

Canadian imperialism bares its fangs

Keith Jones
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This is the report delivered by Keith Jones, the National Secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (Canada), to the 2023 International May Day Online Rally. To view all speeches, visit wsws.org/mayday.

The Ukraine war, like the COVID-19 pandemic before it, has laid bare the true brutish, predatory character of Canadian capitalism.

The claim—long promoted by the ruling class’ attorneys and apologists in the trade union bureaucracy, the social democratic NDP (New Democratic Party), and the pseudo-left—that Canada is a “kinder, gentler” capitalism, different in kind from the predatory dollar republic to the south, stands exposed as a monstrous lie.

Canadian imperialism has played an outsized role in preparing, instigating and prosecuting the US-NATO war on Russia. A war Foreign Affairs Minister Melanie Joly now frankly admits is aimed at bringing about “regime change” in Moscow and that Prime Minister Trudeau has vowed Canada will wage “for as long as it takes.”

Since the start of the war, Canada has showered Ukraine with more than \$8 billion in military and other aid, including tanks, artillery and advanced air defence systems.

During the previous two decades, Canada championed NATO expansion and Russia’s encirclement, helped orchestrate the February 2014 fascist-led coup that overthrew Ukraine’s elected president, and worked in tandem with the US and Britain to reorganize Ukraine’s military to make it interoperable with NATO forces and to incorporate the fascists of the Azov Battalion.

Canadian imperialism played a particularly important and foul role in the war’s political-ideological preparation through its decades-long alliance with the Ukrainian far right. As the *World Socialist Web Site* has documented in the multi-part series “Canadian Imperialism’s Fascist Friends,” following World War

II Canada provided refuge to tens of thousands of Ukrainian Nazi collaborators implicated in the Holocaust and Hitler’s war of annihilation against the Soviet Union.

In pursuit of the twin Cold War objectives of eradicating socialist influence among the large Ukrainian-Canadian population and weakening the USSR, the Canadian state assisted the Ukrainian far right in whitewashing its crimes and in fashioning a new nationalist narrative that celebrates the war criminal Stepan Bandera and his Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists as fighters for “national liberation.”

With the turn of the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy to capitalist restoration, the far-right forces the Canadian state had promoted through the Ukrainian Canadian Congress were redeployed to push for Ukrainian independence and, after 1991, to harness the government in Kiev to NATO and the European Union. Central to these efforts has been the reinjection into Ukraine of a virulent anti-Russian, anti-communist nationalism exemplified by the Bandera cult.

At last year’s May Day rally, I pointed to Chrystia Freeland, Canada’s finance and deputy prime Minister, as embodying, at the highest levels of the state, the alliance between Canadian imperialism and the Ukrainian nationalist far right. Freeland’s maternal grandfather, to whom she pays homage for schooling her in Ukrainian culture and history, was the prominent Nazi collaborator Mikhailo Chomiak.

Over the past year, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress’ influence in Ottawa has only grown. Recently its former CEO, Taras Zalusky, was named chief of staff for Defence Minister Anita Anand.

Emboldened by this support, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, or UCC, is acting as a quasi-arm of the state to smear, censor and suppress all anti-war voices and actions. The UCC boasts about its discussions with

Canada's Minister for Public Safety, Marco Mendicino, about "clamping down" on what it terms "pro-Russian" messaging.

At the urging of UCC supporters, in March the publicly funded University of Waterloo attempted to cancel the International Youth and Students for Social Equality's room booking on trumped-up grounds. The meeting only took place because the IYSSE mounted a vigorous counter-campaign, insisting on students' and workers' democratic right to discuss and oppose the major role Canada has played in instigating and prosecuting a war that could spiral into World War III.

More recently, the far-right Ukrainian nationalists succeeded in forcing the cancellation of a separate anti-war meeting in Montreal by smearing the speakers as pro-Russian and violent.

The UCC-spearheaded, state-supported campaign to suppress any and all anti-war voices is testament to the fear in ruling class circles. They know their false narrative of an "unprovoked war" and a struggle to defend Ukrainian "democracy" would be exposed as a pack of lies if subject to criticism and debate.

While the entire political establishment, whether federalist or pro-Quebec independence, strongly supports the war, the ruling elite know full well that among working people there is only anxiety and opposition to the ever-escalating conflict in Europe.

If this opposition has yet to find expression in the emergence of a mass anti-war movement, it is above all the result of the actions of those organizations that falsely posture as left—the trade unions, the NDP and Quebec Solidaire.

The NDP, with the enthusiastic support of their trade union allies, responded to the war's outbreak last February by forming a governmental alliance with the minority Liberal government. Promising to provide "political stability"—that is, to suppress the class struggle—the NDP is pledged to keep Trudeau in office till June 2025 as his government wages war, dramatically hikes military spending, pursues austerity and imposes huge, inflation driven real wage cuts.

Insofar as there is any opposition to the war from the pseudo left organizations that uphold the authority of the unions and NDP and promote identity politics, it is based on the bankrupt and debilitating perspective that the Canadian government and state can be pressured into helping broker a peaceful, negotiated end to the

Ukraine war and, more generally, to play an altruistic role in world affairs.

Genuine opposition to the war must be animated by an entirely opposed perspective—the fight to mobilize the working class on a socialist, internationalist program against Canadian capitalism, its state and the union-NDP backed Liberal government.

Contrary to the claim of the left nationalists, who depict Canada as a chaste virgin manipulated by the evil Uncle Sam, Canada is a rapacious imperialist power. One that has forged a privileged and lucrative partnership with the most powerful capitalist power of the day—Britain in the 19th century, the US for the past eight decades—in pursuit of its own imperialist interests and ambitions.

Workers in Canada, as around the world, are being drawn into mass struggles that objectively challenge the ruling class agenda of war and austerity. The task of the hour is to transform these struggles into a politically conscious movement for socialism.

The struggle against war is the cutting edge of this fight. A genuine politically independent mass movement of the working class striving for workers' power can only develop insofar as workers separate themselves from and actively oppose all the predatory actions of their "own" ruling class and its state and make the great battle cry of the socialist moment—"workers of the world unite"—the axis of their struggles.



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