

Union-NDP supported Trudeau government waging war on two fronts on behalf of Canadian capital

Socialist Equality Party (Canada)

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The ostensibly “progressive,” Justin Trudeau-led Liberal government is waging war on two fronts—to advance the predatory interests of Canadian imperialism around the world and to intensify worker exploitation at home.

On both fronts, the Trudeau government has dramatically intensified its assault in recent weeks. In tandem with its NATO allies, it is escalating the war against Russia, accelerating preparations for war with China, and diverting massive additional resources from social spending to expanding Canada’s military might. Putting the lie to the government’s claims to uphold workers’ rights, Trudeau has simultaneously deployed the repressive powers of the capitalist state to break a militant strike by 7,400 West Coast dockers.

In waging this two-front war on behalf of Canadian capital, the Liberal government relies on the support of the trade union bureaucracy and Jagmeet Singh and his New Democratic Party (NDP). At the unions’ behest, the NDP is in a governmental alliance with the Liberals that stops just short of a coalition government.

Canadian imperialism bares its fangs

In the run-up to the July 11-12 NATO summit in Vilnius, the Liberal government committed an additional \$500 million in armaments for Ukraine. This takes Canada’s military aid to Kiev since the US-provoked Russian invasion to over \$2 billion and total financial support to well over \$8 billion. Trudeau also announced that Canada is more than doubling its military commitment to the NATO battlegroup in Latvia to 2,200 soldiers. This is part of NATO’s comprehensive plan to deploy 300,000 troops across Eastern Europe to encircle Russia and expand its presence in the Nordic and Arctic regions to develop new fronts in its undeclared war with Moscow.

At the NATO summit itself, Trudeau joined the other leaders of the US-led military alliance in adopting a strategy document for world domination, while blithely dismissing concerns that NATO aggression could trigger nuclear conflict as “appeasement.” The NATO strategy document outlines plans to intensify the war with Russia and with the scarcely veiled aims of “regime change” and its semi-colonial subjugation; to enhance NATO’s presence in the Asia-Pacific to combat China; and to significantly expand NATO’s military presence in virtually every part of the world, space, and cyberspace.

Trudeau also signed on at the Vilnius summit to “an enduring commitment to invest at least” 2 percent of Canada’s GDP each year on the military. This would translate into an immediate increase in military

expenditure of approximately 60 percent or \$20 billion per year. Moreover, the war plans outlined in the NATO strategy document, as well as its specific injunction that far bigger expenditures will be required “in many cases,” makes clear this constitutes little more than a down payment in securing what ruling class strategists call Canada’s “seat at the table” in an imperialist repartition of the world.

War on the working class

Canadian capital, and its Liberal government, are determined to place the full burden of war and rearmament on the working class. They are no less intent on making working people pay for their ruinous response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which combined a massive bailout of the banks and big business with a profits-before-lives policy that has killed more than 50,000 Canadians.

It is this class war agenda that has animated the Trudeau government’s campaign to suppress the British Columbia dockers’ strike—a strike that Labour Minister Seamus O’Regan has pointedly denounced as a threat to the “national interest.”

While Trudeau was in Vilnius committing Canada to never-ending wars and tens of billions in additional military spending, the government launched a campaign of escalating state attacks on dockers’ right to strike and collectively fight for their class interests.

The Liberal government-aligned bureaucrats who lead the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) surrendered to the very first volley in this assault, endorsing a government-authored proposed contract. But when workers rebelled against this sellout, Trudeau and O’Regan were forced to resort to ever more draconian, transparently anti-democratic measures.

First, they prevailed on the Canada Industrial Relations Board, an arm of the state, to declare the resumption of the strike “unlawful.” Then Trudeau convened a meeting of the Incident Response Group, an emergency cabinet group tasked with dealing with threats to “national security” and on which the military and intelligence chiefs sit, to discuss “all options” to break any continued worker resistance. Canada, the Prime Minister’s Office’s readout of the meeting declared, “cannot face further disruption.”

For the Trudeau government and the ruling class, the dockers’ struggle is intolerable because it constitutes a double threat. First, in shutting down the West Coast ports for two weeks to defend their jobs and living standards from the voracious shipping bosses and port operators, the dockers have disrupted the production chains upon which Canadian and

US imperialism depend to feed their war machine. Second, they have challenged the state-corporate drive to increase the “global competitiveness”—that is the profitability—of Canadian capitalism through increased worker exploitation.

The Liberal government’s union and NDP partners

The corporatist trade unions and the social-democratic politicians of the NDP are the government’s partners in advancing its agenda of war, massive military spending hikes, austerity and inflation-driven real wage cuts.

The labour bureaucrats enforced the ruling class’s profits-before-lives pandemic policy that led to successive waves of mass death. They are strident supporters of the Ukraine war and rearmament. The unions and NDP have given tacit support to the far-right Ukrainian Canadian Congress-led, Trudeau government-backed, campaign to smear and censor all anti-war voices. They also played a key role in the recent renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement, which was aimed at consolidating a US-dominated continental trade bloc from which American and Canadian imperialism can vie for global economic and geostrategic hegemony.

Just one month after the US and NATO powers goaded Putin into launching his reactionary invasion of Ukraine, the NDP—acting at the urging and behest of the leaders of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and Unifor—entered into a “confidence-and-supply” agreement with the Trudeau government. It has thereby pledged to ensure the survival of the minority Liberal government through June 2025.

The explicit purpose of this parliamentary and governmental alliance, as stated by NDP leader Jagmeet Singh at its unveiling, is to ensure “political stability.” That is stability for the Trudeau government and the ruling class to wage their two-front war. This has been underlined by Singh’s repeated affirmations in recent months that the NDP intends to continue propping up the government. Singh and the NDP have thus reassured the ruling elite of their continued support for the government as it ratchets up Canada’s involvement in the Ukraine war and the US military-strategic offensive against China, and combats worker resistance to punishing price rises and interest-rate hikes.

If the Trudeau government is waging a war on two fronts, the union and NDP leaders are its “labour lieutenants.” Their specific task is to contain, divert and derail mounting working class opposition.

This has been on full display during the dockers’ courageous struggle. The ILWU bureaucrats bowed to the Trudeau government’s ultimatums without a fight. While they were forced to concede that the employers’ strategy was predicated on inducing government intervention, they did nothing to mobilize working class support, in Canada or internationally, for defiance of a back-to-work law. No appeal was issued to US West Coast dockers—who are in the same union, are without a contract for a year, and face a similar threat of the criminalization of any strike by the Biden administration—for joint action.

ILWU Canada President Rob Ashton and the union’s top brass made a show of denouncing government intervention. However, they rolled over before the government campaign of threats and intimidation. Three times in the course of six days they called off worker job action or impending action, thereby sparing the Trudeau government the trouble of imposing a back-to-work law.

No doubt behind the scenes, the CLC and BC Federation of Labour (BCFL) leaderships, Jagmeet Singh and BC NDP Premier David Eby were all pressing the ILWU leaders to sign on to the government-dictated sellout agreement. They feared that in so much as the dockers’ defiance

forced the Trudeau government to openly act as strikebreaker-in-chief it would undermine the anti-worker union-NDP-Liberal alliance. Even more fundamentally, they feared the strike could trigger a rapid escalation of the already substantial strike wave developing across North America as workers rallied to the BC dockers’ defence. This would threaten the stability of Canadian capitalism, on which the privileges of the union bureaucrats rest, and lay bare the necessity for a political struggle for workers’ power.

The same considerations dictated the unions’ shutting down of the Ontario education support workers’ struggle last November at the very point when it threatened to precipitate a province-wide general strike that could have brought down the hated Ford government.

Last Thursday, Trudeau delivered a venomous tirade against the dockers. What above all angered him was that workers had the audacity to challenge the corporatist alliance between big business, the union bureaucracy and the state. “I think we were all dismayed,” declared Trudeau, “when we found out that a good deal that had been worked out at the table that was agreed to both by union leadership and by the management had been suddenly rejected and they were back in a strike position. This was unacceptable.”

From the standpoint of the ruling class, the growth of working class militancy and the increasing alienation and opposition of rank-and-file workers to the trade union apparatuses that have for so long suppressed the class struggle is indeed a grave menace.

For a socialist-internationalist strategy to defeat Trudeau’s two-front war

If workers are to defeat the two-front war of the Trudeau government and the ruling class, they must base their struggles on a socialist and internationalist strategy.

Around the world, the systemic crisis of capitalism is propelling workers into struggle. Across North America and Europe, major strikes and mass protests have erupted against attacks on workers’ wages and conditions, social spending cuts and ever widening social inequality.

Workers are exhibiting great militancy; however these struggle workers have to date foundered on two obstacles.

The first of these is the capitalist state. Confronting mass social anger, the capitalist ruling elites and their various political representatives, whether ostensibly left or right-wing, are increasingly responding with repression and violence and by bringing forward far-right and fascistic forces like Donald Trump.

In Britain, the Tory government has responded to powerful strikes by healthcare workers, transport workers, and postal workers, by permanently criminalizing worker job action across wide swathes of the economy. In the United States, Biden’s union-backed Democratic administration illegalized an impending strike by 110,000 railroaders last December. In France, the “liberal” President Emanuel Macron ran roughshod over parliamentary norms and unleashed brutal violence by fascistic security forces to push through pension cuts in the face of mass opposition last spring.

The second obstacle is the pro-capitalist trade union apparatuses and the phony “left” parties with which they are aligned. These forces work tirelessly to disunite the working class and to defuse all social opposition by channeling it into parliamentary and protest politics and nationally circumscribed contract struggles under the rigged, state-regulated collective bargaining system. In Britain, the unions have systematically divided workers, calling short, often one-day strikes, while subordinating them politically to the pro-war, pro-austerity Labour Party. In the US, the

rail unions policed Biden's antistrike law and the ILWU, at the government's urging, has imposed a no-strike pledge on West Coast dockers. In France, the unions and the Jean-Luc Mélenchon-led alliance of pseudo-left parties implacably opposed any struggle to bring down Macron. To wear protesters down, they called one-day protests spread out over many weeks, while advocating futile appeals to the "president of the rich" to see "reason."

To assert their class interests, counter the attacks of individual employers, defeat the ruling class agenda of austerity and war, and confront its state power, workers need to build new organizations of genuine class struggle. In every workplace, workers should build rank-and-file committees organizationally and politically independent of the pro-capitalist trade unions. Affiliated to the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, these committees must fight to systematically unite the struggles of workers around the world, and to secure workers' needs irrespective of what the capitalists and their governments declare "affordable." Such rank-and-file committees have already been established by diverse sections of workers in numerous countries, including in Canada, as at the strike-bound National Steel Car plant in Hamilton, Ontario.

But a working class counteroffensive will be able to develop and be sustained only in so far as it becomes an independent political movement of the working class that strives to break the economic and political power of the ruling class by establishing a workers' government committed to the socialist reorganization of socio-economic life.

In Canada, workers must repudiate the Liberal-union-NDP alliance, which for decades has served as one of the key political mechanisms for suppressing the class struggle, as well as the Canadian and Quebec nationalist politics of the unions and pseudo-left which divide workers within Canada and from their class brothers and sisters in the US, Mexico and around the world.

Workers must beware. In so far as they don't break free of the political control of the unions and develop an independent political offensive of the working class in opposition to the Trudeau government, the door will be open for the Conservatives, under their new far-right leader Pierre Poilievre, to make a demagogic appeal to the growing social anger over falling living standards and crumbling public services. Powerful sections of the ruling class are already baying for Trudeau's replacement by a Poilievre-led Conservative government, in anticipation it will use authoritarian methods of rule and the fascistic forces behind the "Freedom" Convoy to intensify the onslaught on working people.

Pivotal to the independent political mobilization of the working class is the fight to impart its mounting socio-economic struggles with an anti-war perspective and program. The ruling elite's onslaught on workers' social and democratic rights at home cannot be opposed if workers don't oppose with equal tenacity and clarity all aspects of Canadian imperialism's predatory global agenda—from the NATO war on Russia and its trade wars to the military-strategic alliance with Washington. As the dockers' struggle has shown, the ruling class's drive to impose real-terms pay cuts and miserable working conditions on working people is directly connected to its insistence an ever greater share of society's wealth be funneled into the Ukraine war and the pursuit of resources, strategic advantage, and profits through a violent repartition of the world. The ruling elite's determination to impose this agenda will only intensify with the deepening of the world capitalist crisis, which is the root cause of its twin policies of social impoverishment for the working class and imperialist war.

None of the problems that confront working people—war and militarism, economic insecurity, climate change, or the revival of fascism—can begin to be addressed without ending the subordination of society to the financial oligarchy's pursuit of profit and the division of the world into rival capitalist nation-states. The growing global working class upsurge

must be transformed into a politically self-conscious movement for socialism and the establishment of workers' power, so the resources of world economy can be used to fulfill social needs, not enrich the few and wage war. The Socialist Equality Party and its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International are fighting to build the revolutionary leadership needed to spearhead the fight for internationalism socialism. We urge all workers and youth to join us in this fight.



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