

Greetings from the ICFI to the SEP (Australia) 2022 Congress

Canadian imperialism's predatory reach far exceeds its grasp

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The following remarks were delivered by Keith Jones to the Sixth National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia), held from September 24 to 27, 2022. Jones is the national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (Canada), the Canadian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

It is a privilege to extend the fraternal revolutionary greetings of the Socialist Equality Party/Parti d'égalite socialiste (Canada) to your sixth national congress.

I have read your resolutions and want to take this opportunity to lend them my emphatic support. As they must, they examine the cascade of intersecting crises that are roiling world and Australian capitalism. Of especial importance are the analysis they provide of the pandemic as a trigger event akin to World War One that has dramatically accelerated the global capitalist breakdown; of the US-NATO war as what the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered; and of how the same processes that are fuelling the imperialist drive to world war are also propelling social revolution.

All of the resolutions—and it is this, above all, that imparts to them their great significance—are animated by the recognition that the ICFI is now called upon to provide revolutionary leadership to an emerging global counter-offensive of the working class. Based on a continuous reworking of the century-long struggle of the Trotskyist movement to defend and develop the program of world socialist revolution, we must provide the socialist political conceptions and strategic and tactical initiatives to mobilize the working class ever more systematically as an independent and international political force in the struggle for workers' power.

Canada and Australia are on opposite sides of the planet, but there are many parallels in their evolution as capitalist societies, beginning with the brutal displacement and subjugation of the aboriginal peoples.

As rulers of third-rank imperialist powers, their capitalist elites have shared a common destiny, serving as the junior partners in exploitation, brigandage, and world wars of first British and then US imperialism.

The parallels and similarities are not just historical. Canadian and Australian imperialism have responded in a like manner to the crisis—in reality, death agony—of US imperialism. In pursuit of their own imperialist interests and ambitions, they have integrated themselves ever more deeply into the US drive for global hegemony, participating in Washington's never-ending wars of the last three decades. Today, they play major roles in US imperialism's strategic conflicts with Russia and China—conflicts that without the revolutionary intervention of the international working class will rapidly spiral into World War III.

Canada considers itself a Pacific power whose strategic interests include the Malacca Straits, and now routinely joins the Pentagon in its provocative "freedom of navigation" exercises through the Taiwan Strait. In so far as any of this is criticized within the capitalist establishment, it is from the standpoint that Canadian imperialism should be doing more, and

demonstratively more, to prepare for and help provoke war with China. Why was Canada not invited to join AUKUS, scream the military-strategic think tanks?

But the calculating, predatory and anti-democratic character of the Canadian ruling class and its state are best illustrated by the role Canadian imperialism is playing in the US-NATO war on Russia. Working in tandem with Washington, Canada played a major role in preparing and instigating the NATO war with Russia and now in its prosecution. Along with the US and British militaries, Canada's armed forces helped train and reorganize the Ukrainian military during the seven years between the 2014 coup and the Russian invasion, including through the integration of the Azov battalion and other fascist militia. Since January, it has funnelled \$625 million in weapons to Ukraine and, as the *New York Times* recently revealed, Canadian Special Forces are deployed in Ukraine.

As in Washington, London and Berlin, so in Ottawa, Russia's warnings of a dramatic escalation of the war, including the potential use of nuclear weapons, following the recent rout of its forces in north-east Ukraine, are being cavalierly dismissed. Maintaining the Canada-US military-strategic alliance with Washington and advancing Canadian imperialist interests in the Arctic, where Canada and Russia are in direct competition for resources and control over sea-lanes, are madly seen by the ruling class as interests for which triggering nuclear war is an acceptable, indeed, necessary risk.

Canada's role in the Russia war long predates even 2014. As we documented in the five-part WWSW series published in May, "Canadian Imperialism's Fascist Friends," its especially provocative and belligerent role in the war with Russia is bound up with its seven-decades long alliance with the Ukrainian far right.

Canada provided a safe haven to tens of thousands of Ukrainian fascists who had collaborated with the Nazis during World War Two in the Holocaust and in their war of extermination against the Soviet Union. The Canadian ruling class helped whitewash the monstrous crimes they had committed as members of the fascist Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists or the Waffen SS, using them as instruments of its Cold War policy both at home and abroad.

With the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union, these forces were redeployed to press for Ukraine to be harnessed to NATO and the European Union. The political-ideological spearhead of this was the reinjection and promotion of a fascist Ukrainian nationalism, based on vehement anti-communism, extreme hostility to Russia and glorification of the Nazi collaborator and fascist Stepan Bandera.

The reactionary alliance between the Ukrainian far-right and Canadian imperialism is embodied in the person of Chrystia Freeland, the leading anti-Russia war-hawk in Canada's government, its deputy prime and finance minister and the favourite to succeed Justin Trudeau as Liberal

leader and Canada's prime minister. Freeland's maternal grandfather, Michael Chomiak, who she publicly lionizes for schooling her in Ukrainian nationalism and culture, was a prominent Nazi collaborator.

The exposure of Canada imperialism's alliance with the Ukrainian fascists is a crucial element in the SEP Canada's fight to mobilize the working class against the war and more generally to destroy the fraudulent lies promoted by the social democrats and pseudo-left about Canadian capitalism's supposed democratic and pacific character.

When I spoke at your last Congress in 2020, I reported that more than a quarter of Canada's active armed forces personnel had been assigned to a COVID-19 deployment in anticipation of possible mass social unrest, and that as part of this deployment the military had developed and activated plans to "shape opinion" and deter opposition based on tactics that it had developed while waging counter-insurgency war in Afghanistan.

At that time, we did not know that Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison had, with the Governor-General's assent and connivance, assumed quasi-dictatorial powers, nor that Canada's Liberal government was in the midst of adopting a battery of secret laws—laws whose subject, let alone stipulations, remain known by only a tiny cabal of government officials.

Democracy is incompatible with the decades-long rampant growth of social inequality and the ruling class's agenda of militarism, war and ever-more brutal worker exploitation. Everywhere the bourgeoisie is turning to authoritarian forms of rule and resuscitating and emboldening the far-right.

Earlier this month, Canada's official opposition Conservatives elected Pierre Poilievre as their leader. A veteran Conservative MP, Poilievre made the defining issue of his leadership campaign his strident support for the far-right Freedom Convoy, which menacingly occupied the nation's capital for more than three weeks last winter, and its call for a permanent end to all anti-COVID public health measures.

The Convoy—or to be more precise the readiness of significant sections of the ruling class to whip up and instrumentalize a far-right movement with the aim of imposing a "let it rip" pandemic policy, destabilizing the minority Trudeau government, and if possible forcing it from office—represented a nodal point in the breakdown of Canadian democracy.

Poilievre claims to be a spokesperson for the aggrieved and ignored "working Joes," making demagogic appeals to social grievances—such as skyrocketing inflation—that mimic those of Trump, defrocked British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and other vicious, far-right opponents of the working class, and are just as fraudulent.

In Canada, as around the world, reaction seeks to exploit the confusion, disorientation and despair produced by the unions and official left's decades-long suppression of the class struggle and connivance in the imposition of sweeping attacks on working people's social and democratic rights.

Like the unions in Australia, Canada's unions and the social-democratic NDP responded to the pandemic by doubling down on their corporatist partnership with big business and the state. They helped organize the bailout of the financial markets, then policed the ruling class profits-before-lives pandemic policy that has resulted in seven waves of mass infection and death that have killed 45,000 people, or more than all the Canadian deaths in World War II.

The so-called Freedom Convoy benefited from powerful ruling class support, to say nothing of the encouragement given it by Trump and his Republican and fascist allies. But if a movement whose "social Darwinist" and anti-democratic views are anathema to the vast majority of working people could dominate Canadian political life for the better part of a month, this was above all because the unions and NDP kept the working class muzzled and on the political sidelines. They then supported the Trudeau government when it invoked the never-before-used

Emergencies Act to end the occupation of Ottawa—setting a precedent for the suspension of basic democratic rights that can and will be used against the working class. And in its immediate aftermath, the unions and NDP staunchly supported the Trudeau government as it greenlighted the provinces' scrapping of all remaining COVID-19 mitigation measures—that is the implementation of the homicidal pandemic program of big business and the far right.

Trotsky notes in the *Transitional Program* that in times of acute crisis, like war, trade union leaders become cabinet ministers. Less than four weeks after the eruption of the Ukraine war, the NDP, with the full-throated backing of the trade unions, entered into a formal governmental alliance with the minority Liberals. In the name of "stability"—that is the suppression of the class struggle on behalf of the bourgeoisie—they have pledged to keep the Liberal government in office through May 2025 as it wages war, massively boosts military spending, pivots to austerity in a new supposed "post-pandemic" era and enforces huge inflation-driven real wage cuts.

But as the work of the ICFI theoretically anticipated and prepared for, above all in the founding of the SEPs and the WSWS's quarter-century of political work, and has been positively demonstrated in the initial initiatives undertaken by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, the relationship between the working class and the counter-revolutionary bureaucratic apparatuses, on the one hand, and the Fourth International, on the other, has been fundamentally transformed.

Workers in Canada, as around the world, are being propelled into struggle. Since the second half of 2021, there has been a wave of strikes that have impacted virtually every economic sector, from mining, railways, construction and food-processing to education and government administration.

In these struggles we have increasingly emerged as the pole of opposition to the labour bureaucracy on the basis of the fight for rank-and-file committees as part of the IWA-RFC. Through the work of the Cross-Canada Educators' Rank-and-File Safety Committee, and more recently the Ontario Education Workers Rank-and-File Committee, we have given concrete expression to the fight for the independent mobilization of the working class to enforce a science-based Zero Covid strategy in opposition to the unions. Underscoring the nervousness with which the bureaucracy views these developments, leading union officials, including the head of the 50,000 member Ontario School Board Council of Unions, have repeatedly denounced and/or sought to intervene in the work of our education and CP Rail worker rank-and-file committees.

Important as these initiatives are, we are acutely aware that outside of the strengthening of the SEP Canada's Trotskyist foundation these gains will prove fleeting.

The formal founding of the SEP Canada as a section of the ICFI must serve as a critical step in strengthening its Trotskyist identity, by reasserting and defining still more clearly our attitude to the struggles of the Fourth International, led by the ICFI to uphold and develop the program of world socialist revolution. An element in this is drawing a balance sheet of the roots and consequences of the liquidation of the first Canadian section of the ICFI, which in 1963 joined the American Socialist Workers Party in reuniting with the Pabloites.

Especially important will be to demonstrate how the struggle the ICFI waged against the national-opportunist WRP and subsequently to draw the lessons of the 1985-86 split found expression in and drove the programmatic clarification of the Canadian supporters of the ICFI to key questions of political perspective that remain to this day at the center of the struggle to win the Canadian working class to the program of world socialist revolution. In particular, these involve the fight against left Canadian and Quebec nationalism; Canadian imperialism and the program of Quebec *indépendantiste* nationalism and for the unity of the North American working class against the alliance between Canadian and US

imperialism and their junior partner Mexico.

In conclusion, your congress, because it is rooted in the ICFI's historically developed Marxist analysis of the rapidly maturing objective prerequisites for social revolution and its understanding of the decisive significance of revolutionary leadership, strategy and action, represents a major step forward for the Fourth International and the global working class.

Thank you comrades.



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