

Launch of Canada's federal election campaign dominated by Trump's tariff war and annexation threat

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As expected, Canada's newly minted Liberal Party leader and Prime Minister, Mark Carney, has called a federal election for Monday, April 28, rather than allow his minority government be defeated in an impending parliamentary non-confidence vote.

The 36-day campaign, as underlined by Sunday's campaign-launch addresses of the four main party leaders, will be dominated by US President Donald Trump's vow to use "economic force" to make Canada America's 51st state, and by the establishment parties' efforts to conceal their plans for war and vicious attacks on working people's democratic and social rights behind phony Canadian and Quebec nationalist appeals.

It is a measure of how far the decades-long economic and military-security partnership between North America's two imperialist powers has deteriorated that both Carney and Pierre Poilievre, the head of the official opposition Conservatives, openly acknowledged the threat to Canada's very existence as a separate state in their speeches. "Donald Trump wants to break us so America can own us," declared Carney.

The Liberals and the Conservatives, the ruling class's traditional parties of government, are seeking to exploit the popular anger and apprehension over Trump's tariff war and his threat to take over Canada to shift politics far to the right.

In the name of defending Canada's "economy" and "sovereignty," they are laying the political terrain for imposing a raft of Trump-style measures—including huge social spending cuts, the gutting of all environmental and regulatory restraints on capital, reduced taxes on big business and the rich, and a massive increase in military spending. The reactionary flavour of the entire campaign can be gleaned from the two principal parties' main election slogans. The Liberals are championing "Canada strong" and the Conservatives the fascistic "Canada First."

A government of austerity to pay for rearmament and war

Whichever party or combination of parties forms Canada's next government, it will be a government of reaction and war dedicated to ensuring that the full burden of the ongoing trade war with the US falls on the working class and that vast new sums are funnelled from fulfilling social needs to rearming the military, so that the Canadian ruling class can ensure its place in the ongoing imperialist drive to repartition the world.

All of the four major parties—including the social-democratic NDP—have pledged to meet NATO's 2 percent of GDP military spending target. This will require a \$20 billion per year increase in the defence budget, boosting it to over \$60 billion annually. But the ruling class views this only as a down payment. The Business Council of Canada, the mouthpiece of

Canada's biggest companies, is already demanding military spending be raised to 3 percent of GDP, as are a growing list of national security think-tanks.

The Justin Trudeau-led Liberal government, which held office for more than nine years, massively hiked military spending; played a major role in instigating and prosecuting the US-NATO war on Russia; supported Israel's genocidal assault on the Palestinians; oversaw the ruling class's murderous profits-before-lives COVID-19 pandemic policy; illegally arrogated the power to break strikes at will; and presided over a massive cut in working people's living standards. Yet the ruling class soured on Trudeau and ultimately pushed him out, because they viewed his government as insufficiently aggressive in its assault on the working class and advancing its predatory interests on the world stage.

In Carney, who has assumed the premiership without ever having previously held elected office at any level, the Liberals have turned to a trusted ruling-class figure, with a proven record of imposing savage austerity on the working class in the interests of the billionaire oligarchy. From 2008 to 2013, Carney served as the governor of the Bank of Canada under hard-right Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper, and from 2013-2020 as the head of the Bank of England as successive Tory government enforced savage spending cuts to pay for the multi-billion bailout of the banks following the 2008 financial crisis.

In the week-and-a-half since he became prime minister, Carney has already moved the government sharply to the right, implementing policies that are virtual carbon copies of those advocated by Poilievre. Carney has cancelled a hike in the capital gains tax, scrapped the carbon tax as part of a plan to make Canada an "energy superpower," "streamlined" environmental reviews of business development projects, visited the Arctic to announce the purchase of a new \$6 billion missile early warning system, and pledged a new era of "fiscal responsibility."

At his campaign launch Sunday, Carney tried to pass off a 1 percent cut in the tax rate on the lowest income bracket as part of a major drive to resolve the affordability crisis. In reality, it was meant to signal that a Liberal government will meet its pledge to rapidly balance the government's budget, while hiking military and big business infrastructure spending, through massive social spending cuts, not tax increases on the rich and big business.

Inspired by Trump and his billionaire adviser Elon Musk, who has overseen the layoff of tens of thousands of government workers through the intervention of his Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), Carney announced the creation of a new mechanism to slash government spending. As part of his new cabinet, he unveiled a new post called "minister for government transformation."

Asked by a reporter Sunday how his pledge to slash taxes and regulations squared with new spending commitments, Carney responded,

“We are looking at driving efficiency in government by flipping around the approach to government, which is to concentrate on the outcomes as opposed to the dollars in.”

Even as they lurch to the right, Carney and the Liberals are trotting out their standard Canadian nationalist lies about having “all Canadians backs,” while using the even more avowedly right-wing positions of their Tory opponents as a foil. Repeatedly, the Liberals—long the Canadian ruling class’s preferred party of government—have cast themselves as the only viable “progressive” alternative to the Conservatives, then when in government implemented their rival’s right-wing policy prescriptions. To cite but one example, Jean Chretien, who was on hand at Carney’s March 14 swearing-in ceremony to give him his blessing, led the Liberals to power in 1993 by attacking the Conservatives’ “fixation” on the deficit; then carried out the greatest social spending cuts in Canadian history.

Carney and his Liberals are stumping for votes by pointing to the well-known political affinities between Poilievre and his Conservatives and the fascist would-be dictator Trump. “A person who worships at the altar of Donald Trump will kneel before him, not stand up to him,” declared Carney in his March 9 Liberal leadership victory speech. At his campaign launch, Carney referenced an interview the far-right United Conservative Premier of Alberta Danielle Smith gave *Breitbart News*, in which she urged the Trump administration to delay further tariffs until after the election, arguing that would benefit Poilievre, who’s “very much in sync with ... the new direction in America.”

In reality, the opposition of Carney and the Liberals to Trump, like that of Poilievre and his Conservatives, is entirely from the standpoint of upholding the profits and geostrategic interests of the Canadian ruling class. Both are eager to reconcile with Trump, if only he would relent on his trade war threats and grant Canadian imperialism a duly recognized position within a US-led Fortress North America.

When figures like ex-prime ministers Harper and Chretien speak about bearing “any sacrifice” to protect Canadian sovereignty, what they mean is that they are ready to impose the most massive attacks on working people—as the ruling class has done whenever its fundamental interests are at stake.

Social demagogy and Canadian nationalism

Poilievre has responded to a shift in sections of the ruling class behind Carney and the subsequent sudden revival of Liberal electoral prospects by doubling down on his attempt to combine a phony, hypocritical voicing of popular grievances over inflation, the housing crisis and the collapse of public services with explicit, Trump-style, far-right appeals.

Thus in his maiden campaign speech, the Conservative leader railed against a “Liberal radical post-national, borderless and globalist ideology [that] has weakened our nation.” He insisted that as Canadian prime minister, he would “stand up to Donald Trump from a position of strength” against his “unacceptable threats against our country.” This was necessary to ensure that everyone who works hard can “get a house, a nice house, on a safe street, protected by brave troops under a proud flag.”

Poilievre emerged as Tory leader following his strident support for the fascist-instigated “Freedom” Convoy that menacingly occupied downtown Ottawa for close to a month in early 2022 to demand the removal of all remaining COVID-19 protective measures. The Convoy was promoted by Trump and many of its leading personnel enjoyed close ties to Trump’s MAGA movement.

Despite his far-right ties, Poilievre has managed to portray himself as an advocate for the “average Joe” precisely due to the anti-worker policies of the Liberal government, and the trade unions’ systematic suppression of

the class struggle and enforcement of round after round of concession-filled contracts in the private and public sectors.

At the NDP campaign launch, party leader Jagmeet Singh sought to cast himself and his party as the voice of “working people.” Singh asserted that unlike Carney and Poilievre, workers could rely on him to challenge Trump and Canadian big business. He spoke as the leader of a party that, with the enthusiastic support of its union allies, kept the minority Liberal government in power from 2019 to parliament’s dissolution on Sunday.

Hoping that his listeners had slept through the recent years of NDP-backed Liberal rule, Singh declared, “Even before Donald Trump started his greedy trade war, times were tough, and we fought to make things better for you and your family.”

What is Singh talking about? In March 2022, he agreed to a confidence-and-supply arrangement with the Liberals under which the NDP vowed to keep the Trudeau government in office until spring 2025. The main purpose of this deal was, as Singh himself admitted, to create “political stability” for Trudeau’s government as it positioned Canada as a major player in the US/NATO war on Russia in Ukraine and intensified austerity to make workers pay for the bailout of big business during the pandemic. These policies have helped push social inequality and various measures of poverty to their highest levels on record.

The NDP’s rotten record, which stretches back long before its support for Trudeau’s minority Liberals began in 2019, has driven the party’s poll numbers to lows not seen since the 1990s. Singh hopes by putting on a fraudulent “left” face to capitalize on mounting opposition among the working class and young people to war, Israel’s genocide of the Palestinians, and capitalist austerity, which has found expression in an ongoing strike wave that has swept across all economic sectors since late 2021. As he declared further on in his speech, “You deserve a government that has your back and we will fight like hell to make sure that happens.” Carney is experienced only in “serving billionaires, shareholders, and CEOs,” Singh continued, before insisting that he would oppose anyone who says that “the only way to beat Donald Trump is to become more like his version of the United States, where billionaires rule and everyday people pay.”

The leaders of all three federalist parties emphasized that Canada must stand up for itself and seek new allies other than the United States. But to the extent that such assertions prove possible, they would entail a disastrous reduction in working class living standards. The US accounts for some 75 percent of Canadian exports, and the auto and other manufacturing industries have established extensive cross-border ties with the US and Mexico over decades. Reversing this trend to focus on new trading markets or to implement Carney’s proposal to integrate Canadian arms producers more into the European powers’ vast rearmament drive as part of a closer relationship with the European Union would require the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs and result in a dramatic acceleration of inter-imperialist rivalry with the US.

The crisis confronting Canadian imperialism is already exacerbating regional tensions within the ruling class. Danielle Smith, the premier of the western oil-producing Canadian province of Alberta, has threatened a “national unity crisis” within months if a new government fails to meet her province’s demands for unlimited development of its carbon-energy resources, including guaranteed pipeline access to all three of Canada’s coasts.

Meanwhile, the Bloc Québécois, the third largest party in the outgoing parliament, is accusing the other parties and provinces of planning to cut a deal with Trump at the expense of Quebec’s “interests”—by which they mean the interests of the Quebec bourgeoisie. The BQ is the sister party of the separatist Parti Québécois, which advocates on the basis of an explicitly chauvinist and anti-immigrant program for the establishment of an independent capitalist Quebec that would be an integral part of NATO, NORAD and a US-led North American economic bloc.

None of the parties running in the election offer a way forward for workers seeking to fight Trump's threatened annexation of Canada, oppose rearmament and imperialist war, defend their jobs and living conditions, and reject the drive towards authoritarian forms of rule. The urgent task before the working class in Canada is to build the Socialist Equality Party (Canada) as the revolutionary leadership required to unify workers in Canada, the US, Mexico, and internationally in the struggle for the socialist transformation of society.



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