Trump “pauses” 25 percent tariffs on Canada and Mexico, as global trade war proceeds

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US President Donald Trump reached separate arrangements Monday with Mexico and Canada—Washington’s “free trade” partners for more than three decades—to “pause” his imposition of sweeping across-the-board tariffs.

All imports from Mexico and Canada, America’s two largest trading partners, were to have been subjected to 25 percent tariffs as of 12:01 a.m. Tuesday, with the exception of imported Canadian oil, electricity and other energy products. They were to have been subjected to a 10 percent tariff. The retaliatory tariffs announced by Canada and Mexico have now likewise been suspended.

However, Trump’s global trade war is far from over. It has not even been “paused.”

Trump’s 10 percent tariff on all Chinese imports, which comes on top of the vast array of tariffs already imposed by the first Trump and Biden administrations on Chinese goods, will come into force as planned early Tuesday morning.

Trump is also continuing his drumbeat of threats against the European Union, against whom he has vowed to “soon” impose across-the-board tariffs.

And the “paused” tariffs will continue to hang like a sword of Damocles over both Canada and Mexico.

Over the next 30 days, both countries can expect to be confronted with a barrage of demands over trade, energy and investment policy, border security, foreign policy, and, in Canada’s case, military spending and continental “defense.”

Trump, as he has already made clear, views the initial assurances he has extracted from Ottawa and Mexico City for new measures to stop the “flooding” of the US with migrants and fentanyl—the ostensible aim of the tariffs under the executive orders he issued last Saturday—to be nothing more than a small down payment.

The agreements with Mexico and Canada include the deployment of additional forces to both borders, which will become increasingly militarized. Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum agreed to send 10,000 Mexican national guard troops to the country’s northern border, while Trudeau is committed to deploy 10,000 personnel to the Canada-US border, designate Mexican and other drug cartels as “terrorist organizations” and have “24/7 eyes on the border.”

Asked by CBC what “24/7 eyes on the border” meant, Public Safety Minister David McGuinty confirmed that this would include drones, Blackhawk helicopters and moveable and fixed radar installations. Canada also pledged to establish a “Canada-US joint strike force” to combat fentanyl distribution, appoint a “fentanyl czar” and invest $200 million in funding for the intelligence agencies to tackle money laundering. The additional $200 million comes on top of a $1.3 billion package unveiled last month for border security.

Following the announcement of his deal with Trudeau late in the afternoon, Trump posted to Truth Social that he was happy with the “initial outcome.” He continued, “The tariffs announced on Saturday will be paused for a 30-day period to see whether or not a final economic deal with Canada can be structured.”

Throughout the day Monday, he introduced new demands, including greater access for US banks to Canada’s domestic market. More fundamentally, he reiterated his push to annex Canada as the 51st state of the United States. Referring to Canada, Trump told reporters at the White House after his first of his two phone calls with Trudeau Monday,

> I’d like to see Canada become our 51st state. … It’s different as a state, it’s much different, and there are no tariffs. So I’d love to see that, but some people say that would be a long shot. If people wanted to play the game right, it would be 100 percent certain that they’d become a state. But a lot of people don’t like to play the game because they don’t have a threshold of pain. And there would be some pain, but not a lot. The pain would be really theirs.

In reality, the “pain” from a tariff war—whether the immediate goal is bringing Canada’s economic and military-security policies even more into line with US imperialist interests or outright annexation—would be borne by the working class across North America, including in the United States.

Tariffs are paid by companies when they import goods across the border. A company can respond in one of two ways to a new tariff: by passing the additional cost onto consumers or cancelling their order. In either case, workers pay the penalty, whether it be through increased prices for consumer goods, job cuts, temporary layoffs or inflation.

Due to the fact that the auto and other manufacturing sectors are so closely integrated across North America, companies would in practice often pay tariffs at a much higher rate than the 25 percent levied because components can cross national borders multiple

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times during the production process.

Trump's repudiation of the United States-Mexico-Canada Trade Agreement he himself negotiated—and invocation of a national emergency citing Canada and Mexico as threats to US "national security" to do so—was intended to send a message around the world. For the would-be Führer Trump, international trade agreements can be torn up at will, and the law of the jungle prevails in global inter-state relations. His trade war is the antechamber to a shooting war.

Trump and the financial oligarchy for which he speaks view it as essential that US imperialism secure unbridled domination over America's "near abroad," so as to prepare for the waging of world war to secure global hegemony. Trump has pledged to seize control of Greenland, retake ownership of the Panama Canal, and annex Canada along the lines of Hitler's "Anschluss" (joining) of Austria with Nazi Germany prior to World War II. The ultimate targets of this mad strategy are Russia and China, as well as America's nominal European imperialist allies.

For more than three-quarters of a century, Canadian imperialism has viewed its military-security partnership with Washington as the essential framework for pursuing its own predatory global interests. Today Canada's capitalist elite and political establishment fully support US imperialism's drive to repartition the world's resources and markets through global war and are eager to participate in a US-led "Fortress North America." They merely want their prerogatives as a junior partner of American imperialism—beginning with guaranteed access to the US market—to be duly recognized and not subject to revision at will by Washington.

Thus Trudeau in his address to the nation Saturday recalled the many wars Canada and the US have fought together as far back as World War I. Ontario Premier Doug Ford, whose province is home to Canada's auto industry, put the matter even more bluntly, declaring in his statement welcoming Monday's 30-day pause in tariffs, "Canada and the US need to remain united and focused on the real trade war we're fighting, with China. If we want to win, we need to fight together—not each other."

This is how the situation is viewed throughout Canada's political establishment and among their partners in the trade union bureaucracy.

In his social media post Monday, Trudeau noted with evident enthusiasm the opportunity granted by the 30-day suspension of tariffs to "work together" with Trump, a man who during the first two weeks of his second term has left no doubt that he is working towards the creation of a presidential dictatorship in the United States.

Political forces within Canada are already demanding *à la* Trump the militarization of the Canada-US border, which has been largely demilitarized since the late 19th century. Far-right Conservative Party leader Pierre Poilievre, who is poised to come to power following a spring election with a mandate from corporate Canada to implement the kind of class war policies that Trump is enforcing south of the border, urged Trudeau to "send Canadian Forces troops, helicopters, and surveillance to the border now." Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe has proposed integrating the Canada Border Services Agency with the Canadian Armed Forces to facilitate military control over and operations at the border.

Workers across North America cannot defend their jobs and livelihoods amid an unfolding trade war—one moreover that is part of a developing imperialist world war—by lining up with their "own" ruling class. But this is precisely the advice they have been given by the union bureaucracies in the US and Canada, which have sought to outdo each other in nationalist tub-thumping since the threat of tariffs was first raised. United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain repeated Sunday Trump's lying claim about tariffs protecting "American jobs."

Lana Payne, the president of Canada's largest private sector union Unifor, responded to Monday's announcement of a pause in tariffs by urging workers to unite for a tariff war to "save" Canada. Payne, who has joined the corporatist Council on Canada-US Relations alongside business leaders and government ministers, added, "As a country, we must use the days ahead to continue to bring Canadians together, to continue to plan for a potential trade war, and to use every single lever we have to build a strong, resilient, and diverse economy."

In opposition to the union bureaucracies' efforts to corral workers behind the competing ruling elites' nationalist policies of trade war and military conflict, the working class in the United States, Canada and Mexico must chart their own common independent course. As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote in a perspective published Sunday:

> They must join forces in a united movement of the North American working class, through the development of rank-and-file committees, independent of the trade union apparatus, as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). These committees will organize opposition to the demands of the ruling class for "sacrifices" in the form of mass job cuts, concessions and the evisceration of public services and social programs.
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> Opposition to trade war and its ruinous impacts on the working class must be infused with a socialist internationalist program, key tenets of which are opposition to imperialist war and anti-immigrant chauvinism.

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