

Canada commits to purchase F-35 fighter jets, vows massive defence spending hike in April 7 budget

Roger Jordan
5 April 2022

Canada's Liberal government has announced that it plans to purchase 88 F-35 fighter jets from the giant US arms manufacturer Lockheed Martin, and will significantly hike military spending in its 2022 budget, scheduled to be presented this Thursday.

The minority Liberal government is assured parliamentary support for both measures, thanks to the three-year “confidence-and-supply” agreement struck between Prime Justin Trudeau and New Democratic Party leader Jagmeet Singh March 21. Outside of parliament, this governmental alliance will rely on the corporatist trade unions to suppress working-class opposition to war abroad and austerity for public services at home.

The Trudeau government and social-democratic NDP politicians, with the support of much of the corporate-controlled media, are claiming their political partnership will “deliver for Canadians” by creating a “better, more prosperous future.” In reality, the only constituencies the Liberal-NDP alliance will deliver for are Canadian big business and its military. Behind rhetoric about making dental care available for all, “strengthening health care” and “making parliament work for Canadians,” the Liberals and NDP will work to ensure that Canadian imperialism's war machine gets the funding and equipment required to continue its provocative role in NATO's proxy war with Russia, while enforcing “fiscal responsibility,” i.e., public spending restraint, at home.

The Liberal-NDP deal coincided with a massive escalation of NATO's proxy war against Russia, in which Ottawa is playing a major and particularly aggressive role. Since NATO goaded Putin into invading Ukraine, the Trudeau government has sent tens of millions of dollars of offensive weaponry to Kiev, whose military forces are rife with far-right nationalists and neo-Nazis, and boosted Canada's military presence in the Baltic and Black Sea regions.

The measures the Trudeau government is now taking to greatly expand the Canadian Armed Forces' capabilities are aimed at ensuring Canadian imperialism can continue to wage war around the world in alliance with its US military-strategic partner for decades to come.

Lockheed Martin describes the F-35 stealth fighter jet as the “most lethal, survivable and connected fighter aircraft in the world.” Its key features include “enhanced electronic warfare,” “advanced sensors,” and “advanced 5th-Generation weapons capability.” The price tag for Canada's 88 jets will be \$19 billion or about US \$15 billion. This sum is 25 percent more than what the federal government, which has far and away the greatest fiscal powers and resources under Canada's constitution, provided the provinces and territories in 2020, under the Canada Social Transfer, to pay for social assistance, post-secondary and early childhood education and other social services.

But the F-35 purchase is only the tip of the iceberg.

By supporting the Liberal government through June 2025, the NDP is ensuring that it can enact a large chunk of the 70 percent hike in annual defence spending the Liberals pledged in June 2017 that they would implement over nine years ending in 2026. Under this plan, the current defence budget of around \$23 billion will rise to about \$32 billion over the next four years. The additional funds are committed to funding, among other things, a new fleet of warships and armed drones.

However, due to the advent of a new era of “strategic competition” between the great powers—i.e., the Canadian-backed US military-strategic offensives against Russia and China—these huge planned military spending increases are now being dismissed as grossly inadequate by the military top brass, the most influential ruling class think-tanks, and the government itself. Defence Minister Anita Anand has boasted that she has brought before cabinet various plans to increase Canada's defence spending to 2 percent of GDP and more. NATO is currently pressing all member states to raise defence budgets to at least 2 percent of GDP forthwith.

To meet this goal, Canada would effectively need to double defence spending from its current \$23 billion level. Parliamentary budget officer Yves Giroux told CBC that while Canada's current defence spending equates to 1.39 percent of GDP, an additional “\$20-25 billion” annually would be needed to keep the budget above 2 percent of economic output if the effects of economic growth and inflation are taken into account.

On top of this, there is strong support within the top echelons of the military and foreign policy establishment for a massive investment in modernizing NORAD, the North American aerospace and maritime defence command, a Cold War bilateral Canada-US continental defence structure. Canada's contribution to modernizing NORAD's "early warning" surveillance system in the far north is estimated at \$11 billion.

However, the key issue now being discussed within the Canadian ruling class and military-security establishment is the need for Canada to join the US ballistic missile defence shield and otherwise assist in developing the means to "take out" "over the horizon threats"—that is to prepare to wage "winnable" nuclear war against Russia and China.

The NDP has repeatedly reiterated its full-throated support for this mad rearmament drive, which can only be understood as the Canadian ruling elite's preparation to be a major belligerent in a third world war, as it was in the two imperialist world wars of the last century. NDP Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Heather Macpherson noted recently, "We have seen our military be decimated over [the] long-term. This is not something that has just happened. We have not provided the tools that our soldiers, our men and women in uniform, need to do the jobs that we're asking them to do safely."

The NDP, no less so than the Liberals and Tories, is also fully on board with the reckless drive to war with Russia, which threatens to trigger a global conflagration. The NDP used a recent opposition day in parliament to table a motion aimed at making the sweeping economic sanctions against Russia "more effective." Party spokeswoman for national defence Lindsay Mathyssen said, "Economic sanctions are a strong tool we have to hit at Putin where it will hurt him most, his wealth. However, sanctions won't have the desired effect if the government is not willing to enforce them properly." She demanded a public blacklist of Russian owners of Canadian assets, a move that would no doubt be used to further intensify the hysterical anti-Russia war fever in the upper middle class.

In reality, the price for sanctions will be paid for by working people in Russia, Ukraine, and around the world as the cost of key commodities and basic necessities shoot up under conditions where wages remain stagnant.

Canadian imperialism's vast rearmament program will come at the expense of the working class. The tens of billions in additional war spending to be clawed out of public spending and workers' wages will be added to the hundreds of billions looted from public funds by the corporate elite and financial oligarchy during the pandemic, when the Trudeau government orchestrated the transfer of over \$650 billion to big business and the banks virtually overnight. Like the ruling elite's huge outlays to wage war, the bailout of the super-rich during the pandemic was fully endorsed by the NDP and trade unions, who ensured that all popular opposition to the ruling elite's back-to-work/back-to-school drive was sabotaged and suppressed.

Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland has explicitly stated that additional funding for the military will mean budget cuts elsewhere. During her fall fiscal update in December 2021, Freeland pledged to impose "fiscal guardrails" to ensure that the government spending conducted during the early stages of COVID-19 was reduced and Canada could work towards a balanced budget.

Behind the blather in the corporate media about major new spending commitments to placate the NDP, the reality is that both the Liberals and New Democrats fully endorse the framework of austerity for public spending and low taxes for the corporate elite that has dominated political life for the past three decades. There are no plans to reverse the savage cuts to health care, education, social housing and other critical social services that have seen inequality and poverty in Canada rise to unprecedented levels. On the contrary, cuts in these areas will have to be intensified to pay for the massive military budget and subsidies for the so-called "green," "clean energy" economy, from which corporate Canada hopes to reap multi-billion-dollar profits in the years to come.

The Liberals and NDP will rely on the trade union bureaucracy to suppress working class opposition to this class war agenda. The Canadian Labour Congress has declared its whole-hearted support for the confidence-and-supply agreement, with its president Bea Bruske enthusing in *The Hill Times* that "hope and optimism shines through the gray fog" in Ottawa thanks to the Liberal-NDP deal. It was a "welcome antidote to the noxious partisan rhetoric of recent weeks and months," she asserted.

The meaning of this remark is unmistakable. Bruske, the union bureaucracy and the NDP are determined that no "partisan" divisions emerge on the ruling elite's waging of war abroad, huge rearmament for the military, and austerity for public spending. To this end, the unions will keep sabotaging workers' struggles, like the Teamsters' sellout of the courageous struggle by 3,000 CP Rail workers on the very same day that Trudeau and Singh announced their agreement.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact