

50 years since Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau invoked the War Measures Act

Keith Jones
22 October 2020

Fifty years ago this month, on October 16, 1970, Canada's government—headed by the Liberal Party's Pierre Elliott Trudeau, the father of the country's current prime minister—invoked the draconian War Measures Act. On the bogus claim Quebec was in a state of “apprehended insurrection,” basic civil liberties were suspended.

In the hours that immediately followed, police carried out raids without warrants across Quebec and took hundreds of people into detention. Many of the detained would be held for weeks without charge.

The vast majority of the detainees had no connection whatsoever to the Front de Liberation du Québec (FLQ), the tiny Quebec *indépendantiste* terrorist group that had kidnapped a British diplomat, James Cross, on October 5 and Quebec's Labour Minister, Pierre Laporte, five days later.

With the aim of empowering the Canadian state to intimidate, jail and smear the government's left-wing opponents as violent, the federal and Quebec Liberal governments, Montreal's Jean Drapeau-led city administration and its police chief spuriously claimed the FLQ kidnappings were the first act in an attempt to overthrow the government.

This provided the legal pretext for invoking the War Measures Act. Enacted at the start of the First World War, the act gave the federal government quasi-dictatorial powers in the event of “war, invasion, or insurrection, real or apprehended.” During World War Two, its powers had been used to intern 22,000 Japanese-Canadians, ban strikes, jail Communist Party leaders and outlaw for the war's duration the Socialist Workers League, then the Canadian section of the Fourth International.

With the invocation of the War Measures Act, the police gained the power to conduct warrantless raids and arrests and to hold persons without charge, legal counsel or any right to appear before a judge for 21 days. Even after the three-week threshold was reached, those who were charged could be indefinitely denied bail on the government's say-so.

Denied the right to see a lawyer, many of the detainees did not learn for weeks that they were being held under the dictatorial powers of the War Measures Act. Some were subject to physical and/or psychological abuse.

The 497 people detained under the War Measures Act constituted a diverse group of left-wing opponents of the government—socialists, trade union militants, journalists and anti-poverty activists. They included ordinary working people as well as Michel Chartrand, the head of the Confederation of National Trade Unions' (CSN/CNTU) Montreal Central Council, the poet Gerald Godin and his partner, the celebrated singer Pauline Julien. The latter two were prominent members of the Parti Québécois, the recently founded pro-Quebec independence party. Its leader, the former provincial Liberal cabinet minister René Lévesque, had repeatedly denounced the FLQ and terrorism.

Only 63 of the 497 were ever charged with any crime. Even more tellingly, just 18 were convicted.

Armed with their new powers, the police acted in the most arbitrary

manner. While most of those detained were swept up in the first four days based on prepared lists, the police also seized people, including children, who just happened to be in places that they raided. During the roughly five-and-a-half months that police were authorized to mount warrantless searches (under the War Measures Act and then under a new, somewhat less sweeping, emergency law), they conducted over 36,000 searches, using their emergency powers to intimidate and spy on numerous other leftists.

In invoking the War Measures Act in the early hours of October 16, the Trudeau government also made it a crime to be an FLQ member and declared an “unlawful association” any organization that “advocates the use of force” or the “commission of crimes” as an “aid” to “accomplishing governmental change within Canada.” In a flagrant attack on the presumption of innocence, the government effectively placed the legal onus on those whom it accused of being FLQ members to prove that they were not.

Prior to suspending basic civil liberties, Ottawa had already deployed Canadian Armed Forces troops to Montreal, Quebec City and Ottawa. Starting on October 12, hundreds of troops were deployed guarding diplomats and their offices, government buildings and the mansions of Senator Hartland Molson and other prominent members of Montreal's capitalist elite.

By October 16, Quebec was under a state of siege. There were tanks and 7,500 troops on the streets of Montreal, and a further 5,500 soldiers deployed in the Hull/Ottawa region, and elsewhere in Quebec.

The troops were only fully withdrawn on January 4, 1971—more than a month after members of the FLQ's Liberation Cell, having been tracked down by police, had traded Cross for safe passage to Cuba; and a week after the last of Laporte's kidnappers had been arrested.

The emergency powers granted the police under the Public Order (Temporary Measures) Act, which had replaced the War Measures Act in early December, remained in effect until the end of April.

In 1970 and the years immediately prior, other imperialist democracies had seen terrorist attacks. But nowhere else did the government respond by declaring a state of emergency and ordering large-scale military deployments.

The claim of the Trudeau government and other state authorities that Quebec was in a state of an “apprehended insurrection” in October 1970 was a sham.

Led by Trudeau, the Canadian state manipulated the FLQ crisis to carry out a coup de force.

This sharp turn toward authoritarian methods of rule, all but universally applauded by Canada's corporate and political elite at the time, was the response of the Canadian bourgeoisie to the unraveling of the post Second World War boom and a vast growth of social opposition, that was part of,

and being propelled forward by, a global political radicalization.

While student youth had been in the forefront of many protests, the working class—as exemplified by the French general strike of May-June 1968, and the strikes that convulsed Germany and Italy in the “hot autumn” of 1969—was increasingly coming onto the scene and implicitly threatening bourgeois rule.

Workers in Quebec were in the forefront of a wave of militant trade union struggles that had been developing in Canada since the mid-1960s. Moreover, anti-capitalist sentiment, albeit of a politically amorphous character, was growing, especially among Quebec workers.

The crisis facing the Canadian bourgeoisie had been compounded by popular anger that had erupted during the preceding decade over the generally inferior public services available to French Canadians, both in and outside Quebec. The Quebec bourgeoisie exploited such sentiments in its own push, launched with the “Quiet Revolution” reforms of the provincial Liberal government of Jean Lesage (1960-66), to secure greater powers for the Quebec provincial state apparatus. It sought thereby to strengthen Québécois capitalism and become *Maitres-chez nous* (Masters in our house), replacing the Anglo elite of Westmount as lords over the working class and economic life.

In the April 1970 provincial election, the PQ, which had been formed less than two years before, won 23 percent of the vote.

As the list of those rounded up under the War Measures Act makes clear, the principal target of the Canadian state was not the FLQ or the PQ, but the political left and the working class.

The Trudeau government’s imposition of the War Measures Act was aimed at demonstrating the state’s repressive power to intimidate, disrupt and quell leftist and working class opposition. It was also a dress rehearsal, meant to acclimatize the population to military deployments and “emergency measures” and to prepare the state apparatus for suppressing mass social unrest.

The War Measures Act and the Canadian state’s record of violence and repression

Fifty years on, Trudeau’s decision to invoke the War Measures Act is controversial. However, the official debate is confined within strictly limited parameters.

Some, including Conrad Black, the pro-Trump commentator and one-time media mogul, baldly defend the government’s actions. This they do either by advancing the reactionary argument that “illiberal measures must sometimes be taken to safeguard democracy”; or by claiming—notwithstanding the incontrovertible evidence that they lied and plotted—that Trudeau and his top aides acted in “good faith,” but were hampered by poor intelligence or the lack of a “peacetime emergencies” law.

More prevalent in the establishment media is the view that the imposition of the War Measures Act was a regrettable overreaction, and represents a stain on Pierre Elliott Trudeau’s otherwise exemplary record as a civil libertarian.

Canada’s “newspaper of record,” the *Globe and Mail*, mounted a disingenuous defence of Trudeau in an editorial published last Friday, half a century to the day after Canada’s government invoked emergency powers. In the 11th of a 13-paragraph editorial, the *Globe* termed the government’s suspension of basic civil liberties, “neither necessary nor wise.” But it also declared that “Mr. Trudeau was right” to deploy the army, and hastened to reassure Canadians that they need not be particularly concerned about the events of 1970 since government opponents were not executed, nor a military junta established like in Chile

in 1973. “This was not a Pinochet-style coup,” affirmed the *Globe*, “not remotely.”

For his part, the current prime minister, Justin Trudeau, has repeatedly defended his father’s actions during the October Crisis, including as recently as this month. Well aware that they are unpopular, especially in Quebec, he generally tries to avoid the topic, however, or when pressed, to change the subject. Thus, earlier this month, the younger Trudeau responded to a question about the government’s anti-democratic actions by urging Canadians to reflect on Pierre Laporte’s fate. Less than 48 hours after Ottawa imposed the War Measures Act, and one day after he had severely injured himself while trying to escape from captivity, Laporte was killed by his FLQ kidnappers.

The contemporary leaders of the Parti Québécois (PQ) and the Bloc Québécois (BQ), its sister pro-independence party in the federal parliament, are far more trenchant in their criticisms of Trudeau and Ottawa than is the norm in English Canada. But their denunciations of Ottawa’s state violence are hypocritical and self-serving.

When the PQ has formed Quebec’s provincial government, it has ridden roughshod over workers’ rights, using emergency laws to break strikes and threatening workers with mass firings, so as to impose capitalist austerity. For well over a decade, the PQ and BQ have fanned anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim chauvinism, including by promoting “secularism” laws that attack the rights of religious minorities. Last but not least, the Quebec sovereignists, for all their opposition to the Canadian federal state, support Canada’s military-strategic partnership with US imperialism and participation in US-led wars.

The reality is Trudeau’s imposition of the War Measures Act was in keeping with, not a violation of, the stunted “democratic” traditions of the Canadian state; a state that was founded on the basis of a business deal, negotiated under the aegis of the British Empire, between corrupt politicians, railway promoters and bankers, and on the basis of an explicit rejection of the revolutionary bourgeois democratic traditions of the American republic.

The history of Canadian capitalism and its state is littered with violence and other anti-democratic “excesses.” Among them: the dispossession of the native people of the Western Plains and the imposition of conscription during World War I; the smashing of the 1919 Winnipeg general strike and the 1935 on-to-Ottawa trek of unemployed workers; and the state violence visited on those protesting the 2010 G-20 summit in Toronto and on the 2012 Quebec student strike, whether in the form of police assaults or the provincial government’s draconian anti-strike law (Bill 78).

A federal government-commissioned study of Canadian labour relations published in 1966, four years before Pierre Trudeau invoked the War Measures Act, found that Canadian capitalists were as or “even more hostile” than US big business to workers’ attempts to organize and assert their class interests. But “rather than their own resources,” they have relied “upon legally constituted authorities,” i.e., the state and its police and military, “to apply force and violence.”

The sham “apprehended insurrection”

As justification for its claims Quebec was in a state of “apprehended insurrection” in October 1970, the government pointed to the two FLQ kidnappings, a student rally expressing support for the kidnappers’ seven “demands” and highly troubling evidence that could not be divulged for “security reasons.” The other key claims the authorities advanced to bolster their argument that the powers of the state had to be enhanced were equally bogus.

That, however, did not stop the corporate media and virtually the entire

political establishment from rallying behind the Trudeau government. On October 19, 1970, the House of Commons endorsed the resort to the War Measures Act by a vote of 190-16. All Conservative and Cr ditiste (Social Credit) MPs voted with the government. The social democratic New Democratic Party was divided, with party leader Tommy Douglas and 15 other NDP MPs against, and four in favour of the government's suspension of basic civil liberties.

Ottawa insisted at every point that its actions were being driven by unforeseen events.

In fact, the federal Liberal cabinet had discussed the possibility of employing the War Measures Act to deal with "circumstances of domestic unrest" on May 7, 1970—that is five months before the first FLQ kidnapping.

Trudeau claimed that in invoking the act, he was acting at the demand of Quebec's legally constituted authorities, pointing to letters from the premier of Quebec, Montreal's mayor and the Montreal police chief. This was a ruse. The production of the letters was in fact orchestrated from the prime minister's office and, per its orders, each included the requisite reference to "insurrection" needed to provide the legal pretext for invoking the War Measures Act.

The letters were received in Ottawa hours after the Trudeau government had informed the opposition leaders that it would be invoking the emergency powers, and as the police, similarly forewarned, were already finalizing their list of detainees and organizing their seizure squads.

In the days that followed, government officials spread brazen and lurid lies in an effort to stampede public opinion.

Senior Liberal cabinet minister Jean Marchand claimed the FLQ had infiltrated the highest levels of Quebec public life. Other top officials suggested it had potentially thousands of members and a vast arsenal. The federal Solicitor-General told parliament the FLQ had kidnapped a woman and carved its initials on her belly. In off-the-record briefings, top government officials portrayed a meeting where PQ leader L vesque, *Le Devoir* editor Claude Ryan and Quebec Federation of Labour (FTQ/QFL) President Louis Laberge, among others, had called for a negotiated settlement to the crisis as an attempt to replace Quebec's government.

Montreal Mayor Jean Drapeau insinuated and Marchand openly accused FRAP (Front d'action politique), a recently organized, union-supported, avowedly leftist municipal opposition party, of being an FLQ front. Aided by a compliant media and by the police, who detained two FRAP candidates under the War Measures Act until the eve of Montreal's October 25 election and harassed other FRAP activists, Drapeau's Civic Party won a sweeping victory at the polls.

The police, for their part, claimed the War Measures Act was needed because traditional judicial constraints, such as the obligation to obtain a search warrant, were hobbling their effectiveness. In reality, the courts had been giving the police free rein. By their own admission, in the first four days after Cross' kidnapping they conducted more than a thousand raids and detained 44 people for questioning.

While lying shamelessly in public, the Canadian government provided reassurances to its imperialist allies. Canada's foreign affairs minister, Mitchell Sharp, told his British counterpart that there was no "apprehended insurrection" or even "evidence of an extensive and coordinated FLQ conspiracy." Less than a year after Canada invoked the War Measures Act, the British government followed Trudeau's example and suspended civil liberties in Northern Ireland so it could round up and indefinitely intern Republican opponents of British rule.

The nationalist-terrorist FLQ

Implicit in the claim that Quebec was in a state of "apprehended insurrection" was another gargantuan lie: that the FLQ constituted a serious threat to the Canadian state.

Here is not the place to trace the history of the FLQ, which first appeared in 1963, and carried out a wave of bombings and robberies in the years prior to 1970.

But the FLQ was more a banner than a coherent organization. It went through multiple iterations or "waves." After police, frequently with the help of informers and *agents provocateurs*, successfully broke up "one FLQ," another would emerge comprised of people who had little or no connection to those now in prison.

In 1970, the FLQ numbered some 35 people, loosely organized and divided on priorities. Rejecting the assessment of the Liberation Cell that the FLQ should immediately escalate its terrorist actions by resorting to kidnapping, three of the four future kidnapers of Laporte were actually in the United States when Cross was abducted and then made a hasty return. Laporte was chosen as the target in part because he lived near to their South Shore Montreal base.

Subject to police repression and infiltration and with the events of October 1970 having manifestly demonstrated the bankruptcy of its national-terrorist politics, which had served only to provide a pretext for massive state repression, the FLQ quickly disintegrated.

By 1972 its two leading "theoreticians," the radical journalist Pierre Valli res and Charles Gagnon, a Universit  de Montr al instructor, had both publicly renounced the FLQ. Valli res declared his support for the Parti Qu b cois, formed in 1968 through the fusion of a L vesque-led split-off from the Quebec Liberal party and the conservative Ralliement National.

Gagnon, meanwhile, became the principal leader of the Maoist organization En Lutte!/In Struggle!, forsaking the FLQ for another variant of petty-bourgeois nationalist politics, which dissolved itself in the early 1980s.

Fifty years after the October Crisis many unanswered questions remain, including those about apparent police missteps that enabled the FLQ kidnapers to repeatedly elude capture.

Of especial interest is the authorities' attitude to the "sixth member" of the FLQ's Liberation Cell, a British-born McGill university student by the name of Nigel Barry Hamer. Hamer was identified as a possible suspect in the kidnapping of Cross the day after it happened and a police informer within the FLQ put police on his tail in December 1970. Yet the police did not arrest him until 10 years after the event, despite pressure from lower-level officers to do so. Moreover, Hamer was only arrested after a public outcry prompted by the revelation that police had ignored a "sixth" *F lquiste* involved in the Cross kidnapping. Even then they insisted that he was peripheral to the terrorist plot, although Hamer had played a leading role in Cross's abduction and later helped guard him.

As the conclusion of Hamer's 1981 trial—he had pled guilty to charges of kidnapping, extortion and conspiracy—the presiding judge said Hamer warranted clemency because he had become a responsible member of society (he was a Montreal-area teacher), and had suffered "anguish" for years because he feared he was being followed by the police. Hamer was sentenced to a year in jail and community service. He has since refused all public comment on the events of 1970.

A report into the October Crisis, authored by Crown Prosecutor Justice Jean-Fran ois Duchaine and commissioned by the Parti Qu b cois government that came to power in 1976, dismissed suggestions police *agents provocateurs* had engineered the October Crisis. Yet it was forced to concede in reference to Hamer: "It is nevertheless astounding that, considering the law which permitted them to question and hold people who were suspected of belonging to the FLQ, police did nothing regarding him while that law was in effect."

Whatever Hamer's relations to the state, it is an established fact that in

the aftermath of the October Crisis, the RCMP, Quebec Provincial Police and Montreal police flooded the FLQ and its milieu with agents. By 1972, by the police's own admission, they *were* the FLQ.

Operation Neat Pitch: the military prepares for civil war against the working class

More generally, the police ratcheted up state surveillance and disruption of left-wing, trade unions and Quebec nationalist organizations, including the PQ. Encouraged by the Trudeau government to play a more proactive role, the RCMP Security Service carried out widespread illegal activities, including electronic and postal surveillance, break-ins, the theft of the PQ's membership list, forgery and arson.

Canada's military, meanwhile, undertook extensive preparations for "aid to civilian power" interventions aimed at quelling "domestic disturbances," including the 1972 Operation Neat Pitch exercise. An Operation Neat Pitch planning document, leaked to the separatist daily *Le Jour* in 1974, made clear that the military was planning for civil war against the working class. It paints a scenario, necessitating the army's intervention, of the rapid growth of a "new popular movement throughout North America," fueled by "crises in the international monetary system" and 25 percent unemployment. When the authorities refuse its demands, "disorders" ensue.

Not coincidentally, the Operation Neat Pitch exercise was held in Montreal in April 1972 in the midst of a growing confrontation between the working class and the provincial Liberal government. Just weeks later, a spontaneous general strike erupted across Quebec after the presidents of the three main labour federations were jailed for having encouraged 200,000 public sector workers to defy court injunctions ordering them back to work.

In 1976, under the pretext of providing security to the Montreal Olympics, the military practiced plans for occupying Canada's second-largest city amid a continuing working class upsurge and growing support for the pro-independence PQ. Although in 1974 the military had estimated 2,000 troops would be required for OPERATION GAMESCAN, in the summer of 1976 it assigned more than 15,000 troops, approximately one-fifth of all Canada's military personnel, to the deployment.

Pierre Trudeau and the post-1975 counteroffensive of the ruling class

In Canada, as around the world, the years immediately after 1970 were dominated by growing economic turbulence, and a massive global working class offensive that toppled governments, including the British Tory government, the Greek junta and Portugal's fascist regime.

Through a wave of militant struggles, often initiated by wildcat strikes organized in defiance of the union leaderships, workers in Quebec and across Canada won significant improvements in wages, working conditions and public services in the early 1970s. They then bitterly resisted the attempts of big business and their hirelings in government to make workers pay for the mounting capitalist crisis. In 1974, there were more than 1,200 strikes and lockouts across Canada and in 1975, 1,171. In the latter year, 10,908,000 working-days were lost to labour disputes, a more than four-fold increase from 10 years before.

Canada's ruling class routinely used state violence, especially in the form of coercive anti-worker laws and court injunctions. Its military-security agencies, with the complicity and encouragement of the Trudeau

government, prepared for the resort to anti-democratic measures even more sweeping than the 1970 imposition of the War Measures Act. However, the principal instruments it used to counter, contain and defuse the working class upsurge were the trade union bureaucracy and the social democratic politicians of the NDP.

The labour bureaucracy in Quebec, as in the rest of Canada, strove to quarantine the militant working class struggles convulsing Quebec. The Quebec unions forged an alliance with the Parti Québécois. They boosted the claims of this capitalist party, led by an ex-Liberal cabinet minister, of a "favourable prejudice for the worker's movement" and helped propel it into becoming, for the next four decades, one of the Quebec bourgeoisie's two parties of provincial government. The Canadian Labour Congress took no action in support of the 1972 Quebec general strike, while its president affirmed the CLC "will not be party to any attempt to overthrow a democratically elected government."

In 1976, the CLC leadership sanctioned a one-day national protest general strike to head off rank-and-file demands for systematic working class action against the federal government's wage-cutting wage controls program. At the same time, it adopted as its goal corporatist tripartite collaboration between the government, unions and big business. Two years later, it worked with the Trudeau government to break an "illegal" postal strike.

The NDP propped up the 1972-74 minority Liberal government, and in three provinces where the NDP held provincial office, British Columbia, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, it implemented Trudeau's wage controls.

Fifty years after Pierre Elliott Trudeau was at the centre of a state conspiracy that targeted government opponents and suspended Canadians' civil liberties in the name of suppressing a fictional plot to overthrow "democracy," he continues to be celebrated in the semi-official liberal Canadian nationalist narrative as the author of Canada's truncated Charter of Rights and Freedoms and a civil libertarian.

In reality, Trudeau was a ruthless representative of the Canadian capitalist elite and as such repeatedly trampled on democratic rights in pursuing its mercenary class interests.

In a calculated display of his readiness to use state violence, Trudeau—not for the last time in what would prove to be a lengthy prime ministership—put on the airs of an authoritarian strongman during the October Crisis. On October 13, less than three days before the Governor-General invoked the War Measures Act at his government's demand, Trudeau tartly dismissed the concerns of a CBC reporter, Tim Ralfe, about the heavy presence of military personnel on the streets of Ottawa.

"There are a lot of bleeding hearts around who just don't like to see people with helmets and guns," declared Trudeau. "All I can say is, go on and bleed, but it is more important to keep law and order in the society than to be worried about weak-kneed people." When Ralfe then asked Trudeau how far he was willing to go, the prime minister infamously responded, "Well, just watch me."

Over the course of the next 14 years, Trudeau would repeatedly strip workers of their right to strike, impose years of public and private sector wage-controls, and in 1978, three years before US President Ronald Reagan fired the air traffic controllers and smashed PATCO, threaten to fire striking postal workers en masse. As his final legislative act as prime minister, Pierre Trudeau pushed through the creation of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and gave it the power to do many of the things the RCMP Security Service had previously done illegally.

Democracy in shambles

Fifty years after the invocation of the War Measures Act, world

capitalism is mired in a systemic crisis without parallel since the Great Depression. Facing a global resurgence of working class struggle—fueled by decades of austerity, ever-widening social inequality and ruinous predatory wars—that is developing into an insurgency against the pro-capitalist unions and establishment “left” parties, the bourgeois ruling elites the world over are turning to authoritarian forms of rule, stoking reaction and cultivating the far right.

These processes have been accelerated by the coronavirus pandemic. Having bailed out the financial oligarchy, capitalist governments are forcing workers back on the job amid the pandemic as the cutting edge of a drive to intensify the exploitation of working people.

The capitalist oligarchy’s turn to authoritarianism is epitomized in US President Donald Trump’s ongoing attempt to orchestrate a coup in league with sections of the military-security apparatus and fascist forces so he can hold on to power after the November 3 election and establish a presidential dictatorship. His plans are being facilitated by the Democratic Party, whose greatest fear is the eruption of mass working class opposition. In so far as the Democrats oppose Trump, it is through behind-the-scenes appeals to the military-intelligence apparatus that they represent the bourgeoisie’s better option for containing seething social opposition and pursuing confrontation with Russia and China—thereby further augmenting the political power of the repressive forces of the state.

In Germany, the political establishment and state intelligence agencies have promoted the rise of the neo-fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD), now the official opposition in parliament, as a means of pushing official politics far to the right, and in particular to revive a *weltpolitik*—an aggressive imperialist foreign policy—and a vast rearmament program to prepare for war.

In Canada, democratic forms of rule are likewise breaking down as the ruling class lurches ever further right and girds itself to suppress mass working class opposition. In the name of the “war on terror,” the arbitrary powers and reach of the national-security apparatus have been vastly expanded since 2001. Under the Justin Trudeau-led Liberals’ Bill C-59, CSIS has been empowered to break virtually any law in “actively disrupting” vaguely defined national security “threats” to Canada.

Social opposition, above all from the working class, has been systematically criminalized through a battery of anti-strike laws and police violence.

Encouraged by the sharp shift right in official politics, including the promotion of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment and the veneration of the Canadian military, far-right forces are becoming emboldened. In an ominous development, FCL, one of western Canada’s largest companies, recently used members of the far-right United We Roll group to break up a protest mounted by locked out Regina oil refinery workers. The failed attempt of a right-wing extremist Canadian Armed Forces reservist to assassinate Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in July has served to highlight the growth of ultra-right forces within the military.

Among the very first actions that the Trudeau government took in response to the current pandemic was authorizing the military to assign more than 20,000 troops, or nearly a quarter of all its personnel, to a COVID-19 deployment. The CAF top brass said they were preparing for a “worst case” scenario, which they refused to divulge, but included a breakdown of order. That a key element in the military’s mission was to prepare for social opposition was highlighted when it emerged the CAF had activated a plan, based on methods it had used during the neocolonial occupation of Afghanistan, to gather intelligence, suppress and manipulate information and promote pro-government propaganda so as to deter civil unrest.

The Canadian state’s invocation of the War Measures Act in 1970 and the far more developed and dangerous ruling-class turn to authoritarianism today, in Canada and around the world, must serve as an injunction to the working class. As in the 1930s, the bourgeoisie is turning to dictatorship

and fascist reaction. The only force with the social power to defend democratic rights and defeat the ruling class conspiracies is the working class. But for that power to be unleashed, the myriad struggles of workers and youth against the dismantling of public services, job cuts, police violence, the scapegoating of immigrants and militarism must be unified; and the working class mobilized as an independent political force and armed with revolutionary leadership and a socialist-internationalist program.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact