

Liberals win Canadian federal election dominated by Trump's threat to annex the country

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29 April 2025

Liberal Party leader and former central banker Mark Carney will continue as Canada's prime minister after his party won Monday's federal election. The Liberals have fallen three seats short of the 172 needed for a parliamentary majority. However, their continued rule is not in doubt due to the support of a much-diminished New Democratic Party (NDP).

Carney will head a vicious right-wing government that will pursue rearmament for imperialist world war, work with the European imperialist powers to ensure the war with Russia in Ukraine continues, and mount brutal attacks on the social and democratic rights of workers at home to bolster the "competitiveness" of Canadian capitalism. His Liberals are pledged to raise military spending to 2 percent of gross domestic product by 2030, although much of the corporate elite and national security establishment are urging a quick move to 3 percent or more. Even the lesser figure will entail huge attacks on social spending to cover the tens of billions in additional defence expenditure needed every single year.

In early January, when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was forced from office, the Liberals were trailing the Conservative official opposition in the polls by more than 20 percentage points. However, on Monday under Carney they won 43.7 percent of the vote, an 11-percentage-point increase from the 2021 election, and 169 seats, up from the 160 they captured four years ago.

The Tories, whose far-right leader Pierre Poilievre failed to win his Ottawa-area riding, also increased their share of the vote. They finished with close to 41.5 percent, an increase of 7.5 percentage points, and 144 seats, a gain of 25. Poilievre's personal fate, as well as the Tories' failure to secure the thumping victory projected only a few months ago, reflects widespread hostility in the working class to the program of oligarchic rule, dictatorship and war represented by Trump and by Poilievre, who is widely viewed among workers and young people as the advocate of a Trump-style program for Canada.

The two main parties gained ground primarily at the expense of the social-democratic NDP and to a lesser extent the Bloc Quebecois. Together, the Canadian ruling class's traditional parties of government secured more than 80 percent of the total vote for the first time since 1958.

The social democrats suffered an historic debacle, hemorrhaging both seats and votes. They captured just seven seats, down from 25 in 2021, a result that was decisive in the Liberal victory, and took just 6.3 percent of the vote, barely a third of their 17.8 percent share in 2021.

NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh resigned on election night after finishing a distant third in his Vancouver-area riding of Burnaby Central. Having failed to win the required minimum of 12 seats, the social democrats will no longer enjoy official party status in the House of Commons.

The election campaign was dominated by US President Donald

Trump's initiation of trade war against Canada, America's supposed "free trade" partner in the USMCA, and his threats to use "economic force" to make Canada the 51st state—a demand he repeated on election day. Carney launched his election campaign by declaring that the vote was about securing Canada's continued existence as an independent state. All of the parties, supported by the trade union bureaucracy and corporate media, have responded by whipping up Canadian nationalism to corral workers behind Canadian imperialism in the trade war with the US. Summing this up, Singh asserted near the beginning of his resignation speech late Monday evening, "Tonight, we're all on Team Canada."

Carney, in his election night victory speech, felt compelled to outline from the standpoint of the interests of Canadian imperialism that the partnership between Ottawa and Washington and the broader post-war capitalist order on which it rested have broken down.

"As I've been warning for months," said Carney, "America wants our land, our resources, our water, our country. These are not idle threats. President Trump is trying to break us so America can own us."

Prior to Monday's vote, both major party leaders had agreed to negotiations with Trump after the election. Remarking on his approach to talks with Trump, Carney declared:

We are once again at one of those hinge moments of history. Our old relationship with the United States, a relationship based on steadily increasing integration, is over. The system of open global trade, anchored by the United States, a system that Canada has relied on since the Second World War, a system that while not perfect has helped deliver prosperity for our country for decades, is over.

He claimed that he would be negotiating an "economic and security relationship between two sovereign nations," before adding that the talks with Trump will be conducted "with our full knowledge that we have many other options than the United States to build prosperity for all Canadians. We will strengthen our relations with reliable partners in Europe, Asia and elsewhere."

For Carney and the ruling class, the task they confront is imposing the cost of the deepest crisis of Canadian and world capitalism since World War II on the backs of the working class. The Liberal prime minister alluded to this when he declared, "We will need to do things previously thought impossible at speeds we haven't seen in generations."

How the unions and NDP helped elect the central banker Carney and the big business Liberals

Substantial sections of workers and youth voted for Carney to express their hostility to Trump, whose drive to establish a presidential dictatorship in the United States, and reorder the global economy and redraw the map of the world in the interests of US imperialism is deeply unpopular. The erroneous belief that, in spite of everything, the big business Liberals will in some way take the interests of working people into account in contrast to the right-wing Tories has been cultivated by the trade unions and NDP for years.

For the past three decades, the NDP and its union backers have trumpeted the line that the only way for workers to fight the right-wing Tories is by supporting “progressive parties,” i.e., the Liberals and NDP, at elections. The trade union bureaucracy’s subordination of the working class to the “left” parties of the capitalist establishment has gone hand-in-hand with their systematic suppression of the class struggle, thereby preventing workers from intervening independently into the political situation by exerting their tremendous social power to beat back the onslaught of corporate Canada on their wages, working conditions, and on the public services upon which they depend.

Since late 2021, Unifor, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), and its member unions have sabotaged one struggle after another by workers in a major strike wave that has swept across the country and all parts of the economy. Last December, as the Trudeau government was imploding with the resignation of Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) ran roughshod over the sentiments of rank-and-file postal workers and forced them to surrender to a patently illegal Liberal government back-to-work order.

The bankruptcy of the strategy of voting “progressive” is laid bare by the NDP’s election result. In the face of a fascist-minded President Trump in the White House itching to take over the country and a Trump-style demagogue at the head of the opposition Tories in Canada, the main beneficiary was a multi-millionaire former central banker and investment executive who has spent his entire adult life catering to the interests of the financial oligarchy.

The Liberals, the Canadian bourgeoisie’s preferred party of government, gained ground at the NDP’s expense, especially in British Columbia and to a lesser extent in Ontario.

What’s more, the systematic smothering of worker opposition to austerity and war by the unions, and the NDP’s complicity in implementing these policies through its support for “progressive” governments, drove some workers into the arms of the far-right Poilievre. Like Trump, Poilievre was able to use a demagogic social appeal to some effect, exploiting workers’ anger at the indifference of the “left” and “liberals”—in the US, the Democrats, and in Canada the NDP-supported Trudeau government—to mounting economic distress.

The Conservatives won seats in traditional manufacturing areas that were previously considered NDP strongholds, like Windsor and Hamilton, Ontario, a development aided by the support of a section of the trade union bureaucracy extended to Poilievre during the election campaign.

The NDP’s collapse is the product of its unstinting support for the pro-war, pro-austerity Liberal government, which was given with the enthusiastic backing of the trade union bureaucracy. Since 2019, the NDP has propped up successive minority Liberal governments in parliament. It kept the Liberals in power as they oversaw the ruling class’s profits-before-lives pandemic policy; massively hiked military spending; played a leading role in the US-NATO instigated war with Russia over Ukraine; backed Israel’s genocide of the Palestinians; oversaw inflation-driven real wage cuts; and “reinterpreted” the labor code to arrogate the power to break strikes by government decree. Just one month after Russia invaded

Ukraine in February 2022, Singh struck a “confidence-and-supply” agreement with Trudeau to keep the Liberals in power until 2025 for the purpose, as Singh himself admitted, of ensuring “political stability.”

Workers must oppose Trump and all rival factions of the Canadian bourgeoisie

Key sections of the bourgeoisie swung behind Carney, promoting him as a tested leader, because they view him as one of their own. He is considered a “safe pair of hands” who could reach a deal with Trump to bring Canada within a Washington-led “Fortress North America,” so long as its role as a junior partner of US imperialism is duly recognized. Despite Trump’s threats, the Canadian ruling class would prefer to revive and retain its more than eight-decade-long military-strategic partnership with Washington to pursue its global imperialist interests. It also considers Carney’s track record as a central banker for the oligarchy as a guarantee that he will impose the cost of the capitalist crisis on the backs of workers, which he has underlined during his brief prime ministership by shifting government policy sharply to the right.

In the less than two months since he took over from Trudeau, Carney has abandoned a proposed capital gains tax hike and pledged in the name of “free trade” between the provinces to abolish numerous labour regulations and other restrictions on business by Canada Day (July 1).

Nonetheless, it is a reflection of Canadian imperialism’s deepening crisis that support for Carney within ruling circles is far from overwhelming. The *Globe and Mail*, the mouthpiece of Bay Street, endorsed Poilievre on the eve of the election as the best instrument for imposing savage austerity and gutting all regulatory restraints on capital. The Conservatives also enjoyed the staunch support of much of Canada’s resource sector, especially Alberta’s oil and gas barons.

The breakup of Canadian imperialism’s traditional alliance with Washington and Trump’s threat to take over Canada have deepened longstanding regional tensions within the ruling class, which found expression in the election and could assume more malignant forms in the coming months. In Alberta and Saskatchewan, where Premiers Danielle Smith and Scott Moe have been critical of the official “Team Canada” response to Trump and pressed for a separate deal with Washington, the Conservatives won close to two-thirds of the popular vote and the Liberals barely more than a quarter.

While the Liberals gained ground from the separatist Bloc Québécois in Quebec, the BQ still secured 22 seats and will return to parliament as the third-largest party. Quebec Premier François Legault and his right-wing Coalition Avenir Quebec government, with which the BQ has declared its affinity even though its formal provincial ally is the opposition nationalist Parti Québécois, has issued strident demands for Quebec’s interests to be recognized in any talks with Trump. Legault has also pushed for the development of new economic ties with the European imperialist powers, especially in the defence and mineral extraction industries.

As these competing and contradictory interests collide, and are exacerbated by the pressure sure to be applied by Washington during negotiations between Trump and Carney, the one certainty is that the ruling class in Canada will seek to offload its crisis onto the backs of the working class. The financial oligarchy wants the evisceration of workers’ democratic and social rights, the abolition of all regulatory restraints on corporate profiteering and environmental protection, the slashing of business taxes, and a massive increase in military spending to secure Canada’s interests in the global redivision of the world that is well underway.

Carney intends to deliver this program in close cooperation with the

Liberals' trade union partners, upon whom they will continue to rely on as they did under Trudeau to strangle opposition in the working class. As Carney put it Monday, he will be focused on "bringing together labour, business, and civil society to advance the nation-building investments we need to transform our economy."

No matter how the conflicts between American and Canadian imperialism and within the regional factions of the Canadian bourgeoisie play out in the immediate period ahead, the working class cannot defend its interests by lining up behind any of them. As the Socialist Equality Party emphasized in its election statement:

Trump is a menace to the workers of Canada and the world. But workers can't fight him and all he represents—oligarchy, dictatorship and imperialist war—by lining up with the Canadian bourgeoisie, any of its rival factions or political representatives.

Rather, they must assert their independent class interests by forging a movement for workers' power and fighting to fuse their struggles with the mass opposition to Trump now emerging within the American working class. Canadian workers must assist their American colleagues in breaking free of the Democratic Party, which no less than Trump's fascist Republicans is a party of Wall Street and the CIA, and its trade union allies.

The cross-border movement must spearhead the struggle for a united socialist North America.



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