, a re-elected Trudeau government would rapidly come into headlong conflict with the working class. As already demonstrated by its criminalization of the 2018 postal workers' strike and its expansion of the powers of the intelligence agencies, the Trudeau government will resort to repression if its trade union allies prove unable to contain working-class opposition.

The social democratic NDP as usual trails after the capitalist elite's traditional parties of government. The NDP has essentially echoed the Conservatives' talking-points on the SNC-Lavalin affair, while making clear that, in the event of a hung parliament, it will prop up a minority Liberal government.

The working class must repulse all pressure to line up behind one or another faction of the ruling elite as its infighting deepens. Workers have nothing to gain by the removal of the Liberals through a right-wing intrigue. However, it is no less true that they cannot fight the corporate elite and the right-wing by backing the Liberals, whose four years in power have witnessed a continuation, albeit in repackaged form, of Harper's austerity, militarism and attacks on democratic rights.

The only viable response to the SNC-Lavalin scandal is for the working class to take up the struggle for socialism. The corrupt relations that exist between the political establishment as a whole and Canada's fabulously wealthy corporate elite can be broken only through the establishment of a workers' government, committed to placing the banks and basic industry under public ownership and workers' control, a vast program of public works to meet pressing social needs, such as housing, health care, schools and social services, and a halt to the tens of billions of dollars wasted on preparing Canadian imperialism to fight in a new world war. Above all, working people can only end the domination of big business and the super-rich over political life by taking up the fight to abolish the capitalist profit system that gives rise to it.



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