

Emboldened by Trump, Alberta premier threatens “national unity crisis” if demands not met

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Alberta’s far-right United Conservative Party (UCP) premier has issued an ultimatum to the federal government that will take office after Canada’s April 28 national election.

Canada will face an “unprecedented national unity crisis,” warns Danielle Smith, unless the demands of Alberta’s energy barons for full-throttle development of the province’s abundant oil and natural gas resources are implemented within its first six months.

Smith, whose government recently adopted an Alberta “sovereignty” law that flouts the existing federal-provincial constitutional order, has demonstratively rebelled against the federal Liberal government-led “Team Canada” response to US President Donald Trump’s barrage of tariff actions and annexation threats.

Ontario Premier Doug Ford, Quebec’s “nationalist-autonomist” CAQ, the other provincial and territorial governments, the trade unions, the social-democratic NDP, and most of corporate Canada have joined Ottawa in urging all Canadians—irrespective of class divisions and political differences—to “unite” to “defend Canada.” But Smith and her UCP government are manifestly trying to strike their own deal with Trump.

Smith has repeatedly visited Washington and Trump’s Mar a Lago estate to lobby for Canada’s oil and natural gas exports to be exempted from US tariffs. This has included efforts to leverage the many affinities and interconnections between Alberta and Canada’s far right and Trump’s fascistic MAGA (Make America Great Again) movement.

She has spelled out that her government is eager to integrate Alberta’s economy even more fully into a US-led Fortress North America, and to do so in support of Trump’s drive to establish American imperialist global hegemony through trade war and military aggression.

Canada, or to be more specific, Alberta, is currently far and away the most important source of US oil imports, accounting for more than 20 percent of all oil consumed in the US.

In a backhanded admission of the importance of Canadian energy exports for the US economy, Trump limited the import charge on Canadian oil, natural gas, uranium and electricity to 10 percent, when he imposed 25 percent tariffs on all goods from Mexico and Canada.

Trump has subsequently twice “paused” the blanket tariffs on America’s ostensible “free trade” or US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) partners. However, both countries are targeted by other Trump trade actions against auto, steel and aluminum imports, threatening to destroy integrated production chains developed over decades, and by the “reciprocal” tariffs that he is set to impose on all countries this Wednesday. The fascist US president has also continued to advocate for Canada’s transformation into the 51st state, alongside his threats to militarily seize the Panama Canal and Greenland.

Putting Alberta at the service of Trump’s predatory “Energy Domination” strategy

Smith, beginning with her December visit to Mar a Lago, has forthrightly outlined a plan to put Alberta’s massive oil and natural gas reserves at the service of Trump and his avowed goal of achieving “global energy domination.” For Trump, ratcheting up US oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports, expanding its presence in the oil-rich Arctic and achieving its unbridled domination in the Middle East are all elements in a strategy aimed at enriching Wall Street and grasping China and Washington’s other great-power rivals by the throat.

Smith, for her part, is pressing for Trump’s support for massively increasing Alberta’s energy production and its exports to the US. This, she argues, would allow American oil and LNG producers to concentrate on conquering foreign markets. Her ultra-reactionary scheme is predicated on the fact that much of the pipeline and refinery infrastructure needed to implement it already exists, is on the drawing boards or, like the Keystone Pipeline project, partially completed.

Since its formation in 2017, the UCP has advocated a reactionary “Alberta First” agenda. In 2022, Smith seized the Alberta premiership and UCP leadership from Jason Kenney, himself a one-time Stephen Harper attack-dog and notorious right-winger, by mobilizing far-right forces, including anti-vaxxers, climate-change deniers, social conservatives and Alberta and western separatists. Predictably, under her leadership the UCP has become an ever more explicit far-right formation that combines the promotion of reaction with the ruthless enforcement of the interests of big business, above all the oil and gas industry.

The Smith/UCP ultimatum and the spectre it invokes of a “national unity crisis” are an implicit threat that if the Alberta government’s demands are not met it could secede from Canada and appeal for Trump’s support—whether to become an “independent” state as Texas was between 1836 and 1845 or join the United States.

With just under 5 million people, Alberta accounts for about 12 percent of Canada’s population, but more than a quarter of its exports to the US.

Smith issued her ultimatum in the form of a statement posted on social media shortly after she had her first meeting with Mark Carney since he became Liberal Party leader and Canada’s prime minister.

While the UCP-led government railed against Justin Trudeau, Carney is viewed as essentially no better because of his long association, while a central banker and then a senior corporate executive, with efforts to make Canada a leader in “green” capitalism and his support for a carbon emission cap on Canada’s oil and gas sector. Carney has also angered Smith by refusing to pledge that as part of its retaliatory measures against Trump’s tariffs, Ottawa will never impose an export tax on Alberta oil

and gas.

Smith's "Alberta First" ultimatum

The demands in Smith's ultimatum largely reproduce those in a March 18 "Open Letter to the Leaders of Canada's Political Parties" signed by the CEOs of 14 major energy companies, including Imperial Oil, Suncor, Enbridge, Canadian Natural Resources and Cenovus Energy.

"At his request," wrote Smith in her statement, "I met with Prime Minister Mark Carney today. We had a very frank discussion in which I made it clear that Albertans will no longer tolerate the way we've been treated by the federal Liberals over the past 10 years. I provided a specific list of demands the next Prime Minister, regardless of who that is, must address within the first six months of their term to avoid an unprecedented national unity crisis."

The statement went on to list nine specific demands that would gut any and all climate-change measures and facilitate the rapid expansion of oil and gas production. These include: ensuring Alberta can build pipelines to all three coasts in the face of popular opposition; the evisceration of environmental impact regulations governing energy projects; the lifting of the ban on tanker traffic on parts of the West Coast; the elimination of the planned sectoral cap on oil and natural gas industry emissions; and the rescinding of the federal government order that starting in 2035 all new cars must have net-zero carbon emissions.

Smith also took aim at Canada's constitutionally-enshrined equalization system under which Ottawa provides additional transfers to the poorer provinces to ensure that Canadians, wherever they live, have access to equitable levels of public services and social-welfare supports. "Our province," the Alberta Premier declared, "is no longer agreeable to subsidizing other large provinces who are fully capable of funding themselves."

For decades, all levels of governments and all the establishment parties, including the trade union-sponsored NDP, have been slashing social spending so as to funnel ever greater sums into the military and tax cuts and bailouts for big business and the rich. Nevertheless, Alberta's capitalist elite, with the support of the most rapacious factions of the ruling class across Canada, have long pushed for the scrapping of "equalization," as part of their class war assault on all social rights and privatization drive.

Undoubtedly, a factor in Smith's decision to issue her ultimatum was the sudden reversal in the political fortunes of Pierre Poilievre and his Conservative Party. For well over a year, opinion polls had shown the Conservatives poised to sweep to victory in the coming federal election. But Trump's tariffs and annexation threats have changed the dynamic of the electoral contest, enabling the Liberals under their newly-minted leader to turn attention away from their right-wing record, while Poilievre has been damaged by his advocacy of Trump-style policies and Trumpian-type "anti-globalist," "anti-woke," "Canada First" appeals.

Carney has ignored Smith's provocative ultimatum, while Poilievre has called her demands "reasonable." Also voicing support for Smith is the far-right premier of Saskatchewan, Scott Moe, who in 2023 authored a provincial law akin to Alberta's "sovereignty" law—the Saskatchewan First Act. Like neighbouring Alberta, Saskatchewan's economy is highly dependent on the export of energy and other resource products to the US.

Smith has followed up her ultimatum with a vow that she will strike a second Alberta Fair Deal Panel to "listen" to what "Albertans want to do" if the next government fails to heed her demands.

Her predecessor, Kenney, struck an Alberta Fair Deal Panel shortly after the UCP came to power in 2019, with the double aim of pressing for

greater autonomy for Alberta and a greater say for the province in determining national policy. It produced a long list of proposals, some of which the UCP has moved to implement, including holding a referendum to demand the gutting of equalization and exploring withdrawing Albertans from the Canada Pension Plan.

To defeat Trump and the UCP, workers must oppose "Team Canada" and all ruling class factions

Right-wing Alberta governments have long stoked reactionary regionalist sentiment—deploying Alberta First, anti-Quebec, anti-“eastern,” and anti-Ottawa rhetoric to deflect popular anger over economic distress and rally the populace behind the predatory demands of the Alberta-based energy barons.

Smith's "ultimatum," however, is something new. She is clearly seeking to establish a partnership with Trump, independent of Ottawa, and to use his annexation threats to gain leverage over the Alberta capitalist elite's rivals within the imperialist Canadian federal state.

How this will develop in the coming months and years cannot be said with any certainty. However, it is clear that under conditions of a total breakdown of the post-war framework based on a close Canada-US partnership that allowed North America's twin imperialist powers to ruthlessly pursue their global interests—fueled by a systemic crisis of world capitalism—factions of the Canadian ruling elite are ever more aggressively stoking regionalism and even outright separatism to defend their access to global markets and profits. To the extent that an incoming federal government feels compelled to make concessions to Smith and her UCP, this will only embolden other factions of the Canadian ruling class to press their own demands, such as in Quebec, where the separatist Bloc Québécois' election campaign calls for decisions about Quebec to be made exclusively by "Quebecers." All of these factions are bitterly hostile to the working class.

If workers are to defeat Trump, his would-be minion Smith and everything they represent—oligarchy, reaction, authoritarian rule and imperialist war—they must assert their independent class interests in opposition to the union-NDP supported, Carney-Doug Ford led "Team Canada" and all the rival regionally based factions of the ruling class.

Canada's capitalist elite "opposes" Trump only in so far as he threatens their profits and privileges. They are eager to strike a deal with the fascist would-be dictator, if only he would give them a duly recognized place as an imperialist junior partner in a US-led Fortress North America.

Following his discussion with Trump last Friday—his first since becoming prime minister—Carney proudly announced they had agreed that as soon as the elections are concluded, Ottawa and Washington will initiate "comprehensive negotiations" on a "new economic and security" partnership between the US and Canada.

Should those negotiations end in any agreement, it will be at the expense of the working class in North America and around the world, through a strengthened Canada-US military-strategic alliance, massive military spending increases and the evisceration of what remains of public services and regulatory restraints on capital on both sides of the border.

Should they fail and Trump escalate his trade actions and threats against Canada, the ruling class will demand huge "sacrifices" to "save" Canada's "economy and sovereignty"—that is, Trump-style corporate tax cuts, privatization, deregulation and the funneling of society's resources into rearmament.

In either event, the union bureaucrats and NDP politicians will be at their side, waving Canadian flags and in Quebec the *Fleurdelisé* and suppressing the class struggle and enforcing the dictates of big business as

they have for the past four decades.

The only progressive answer to the crisis in Canada-US relations, which is part of a new imperialist drive to repartition the world through trade conflicts and world war, is the development of a working class industrial and political counteroffensive. It would unite workers in Canada with their class brothers and sisters in the US and Mexico in a common struggle to defend the jobs and social rights of all workers, oppose imperialist war and fight for workers' power.



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