Canadian establishment downplays failed attempt to assassinate Trudeau

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46-year-old Corey Hurren was arrested by the RCMP last Thursday morning after crashing his pick-up truck through the gates of Rideau Hall, the official residence of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Governor General Julie Payette. Hurren, an army veteran and current member of the Canadian Rangers, a reserve unit operating in remote areas, was heavily armed when he was detained, including with an M14 assault rifle, a loaded high-standard revolver, an illegal high-capacity magazine of ammunition, and two loaded shotguns.

According to the charge sheet released Monday, Hurren, who was on full-time army duty at the time of his arrest, is accused of 21 firearms offences and one count of uttering threats against Trudeau. Hurren "did knowingly utter" or "convey a threat to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau … to cause death or bodily harm," reads the charge sheet. Contradictory reports have appeared on how this threat was delivered. Initially the RCMP stated that Hurren had wanted to deliver "a note" to Trudeau, but declined to divulge anything about the note's contents. Subsequent media reports have claimed that Hurren uttered the threat during his exchanges with RCMP officers on the grounds of Rideau Hall.

Although much about Hurren's political biography and views is still unknown, it is clear, at the very least, that he has been influenced by far-right views.

He served in the military from 1997 to 2000, reaching the rank of corporal, and rejoined as a reservist in 2019.

Hurren appears to have been radicalized by the social and economic upheavals triggered by the coronavirus pandemic, including the difficulties facing the sausage-making business he set up in 2014 in Bowsman, Manitoba, the small community where he lives.

In late March, he shared a post on the Instagram account of his small business advocating the views of "QAnon," a far-right group that urges President Trump to arrest and destroy his opponents in the "deep state" and the Democratic Party. "I am not sure what will be left of our economy, industries, and businesses when this all ends," a Facebook post from Hurren noted in May, indicating that he feared for the survival of his business. Just one hour prior to the attack, he shared a post supporting the claim promoted by the far right in the US and Germany that Bill Gates and various international organizations created the COVID-19 pandemic.

The only conclusion that can be drawn from the available evidence is that Hurren plotted a political assassination. He drove his truck laden with firearms, military food rations, and ammunition from his home in northern Manitoba to Ottawa (a distance of more than 2,500 kilometers/1,550 miles); purposefully crashed it through the gates of the Prime Minister's temporary official residence; and then sought to proceed on foot, heavily-armed, towards Trudeau's home. He was intercepted by an RCMP security detail, who took him into custody after a long verbal exchange lasting 90 minutes.

However, judging by the response of the corporate-media and political establishment, Trudeau included, little out of the ordinary happened last Thursday morning. After a few perfunctory news reports on Hurren's detention, including a handful pointing to his sharing of far-right conspiracy theories online, the story largely disappeared from the media. Trudeau, who was not at Rideau Hall when the failed attack took place, blandly remarked at a press conference Friday that he was happy that the RCMP had responded swiftly to this "concerning" incident. Only after the charge sheet against Hurren was released Monday could the National Post bring itself to admit the obvious: that the attack looks "like an assassination attempt."

Prosecutors have to date refused to bring any national security or terrorism-related charges against Hurren. Displaying an astonishing degree of complacency, Leah West, a former national security lawyer with the Department of Justice, told the Toronto Star: "In order to bring charges of terrorism, they would need to have reason to believe that he was motivated by political, ideological or religious motives, and that he intended to intimidate likely in this case the prime minister or elements of the government. That may not have been apparent on its face from the initial investigation."

One can only wonder how different the response would have been had the heavily armed assailant and would-be assassin expressed any affinity for Islamist terrorist groups.

The circumstances surrounding Hurren's attempted assassination raise extremely troubling questions about his political motivations and ties, including the degree to which he was active in far-right circles, whether he acted alone, and if he promoted far-right views among his fellow members of the Canadian Armed Forces.

Just one day before Hurren's attack, hundreds of right-wing extremists and conspiracy theorists gathered on Parliament Hill in Ottawa for what they dubbed a "Dominion Day rally." Banners at the demonstration included denunciations of "global elites" for fabricating the coronavirus crisis, calls for the abrogation of all

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COVID-19 related restrictions, and support for the American-based far-right "QAnon" movement. Present at the rally were several so-called "Yellow Vests", a far-right group based in Alberta and Saskatchewan that has repeatedly organized anti-Trudeau and anti-immigrant protests over the past year-and-a-half. While there is no evidence as yet that Hurren attended the rally, it appears more than just coincidental that his attempted attack on the Prime Minister's residence took place in the same city only hours later.

Under these conditions, what accounts for the general indifference to an assassination attempt by a supporter of the far-right against a sitting Prime Minister?

Behind much official tripe about Canadian capitalism's "progressive" and "democratic" ethos, all sections of the ruling elite have joined hands in shifting politics rapidly to the right in recent decades, mounting an offensive against the working class that has produced an explosive growth in social inequality. A recent study revealed that the richest 1 percent of the population owns over a quarter of all household wealth and more than the poorest 40 percent of all Canadians (see: New report exposes staggering level of social inequality in Canada).

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks were used to justify a vast expansion of the powers and reach of the national-security apparatus. Following an Islamist-inspired terrorist attack on the House of Commons in 2014, Stephen Harper's Conservative government granted sweeping additional powers to the intelligence agencies under Bill C-51, including giving the Canadian Security Intelligence Service the right to break virtually any law in disrupting vaguely defined "threats" to national security. The Trudeau Liberal government enshrined these measures with its Bill C-59.

Over the past two decades, Canada's armed forces have been engaged in virtually uninterrupted wars and military interventions and provocations, from Afghanistan to Haiti (where Canadian and US soldiers completed a coup against the country's elected president mounted by a fascistic militia), to Libya, Syria, and Iraq.

These developments have led to the strengthening of far-right and even fascistic views among sections of the military. Last November, a military intelligence report revealed that at least three dozen serving military personnel had been identified as supporting far-right groups or expressing racist or right-wing extremist views. None of them were expelled from the military. Instead they were instructed to get counselling or were issued with warnings. The release of the report came weeks after a Manitoba-based reservist, Master Corporal Patrik Mathews, fled to the United States after a reporter exposed his role as a recruiter for a neo-Nazi organization. In January, Mathews was arrested by the FBI for his involvement in a far-right terrorist plot.

In another incident in 2018, a group of CAF sailors affiliated to the far-right Proud Boys group received a slap on the wrist after disrupting a Mi'kmaq ceremony in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

The strengthening of far-right groups and networks is not merely a by-product of ruling class policy, but is actively encouraged. After Ottawa played a major role in the 2014 fascist-led coup in Ukraine, Trudeau travelled to the country after becoming Prime Minister in 2015 with members of far-right Canadian-based Ukrainian nationalists in his delegation, many of whom helped supply weaponry to fascistic militias in the country's civil war with pro-Russian separatists (see: Trudeau bolsters Canadian support for Ukraine's far-right regime).

Foreign policy is not the only field in which Canadian imperialism cultivates the far-right and fascistic forces. As the class struggle intensifies at home, driven by ever widening levels of social inequality and never-ending attacks by the ruling elite on the living standards of working people, far-right forces are being systematically nourished.

Last month, a Quebec court acquitted the leader of a fascist group who stormed a media office and threatened a journalist who had investigated the activities of the far-right.

During the recently concluded lockout of over 750 refinery workers at the Federated Cooperative Ltd. refinery in Regina, Saskatchewan, FCL chief executive Scott Banda appeared alongside members of United We Roll, a far-right truckers' group associated with the "Yellow Vests," to denounce picketing workers. United We Roll broke through a solidarity picket for the locked-out workers set up at an FCL site in Alberta, and also dismantled a blockade near Edmonton during the nationwide anti-pipeline protests earlier this year. In early 2019, Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe explicitly declared his backing for a "Yellow Vest" organized convoy to Ottawa to protest the Trudeau government's support for a UN refugee accord (see: Canadian oil refinery boss lauds George Floyd protests while employing state violence against locked out workers).

Workers in Canada must take the attempted assassination of Trudeau as a serious warning of the danger posed by the far-right. It takes place under conditions of a resurgence of right-wing extremist and fascistic politics internationally, including the promotion and protection of far-right networks within the German state apparatus by the political establishment. Just one year ago, Walter Lübcke, a local Christian Democrat politician in Germany, was assassinated at his home by a known right-wing extremist. The German government was recently forced to announce the reorganization of its elite special forces unit (the KSK) due to widespread sympathy for and ties to far-right and neo-Nazi networks among its personnel.

As in the 1930s, when world capitalism was similarly mired in systemic crisis, bourgeoisie elites, terrified of a challenge from below to their vast wealth and privileges, are cultivating fascist forces as shock troops against the working class. In Canada as around the world, fascistic thugs and state violence will be deployed at home and abroad to enforce the rapacious interests of the financial oligarchy. Only the mass mobilization of the working class on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program can answer the threat posed by the far-right.

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