

Canadian government promotes Wuhan Lab conspiracy theory as anti-China campaign gathers pace

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The Canadian government, political establishment and corporate media have rapidly fallen into line behind the United States and its other imperialist allies in taking up the scientifically discredited conspiracy theory that contends the COVID-19 virus originated not in nature, but rather in a lab at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Despite the manifest lack of evidence for these claims, the Canadian government has embraced them as they buttress its turn towards military aggression against China, while providing a means to direct social anger over the ruling elite's brutal "profits before lives" response to the pandemic outwards.

Canada joined with its G7 allies at their annual summit, held earlier this month in Cornwall, England, in "comparing notes" on the discredited lab leak theory, which got its start from far-right circles around the fascist ideologue Steve Bannon and former US President Donald Trump. In the G7's concluding declaration, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau joined with the leaders of Britain, the United States, Germany, France, Italy, and Japan in condemning China over trade and human rights and demanding a more hardline course towards Beijing.

Speaking on CTV's Question Period last month amidst a concerted campaign by the Biden administration and US media to revive the discredited Wuhan claims, Canadian Foreign Minister Mark Garneau revealed the non-scientific, and explicitly political nature of the Canadian government's embrace of the lab leak theory. He stated, "It is important that we do the science to figure out where it (the COVID-19 virus) originated from because it may happen again and so therefore we do support President Biden's announcement ... to investigate more fully." The American push to "investigate more fully" is being driven not by scientists, but by the US intelligence agencies and the far-right, in order to develop a pretext for increased aggression and war with China.

Garneau, himself an engineer and astronaut, knows very well that "the science to figure out where it originated from" was done last year, in the form of the genetic sequencing of the COVID-19 virus, and that the results of that science preclude a lab-accident-origin for the virus. Biden, speaking for Washington and Wall Street, has declared that the US must "win the 21st century," by which he means that it must prevent the emergence of China as a world power. Science didn't produce the results world imperialism requires in this struggle, so pseudo-science and smears are being enlisted.

This volte-face of the whole ruling class is being telegraphed uncritically by the Canadian media, which only one year ago was reporting, "The chairman of the (US) joint chiefs of staff echoed that the weight of evidence continued to suggest natural rather than accidental emergence for SARS-CoV-2." In 2020, the Canadian government dismissed the Wuhan Lab conspiracy theory, whose principal proponent was former president Donald Trump.

A major factor in the about-face is Ottawa's desire, which is shared by

every major capitalist government, to find a scapegoat for their own disastrous failure to deal with the pandemic. Over 1.4 million Canadians have been sickened and more than 25,800 have died from COVID-19 infection as of this writing. Still more will die as the economy is forced to reopen. The vast majority of those illnesses and deaths were totally preventable, as were the effects of the pandemic on the whole of society. Millions of Canadian workers have lost their incomes or seen them sharply reduced, and are being forced back into unsafe working conditions. Price inflation eats what crumbs remain. Meanwhile, the world's billionaires have used the pandemic to massively increase their already obscene wealth. This intolerable situation is now finding expression in an upsurge of class struggle.

This has taken the form of strikes and protests in the auto industry, industrial plants, and mining. 2,400 workers at Vale in Sudbury massively rejected a stitched-up sellout contract, which the United Steelworkers (USW) sought to impose upon them at the behest of the company. This renewed worker militancy is clashing with the trade unions, which the Liberal government and the ruling class have relied upon for decades to suppress the class struggle and subordinate the working class to the objectives of Canadian imperialism.

The Canadian ruling class fears that its manifest failures during the pandemic may open up a political space for a working-class challenge to its rule. By deploying the "big lie"—blaming 25,000 Canadian COVID deaths on China—the Canadian ruling class seeks to escape accountability for its own criminal indifference to mass death.

The Canadian government's adoption of the Wuhan Lab conspiracy theory is part of a broader US imperialist-led campaign driving toward war against China, with which the Canadian ruling class has predictably fallen into step. Such a campaign requires a combination of demonization and lies to whip up the most backwards social layers, and to delegitimize and smear opponents of Canada's current vast rearmament drive, which has seen the Trudeau government commit to spending tens of billions of dollars on new warplanes, war ships and other weapon-systems. At every opportunity, Canadian politicians and the media paint China as a monstrous evil—"the biggest threat" we face. In this effort, the Liberals have the support of the Conservatives, as well as the other supposed "progressive" parties—the New Democrats, Greens, and Bloc Québécois. The bitter fruits of this foul campaign are already being harvested. The Chinese Canadian National Council reported more than 500 incidents of harassment against Asians in the first months of 2021 alone.

When it came to power in 2015, the Trudeau government attempted to open up investment opportunities in China for Canadian firms. It saw the growing rift between China and the United States as an opportunity to advance the economic interests of a section of the Canadian ruling class. The example of Australia, which has developed an enormous economic

relationship with China while remaining totally integrated into US military-security operations in the Asia-Pacific, no doubt served as a model. China has been a principal market for Canadian canola, pork and other agricultural exports, and is Canada's third largest trading partner behind the US and EU. From 2015 to 2017, Canada attempted free trade negotiations with China, but these failed to produce agreement, as they became increasingly roiled by the headwinds generated by the growing US-China conflict.

Canada's China policy became markedly more hostile with the election of Donald Trump, who dissolved the North American Free Trade Agreement and replaced it with the USMCA. The new agreement contains a "poison pill" clause directed against China, obliging each signatory country to notify the others if it "intends to enter trade talks with a non-market economy." More fundamentally, the USMCA lays the economic protectionist basis for North America's twin imperialist powers to challenge rivals like Beijing for a dominant position in the world market. The Canadian ruling class' willingness to subordinate the pursuit of trade with China to its economic relationship with the United States reflects the fact the Canadian economy is massively dependent on access to the US market. The Canada-US bilateral trade relationship is the largest in the world.

Moreover, Canada, an imperialist power of the second rank, has relied for almost eight decades on its military-strategic partnership with Washington to pursue its predatory global ambitions. Over recent years, Canada has played an increasing role in US-led military-strategic offensives around the world, including in the oil-rich Middle East and in the Asia-Pacific, where the US and its allies are building up forces capable of waging a military conflict with nuclear-armed Beijing.

Canada is totally enmeshed with the US military apparatus. The Defense Production Sharing Agreement treats Canadian arms manufacturers the same as US firms. So close is the collaboration between the two armed forces that the integration of the Canadian and US military command structures has even been mooted.

The Canadian establishment's campaign against Beijing is motivated both by fears that China's rise threatens North American global hegemony, and its need to uphold and expand the US-Canadian military-security partnership so as to wield influence and "secure a seat at the table" in Washington.

In 2018 the Canadian government blocked the sale of the large construction firm Aecon to a Chinese firm, and in December of that year it ordered the arrest, at Washington's behest, of Meng Wenzhou, the CFO of tech giant Huawei, on phony charges of defying America's punitive sanctions against Iran. China responded by detaining two Canadians, the former diplomat Michael Kovrig and North Korean "expert" Michael Spavor. In 2020, Canada's telecoms, anticipating a government order to exclude Huawei from their 5G technology networks, announced they would do so on their own initiative.

In March the Liberal government recalled Canada's ambassador to China, Dominic Barton, for "strategic consultations." Barton, the former managing director of McKinsey & Co., the global consulting firm, was appointed ambassador because of the close ties he had developed with Chinese officials while assisting western big business in using China as a cheap-labor production hub. In a further development that underscores how rapidly relations are deteriorating between the US and Canada, on the one hand, and China on the other, Barton has come under sustained attack, including from the *New York Times*, US Congressmen, and Erin O'Toole and his Conservatives for being "too close" to Beijing.

Ottawa's promotion of the discredited Wuhan conspiracy lab theory is only one of a whole series of recent Canadian provocations.

*For weeks, the media and opposition parties have been insinuating that Dr. Xiangguo Qiu and her husband, Keding Cheng, Chinese-Canadian scientists formerly employed in Winnipeg's BSL Level 4 lab, are spies

for Beijing. At the instigation of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), Qiu, a leading expert on the Ebola virus, and Cheng were stripped of their security clearances in 2019 and fired from their jobs in January of this year. Recently the CBC prominently ran a report in which Christian Leuprecht a Royal Canadian Military College "national security expert," all but declared the two Chinese agents, while adding that "Leuprecht has no inside information about the couple's case."

*Last week, Conservative leader O'Toole announced his party would boycott meetings of the National Intelligence and Security Committee until documents relating to Qiu's and Cheng's firing are turned over to parliament, not just the committee. He has gone so far as to link this to the bogus Wuhan leak theory, noting that since Dr. Qui worked with counterparts in China, the facts surrounding her case might shed light on the origins of COVID-19.

*The Canadian government and media continue to promote the slander that China is committing genocide against its Muslim Uyghur minority, a lie promoted by western-based activists of the Uyghur World Congress, a CIA-backed separatist group. The Canadian parliament, with self-styled "progressives" from the NDP and Greens playing a prominent role, recently voted to declare China's treatment of the Uyghurs "genocide."

*Canada, like Washington, is moving to develop closer ties with Taiwan. In April, parliament unanimously voted in favor of the government-funded Halifax International Security Forum giving its John McCain Prize for Leadership in Public Service to Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen, whom it declared "a strong global advocate for democracy." Earlier this month the *National Post* published an article by former Defense Minister Peter MacKay and Winston Wen-yi Chen, a representative of the Taiwanese government, which proclaimed Taiwan a vital ally in confronting "authoritarian" China and barely stopped short of urging support for Taiwanese independence.

*Canada continues to build up its military presence in the Asia Pacific, with the Canadian Armed Forces declaring the Strait of Malacca of vital strategic importance to Canada and provocatively sending warships through the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea.

*Following on from a petition supported by legislators from all parties with representation in the Canadian parliament and Quebec National Assembly—including the NDP, Greens and Québec Solidaire—Conservative Leader Erin O'Toole has called for Canada to press for the 2022 Winter Olympics to be transferred from China. Such tactics recall the darkest days of the Cold War when the United States and Soviet Union came close to nuclear confrontation.

The Canadian working class must firmly reject the anti-China campaign. It is based on lies, smears and fabrications, of which the Wuhan lab leak claim is only the most grotesque. As so many times in the past, Canada's imperialist ruling class and its US allies are seeking to rally popular support for the pursuit of their predatory interests by waving the banner of human rights.

The Canadian working class confronts its mortal enemy not in the Taiwan Strait, but here at home. As the coronavirus pandemic has demonstrated in such a devastating manner, it is the Canadian ruling class, not China, which directly threatens the lives and livelihoods of workers. The Canadian ruling class thinks nothing of sending teachers and students into schools where they could be infected with a deadly disease, just as it thinks nothing of sending workers into a mine to labor in the dark for poverty wages. Likewise, it will show no qualms about sending Canadians to kill and to die in yet another imperialist war. Exploitation and plunder are the sources of its immense profits. In China, the Canadian ruling class perceives a serious competitor to its ability to extract profits on a global scale. For the sake of those profits, no lie is too base to employ.



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