

Conrad Black decries Trudeau's "weak" leadership, "evil campaign"

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A recent *National Post* op-ed penned by the arch-reactionary and failed media mogul Conrad Black sheds important light on the real motives behind the feigned outrage within the political and media establishment over Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's "blackface" photos.

Entitled "Trudeau's not a racist, just a hypocrite and a weak leader," Black's column is an unabashed appeal for the bringing to power of a hard-right government that will not flinch from using authoritarian measures and cultivating the ultra-right to advance Canadian imperialist interests around the globe and clamp down on a resurgent working class at home.

Black has little time for those pillorying Trudeau for donning black and brown face decades ago—incidents for which the prime minister has apologized effusively. All but admitting that the "blackface scandal" has been contrived, Black says, "Trudeau could have expressed regret ... and moved on," except for two things.

First, Trudeau, or so claims Black, has been presiding over an "evil" election campaign, employing "urban guerrilla," "smear" tactics to "defame" the opposition. This is a reference to the Liberals' electorally motivated, and in reality, very limited exposure of the Conservatives' ties to the far right.

Second, and even more importantly, Trudeau has presided over "a series of egregious policy failures" and "fiscal recklessness."

In the midst of the media-political furor over *Time* magazine's publication of a photo of Trudeau in brownface while dressed as Aladdin at a 2001 party, the *World Socialist Web Site* warned that this was a "pseudo-scandal," that was "being weaponized by a substantial faction of the bourgeoisie that has soured on Trudeau ... because they deem him insufficiently ruthless in implementing their class war agenda."

Black's op-ed piece fully confirms this assessment. A member of the ruling class from birth and for a time the owner of one of the largest and most politically influential press empires in the English-speaking world, Black frequently spells out in more or less frank terms the views of the most rapacious sections of capital.

Trudeau, complains Black, is "a pleasant and benign man, but not a strong leader."

He then gets down to the heart of the matter, writing,

"Foreign investment in Canada has declined by 75 per cent in five years while Canadian capital investment in foreign countries has approximately tripled. The storm signals are everywhere and the bell is tolling, and this government's re-election program is to destroy the official opposition with false charges of racist, sexist and sectarian malice."

Black goes on to savage the Liberal government's "colossal mismanagement of native people's issues, absurd obsession with gender issues, and alarmist hysteria about climate and the outright oppression of the oil industry and of the province of Alberta." All of this, he continues, "has been funded" by "high taxes and large deficits."

Black's enthusiasm for Donald Trump, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, and Brexit sets him apart from much of Canada's corporate elite. But substantial sections of big business—Trudeau's pro-austerity, pro-war record, notwithstanding—share Black's impatience for a government that will move more aggressively against the working class, and align Canada still more closely with Washington in support of North American imperialist global dominance, especially against China.

Since coming to power in 2015, Trudeau's Liberals have moved to hike military spending by over 70 percent, set about procuring new fleets of warplanes and battleships, and integrated Canada's military even more completely into Washington's military-strategic offensives against Russia, and China, and in the oil-rich Middle East. Trudeau has also collaborated with Trump's vicious anti-immigrant crackdown, handed billions to big business in subsidies and privatization initiatives, and enforced strict austerity on healthcare and other areas of social spending.

However, an important faction of the ruling elite views this as a mere modest down payment. They fear that the ground is being cut from underneath their feet by the continuing decline in Canada's share of world trade and investment, and by the reemergence of great power conflicts, particularly between the US and China, as well as transatlantic tensions between Washington and the European imperialist powers. These antagonisms have accelerated the disintegration of the multilateral structures, such as NATO and the United Nations, through which Canada as a second-rank imperialist power has

long projected its global interests.

Moreover, over the past twelve months, ruling circles have watched with mounting trepidation the growth of working-class struggle in Canada and internationally. This has included the 2018 strike by 50,000 postal workers which was criminalized by the Trudeau government, the Yellow Vest protests in France, mass protests in Algeria and Hong Kong, the ongoing strike of 48,000 GM autoworkers in the United States, and the mass protests against the Ontario government of the Trump wannabe Doug Ford.

The anti-Trudeau faction of Canada's ruling elite fears that the Liberals and their trade union allies may no longer be able to suppress and contain working-class opposition. What they want is a more ruthless and authoritarian government that will intensify the assault on workers' social rights and deploy the full force of the capitalist state against any eruption of mass opposition to war, attacks on democratic rights, and austerity. This is the meaning of Black's calls for a government headed by a "strong leader."

To this end, Trudeau's opponents within the ruling class have not only exploited the "blackface" scandal to discredit the prime minister. They, as exemplified by Black's tirades against Liberal "character assassination" of "respectable Conservative candidates," have also used it to downplay and trivialize the Conservatives' extensive and growing ties to far-right and outright fascist forces.

The extremely reactionary implications of this whitewash campaign are exemplified by the column Conrad Black authored last October recommending his readers consider voting for far-right Toronto mayoral candidate Faith Goldy. Black praised Goldy, who provided gushing reports for Rebel Media of the 2017 neo-Nazi demonstration in Charlottesville, Virginia and later appeared on a podcast produced by the fascist Daily Stormer, as a "civilized person of reasonable views... a smart, brave and appealing candidate," who recognizes "that the greatest problems lie in selected non-white areas."

Black's endorsement of the fascist Goldy is but one expression of the ruling elite's systematic promotion and encouragement of far-right forces. Hamish Marshall, the national director of the Conservatives' election campaign, was a founding director of Rebel Media, which has recently championed the cause of the British fascist Tommy Robinson. Prominent Conservatives, including the current party leader Andrew Scheer, routinely appeared on Rebel Media, including as a guest on Goldy's talk show, "On the Hunt," till Rebel Media had to fire her because of her open association with the neo-Nazi Daily Stormer.

Trudeau and his Liberals are not merely incapable of resisting the rapid rise of right-wing extremism in Canada; they are actively encouraging it. This can be seen through their alliances with far-right forces in Ukraine, where they are militarily and financially supporting the right-wing Kiev regime, and in Venezuela, where the Trudeau government has played a key

role in backing the US puppet Juan Guaidó and provided international legitimacy for Washington's war threats. The Trudeau government's incessant promotion of identity politics, presenting all major social problems in all but exclusively racial and gender terms, is giving succour to the far-right, enabling them to demagogically posture as the defenders of the "forgotten majority," or even "equality."

The turn towards authoritarian forms of rule by the bourgeoisie and the promotion of outright fascists by both its nominally right-wing and left-liberal factions is an international phenomenon with objective roots in the crisis of world capitalism. In France, President Emmanuel Macron, a former minister in Francois Hollande's Socialist Party government, has overseen ruthless state repression against Yellow Vest demonstrators and glorifies Nazi collaborator Philippe Pétain as a national hero. In Germany, the Social Democrats continue to play a central role in the coalition government of conservative Chancellor Angela Merkel, which is implementing in large measure the policies of the far-right Alternative für Deutschland. In the United States, Trudeau's allies in the Democratic Party are seeking to remove Trump in alliance with powerful factions of the military and intelligence apparatus in an antidemocratic impeachment focused exclusively on national security concerns. They are saying nothing about Trump's attacks on refugees, persecution of political opponents, and threats to wipe entire countries off the map.

Regardless of who wins the upcoming federal election, similar developments are on the agenda in Canada. Right-wing provincial governments in Ontario and Quebec have already invoked the constitution's reactionary "notwithstanding clause," which allows governments to run roughshod over rights "guaranteed" in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, to attack democratic rights. Alberta's Tory provincial government commissioned a recent report that demanded across the board public spending cuts of 20 percent and proposed draconian state repression to enforce such savage austerity.

The great dangers posed by the current political situation underscore the urgent necessity for the working class to intervene with its own independent program. Opposition to the threat represented by the growth of the far-right, and the policies of capitalist austerity and war supported by the entire ruling elite can develop only on the basis of a socialist and internationalist perspective.



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