

Trump threatens Canada and Mexico with 25 percent tariffs from ‘Day One’

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26 November 2024

US President-elect Donald Trump has vowed to impose a 25 percent tariff on all Canadian and Mexican products from “day one” of his second term as president, unless Washington and Wall Street’s continental trade pact “partners” stop the “invasion” of America by “illegal aliens” and “drugs.”

Trump has made a similar threat against China, only in that case the levy would be 35 percent.

The imposition of Trump’s trade war measures would roil the North American and world economy, to say nothing of dramatically intensifying US imperialism’s across-the-board economic, diplomatic and military-strategic offensive against China.

His trade war targets would be compelled to reply in kind, imposing their own tariff restrictions. This would rapidly plunge the world into a trade war akin to that which erupted in the Great Depression and helped trigger the Second World War.

The countries now in Trump’s trade war crosshairs are America’s three largest trade partners. In 2023, they accounted for more than \$1.32 trillion in US imports, some 45 percent of all US imports, (with Mexico having a 16 percent share, Canada 15 percent and China 14 percent). They also accounted last year for over \$820 billion (41 percent) of US exports, double the share that went to the European Union.

These figures only begin to suggest the extent to which Canada, the US and Mexico are highly economically integrated and the immediate and massively disruptive impact the imposition of tariffs would have on production chains, workers’ jobs and consumer prices in all three countries.

For both Canada and Mexico, the US is far and away their largest trade partner. More than three-quarters of all of Canada’s exports go to the US. The percentage is even greater for Mexico.

In threatening to impose punitive tariffs, in defiance of

the provisions of USMCA (the successor to NAFTA) and World Trade Organization rules, Trump is signaling to the world that he will ruthlessly pursue the predatory interests of US imperialism against both those designated as “strategic rivals” and America’s ostensible allies and “partners,” with wanton disregard for all legal constraints.

“This Tariff,” declared Trump in a Monday afternoon statement, “will remain in effect until such time as Drugs, in particular Fentanyl, and all Illegal Aliens stop this Invasion of our Country!”

Canada is in many respects Washington’s closest imperialist ally. Yet Trump, blithely threatened to crash its and Mexico’s economy by way of a social media post on his Truth Social platform.

By threatening his USMCA partners with trade war, Trump is seeking to extort concessions on trade, investment and access to energy resources that will increase the wealth and strengthen the geo-strategic position of the US capitalist oligarchy. He and his “America First” acolytes also want to bully Ottawa and Mexico City into bringing their border “security” and foreign policies more in line with Washington’s aims and interests, and in Canada’s case make it commit hundreds of billions more to future military spending.

Trump’s tying of his trade war threat to his rabid denunciations of an “alien invasion” is not just a means of providing a bogus pseudo-legal pretext for him to impose tariffs, citing “national security” clauses in trade law that, prior to his first administration, were rarely if ever deployed.

He wants to compel Ottawa and Mexico City to provide unstinting political and logistical support for the war on immigrants that his administration intends to unleash from the very first day, with the stated aim of deporting millions of “illegal” immigrants, many of whom have lived in the US for decades.

This anti-immigrant witch-hunt is central to Trump’s

entire fascistic agenda. It is to serve as the pretext for deploying the National Guard and military to America's major cities to suppress protests that will inevitably erupt as his administration implements its plans for a social counterrevolution, including \$2 trillion in budget cuts, tax cuts for big business and the super-rich, and the removal of all regulatory restraints on capital.

Trump and his advisers also clearly see the war on immigrants as an integral part and lever for advancing their plans to create a Fortress North America, with militarized external and internal borders, and directed both against American imperialism's foreign rivals and, to use Trump's words, against "the enemy at home"—that is, the working class.

On entering the White House in 2017, Trump threatened to scuttle NAFTA entirely. Then, through brinkmanship negotiations with Ottawa and Mexico City, he refashioned it into USMCA—a commercial bloc that is both more transparently under US hegemony and more explicitly directed at waging trade war—first against China but also against Europe, Japan and other powers.

Trump's tariff threat has spooked Canada's Liberal government and the entire capitalist elite. On Monday evening Prime Minister Justin Trudeau telephoned Trump to placate him and had what his aides insist was a "good" conversation. An emergency House of Commons debate is to be held Tuesday evening, and a meeting of the prime minister and all 10 provincial premiers will convene Wednesday.

The response of Canada's imperialist bourgeoisie to the increased pressure being placed on it by its US partners and rivals will be to lash out still more aggressively against the working class at home and in pursuit of its predatory interests on the world stage.

On Tuesday, Public Security Minister Dominic LeBlanc said Canada will intensify its collaboration with the US Homeland Security Department and is considering providing the RCMP and Border Security Agency with more resources, including more helicopters and drones.

Even before Trump's latest threats, the Canadian ruling class had spelled out the need for a radical shift to the right to ensure Canada was "behind Trump's walls"—as the *Globe and Mail*, the traditional voice of the financial elite, put it—and remained "competitive." This class war agenda includes: intensified austerity, corporate tax cuts at least equal to those made by Trump, a doubling of military spending within the next four years, and other measures "helpful" to Washington.

Leading Canadian politicians have also been calling for

Canada to seek a separate bilateral trade deal with Trump at Mexico's expense. This has been accompanied by angry denunciations from Liberal ministers that Mexico is serving as a "backdoor" for China to penetrate the North American market.

In Mexico City, the reaction to Trump's tariff threat has been similarly panicked. Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum has pleaded that Mexico is already doing Washington's bidding. Despairingly, she has pointed to her government's efforts to limit Chinese imports, deployment of troops to block hundreds of thousands of migrants from making their way to the US border and collaboration with US authorities to stanch the drug trade.

Workers in the US, Canada and Mexico must unite in a common struggle against North America's twin imperialist powers and their Mexican bourgeois clients to defend the jobs and democratic and social rights of all, and in opposition to the wars the US and its imperialist allies, Canada included, have instigated in a drive to repartition and plunder the planet.

Whatever the conflicts between North America's rival ruling classes, they stand united in seeking to place the full burden of capitalism's systemic crisis onto working people.

The mobilization of the working class and the forging of its fighting unity requires an unrelenting struggle against the reactionary national-based trade union apparatuses—from the AFL-CIO and the UAW in the US to the CLC and Unifor in Canada. They have systematically divided the working class along national lines with reactionary campaigns to defend "Canadian" and "American" jobs, and are fully integrated into the war plans of imperialism.

It also demands that workers urgently take up the defense of immigrant workers, unequivocally opposing the scapegoating and victimization of immigrants, be it by Trump, Trudeau, the Quebec ethno-chauvinists or the Mexican authorities. With world capitalism descending into trade war, the cesspool of rival chauvinisms and war, more than ever the watchword of the working class must be "Workers of the World, Unite!"



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