

Canadian establishment shrugs off Trump's authoritarian power grab, voices "horror" over mass protests

Roger Jordan, Keith Jones
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The eruption across the United States of mass multiracial, multiethnic protests against racist police violence and the Trump administration's incitement of a vicious military-police crackdown have shaken Canada's ruling elite. While glossing over the dangerous implications of Trump's shredding of constitutional prohibitions on the deployment of the military against the American people, the comments of Canada's political leaders and corporate media underscore that their greatest fear is that the demonstrations now sweeping the United States will trigger an explosive upsurge of the class struggle in Canada.

Mimicking the Democratic Party's fecklessness, no political leader in Canada has directly criticized Trump's decision Monday—in what amounts to a bid to establish a presidential dictatorship—to arrogate the power to unleash the military against peaceful protesters.

Asked at his daily coronavirus briefing Tuesday for his opinion of the Trump-incited police rampages against demonstrators, the President's smearing of the protesters as "terrorists," and his vow to "dominate" the street with the military, all Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau could muster, after a lengthy 21-second pause, was: "We all watch in horror and consternation at what is going on in the United States." Pressed by a reporter to condemn Trump's use of heavily armed police to expel peaceful protesters from a park near the White House, Trudeau deliberately avoided doing so. "Canadians," he answered, "need a government that will be there for them, that will support them and that will move us forward in the right direction, and I will do that."

There was one grain of truth in Trudeau's response: the ruling elite is horrified by the emergence of a mass working class movement in opposition to police violence, state repression, and social inequality. It is terrified that the political and social destabilization of its key military strategic partner will undermine Canadian imperialist interests around the world, and that the wave of protests in the US, the largest since the 1960s, will fan social opposition in Canada, demonstrating the class unity of workers on both sides of 49th parallel.

To conceal the class character and significance of the protests, Trudeau, together with Conservative leader Andrew Scheer and New Democratic Party leader Jagmeet Singh, have portrayed them as being almost entirely about race relations. Singh, who described Trump's role as "reprehensible," avoided any reference to Trump's move towards authoritarian forms of rule. Instead, he accused people in general of being "passive bystanders" to "hatred and racism."

The protests, which have been overwhelmingly working class and multiracial, were triggered by the brutal police murder of George Floyd, an African American worker. But they are being fueled by mass anger over decades of savage austerity, endless wars, and the looting of society by the financial oligarchy, as exemplified by the rise of Donald Trump to the presidency and US capitalism's catastrophic response to the

COVID-19 pandemic. While tens of millions have been deprived of their jobs and income, the US has become the center of the pandemic with more than 100,000 acknowledged COVID-19 deaths.

As they do whenever confronted with a crisis, Canada's political leaders and corporate media have responded to the explosion of working class opposition in the US by brandishing their principal ideological weapon—Canadian nationalism. Desperate to insulate and inoculate Canada from the "social contagion" of class struggle, they relentlessly promote the lie that Canadian capitalism is a more "humane" and just society, qualitatively different from the rapacious dollar republic to the south. Susan Delacourt in the *Toronto Star* observed, "While Donald Trump was lashing out over mass civil unrest in his country on Monday, Canadians were getting practical protest advice from top-level government officials."

Another variant on this theme was provided by the *Globe and Mail*'s Gary Mason, who placed all the blame for the social convulsions shaking the US on the figure of Trump, who has apparently descended from the sky to infect an otherwise healthy social and political order. "The US president," wrote Mason, "is the embodiment of white privilege. ... At a moment in the country's history that cries out for leadership, that yearns for someone to speak to a country that is hurting and frightened and doesn't know what tomorrow will bring, he is incapable of such empathy. He is devoid of anything that even slightly resembles the common touch" While left unsaid, the implication was clear, Canada's ruling elite has such a leader in Trudeau.

The shambolic state of Canadian democracy

The Canadian bourgeoisie's refusal to publicly acknowledge the class character and social grievances animating the US protests says more about that state of Canadian society than it cares to admit. Over the past four decades Canada, like the US, has witnessed a massive growth in social inequality and brutalization of society. For the better part of a quarter century, it has been almost perpetually at war, and the ruling elite has increasingly sought to criminalize social opposition.

The solidarity protests that have been joined by tens of thousands in Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Halifax and other cities in recent days underscore that a process of political radicalization among workers and young people is well under way. This has no doubt been further fueled by the ruling elite's response to the pandemic, which has been to bail out the banks and big business to the tune of \$650 billion while placing workers on rations. More than 7,000 Canadians have perished from COVID-19,

and 25 percent of the labour force has lost their jobs.

As in the US, democracy in Canada is in shambles. Following the September 11, 2001 attacks, the ruling elite enthusiastically joined George W. Bush's "war on terror," including the deployment of military forces to Afghanistan and the erection of a police state infrastructure. Both Liberal and Conservative governments have instituted legislation attacking basic democratic rights and have used the same concept of "domestic terrorism" now invoked by Trump to justify his military crackdown to intimidate and suppress protests. In 2016, a Liberal government minister told big business at a closed-door meeting that the government was prepared to deploy the army against anti-pipeline protests. This discussion was given new life earlier this year during the railway blockades in support of the Wet'suwet'en land rights protest. The blockades were ultimately broken up by the police, but only after substantial sections of the ruling class clamoured for the army to be sent in.

The ruling elite's readiness to abrogate democratic forms of rule has been proven time and again. It was Trudeau's own father, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who seized on two kidnappings by the FLQ in 1970 to invoke the War Measures Act and deploy troops on the streets of Canadian cities amid an upsurge of militant working class struggles. Trudeau continues to defend his father's political legacy, including the detention without charge of hundreds of leftists in Quebec.

In the midst of the 2008 economic crisis, Prime Minister Stephen Harper was strongly supported by the ruling elite when he shut down parliament to prevent the fall of his government, using the anti-democratic powers of the unelected Governor General in what amounted to a constitutional coup. This manoeuvre enabled his right-wing government to cling to power for a further seven years and launch a devastating onslaught on the working class, including the virtual abolition of the right to strike, sweeping social spending cuts, the promotion of Canada as a "warrior nation," and the whipping up of Islamophobia. Harper's willingness to ride roughshod over democratic rights was enthusiastically applauded by the *Globe*, which hailed him during the 2011 election campaign for his "bullheadedness." Trudeau's trade union-backed Liberals have picked up where Harper left off in 2015, persisting with austerity, accelerating the buildup of the military, and expanding the powers of the national security apparatus.

As in the US, the ruling elite is increasingly promoting the far right. Police and the management of FCL, one of the largest companies in Western Canada, have collaborated with the anti-immigrant, ultraright United We Roll Group in violent attacks against 750 locked out oil refinery workers in Regina.

Trudeau, his Liberals, and the dominant sections of the Canadian bourgeoisie were undoubtedly taken aback by Trump's election in 2016. Subsequently, they lent support to the anti-Russia campaign that was spearheaded by the US intelligence agencies and promoted by the Democrats, with the aim of removing Trump by methods of intrigue and palace coup.

Now they fear that Trump's provocative actions could trigger a social explosion that could threaten capitalist rule. But their opposition is of a tactical rather than a principled character.

Like the faction of the US oligarchy aligned with the Democratic Party, the Canadian bourgeoisie fears a mass popular upsurge of the working class against Trump, far more than it does the US President's turn to authoritarian forms of rule.

This is demonstrated by the Trudeau government's record of close cooperation with Trump and his administration. Within days of Trump's election, the Liberals agreed to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which had been one of Trump's main campaign pledges. Ultimately this resulted in USMCA or NAFTA 2.0, a trade war bloc aimed at the global rivals of US and Canadian imperialism, above all China.

In keeping with the orders of Canada's "newspaper of record," the *Globe and Mail*, which insisted Canada must be "inside" Trump's walls, the Liberal government has worked with Trump's fascistic thugs in Immigration and Customs Enforcement to persecute and deport immigrants. The Trudeau government has also expanded Canada's role in Washington's three principal military-strategic offensives against China and Russia, and in the oil-rich Middle East, and assisted US imperialism in its intrigues and aggression in Venezuela and elsewhere in Latin America.

The military strategic partnership between Canadian and US imperialism

Whilst Canada's ruling elite has bristled at the adverse impacts some of Trump's "America First" policies have had on their wallets and geostrategic interests, they have egged on the purported "human rights" advocate and "progressive" Trudeau in his pursuit of closer ties with Trump-led Washington.

In her speech on the release of the Liberals' national defence policy in June 2017, Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland hailed the "outsized role" US imperialism has played since the Second World War in creating and sustaining an "international rules-based order," that is, in defending and stabilizing world capitalism under US economic and geopolitical dominance.

She reaffirmed Ottawa's commitment to the Canada-US military security partnership that has formed the cornerstone of Canadian imperialist strategy since 1940, and which saw Canada serve as a key US ally throughout the Cold War, and join a never-ending series of US-led wars, including in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Libya and Iraq over the past quarter century.

But Freeland had to acknowledge that the US-led postwar order was unravelling. Canada, she declared, would therefore need to do more to assist its strategic partner in upholding North American global dominance, including through "hard power," i.e., the waging of war.

The deepening social crisis in the United States and its precipitous global economic decline, processes which have accelerated dramatically over the intervening three years, are rapidly eroding the material and ideological foundation of Canadian imperialism's predatory partnership with Washington and Wall Street.

The United States is no longer a force for global capitalist stability, but a source of increased conflict and friction, as it pursues aggression and unilateralism around the world in a desperate attempt to reverse its decline and beat back rivals. Washington no longer has the economic heft or inclination to enforce a "rules-based order;" it has, in fact, played the leading role in tearing it down. And how can Canada's "progressive" politicians cloak the pursuit of profits and strategic advantage in "human rights" and "democratic" rhetoric when its closest ally embraces dictatorial forms of rule and launches brutal military police crackdowns on peaceful protesters producing popular revulsion around the world?

For the Canadian ruling elite, which has always benefited from a close partnership with the dominant imperialist power of the day, this has created an unprecedented crisis with no obvious solution.

Notwithstanding Trudeau's desire to accommodate himself to Trump, powerful sections of the ruling circles are increasingly hostile to his strategy, arguing that Canada must pursue an even more aggressive policy. Foreign policy experts are openly discussing the outdated character of the Liberals' 2017 defence policy statement, since no "rules-based order" to speak of exists.

One faction is pushing for an even closer alliance with Trump. In an

editorial Monday, the *Toronto Sun* assailed Trudeau for making “political sideswipes” at Trump on the issue of racism and not “denouncing” the protesters for “violence and riots.” Just two weeks earlier, the *Sun* suggested that Trudeau’s ouster would be warranted if he fails to take a harder line towards China. While the Liberals have lined up behind Trump’s aggressive moves against Beijing, the *Sun* and other right-wing forces are angered by Trudeau’s hesitation over excluding Chinese tech giant Huawei from Canada’s 5G network, among other issues.

Trump’s shift in the direction of a presidential dictatorship will only throw fuel on the fire of these factional disputes. But whatever their disagreements, all sections of the ruling class are implacably hostile to the working class and, as demonstrated in their response to the events in the US, complicit in the assault on democratic rights. Their principal concern is how best to advance the global interests and ambitions of Canadian imperialism under conditions of the deepest crisis of world capitalism since the Great Depression. In the final analysis, this means escalating military violence abroad and ratcheting up the exploitation of the working class at home.

In opposition to this, workers and young people in Canada must unify their struggles with their class brothers and sisters in the United States to beat back Trump’s presidential dictatorship and the turn towards authoritarianism and war that is supported by the ruling elites of both countries. This requires building the Socialist Equality Parties of Canada and the United States to provide the mass struggles now erupting with a socialist and internationalist program and perspective.



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