

Canada's federal election and the crisis of working class political perspective

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Canada's April 28 federal election was dominated by Trump's global trade war and his vow to use "economic force" to transform Canada into America's 51st state.

After a campaign in which all the parties trumpeted bellicose Canadian nationalism, the Liberals, under their recently-minted leader, the former central banker and blue-chip corporate executive Mark Carney, were able to retain power.

They did so by riding on a wave of popular hostility to the fascist would-be dictator Trump.

Prior to Trump's barrage of trade war measures and annexation threats and the forced resignation of Justin Trudeau as prime minister in early January, the Liberal government was a dead man walking. For well over a year, opinion polls had indicated that the Conservatives under their far-right leader, Pierre Poilievre, would romp to power in the coming election.

But Trump's return to the presidency proved to be Poilievre's undoing. Although the Conservatives gained seats and votes from the 2021 election, above all, by appealing to popular anger over the dramatically rising cost of living, they were decisively repudiated by working people because of their evident affinity for Trump, epitomized by their adoption of "Canada First" as their main campaign slogan and a Trump-like far-right agenda.

Those workers and youth who voted for Carney and his Liberals in the belief that they represent any type of progressive answer to Trump and all that he represents—oligarchy, dictatorship, fascism and war—have been cruelly deceived.

For this the trade unions and the social democratic New Democratic Party (NDP) are principally responsible. They spent the previous five years propping up the minority Trudeau Liberal government, as it implemented the ruling class' profits-before-lives pandemic policy, waged war on Russia, massively hiked military spending, backed the Gaza genocide and illegalized strikes. And the unions and NDP have been the staunchest supporters of Canadian capitalism's Liberal government-led trade war counteroffensive, which targets American workers' jobs and living standards.

The unions and NDP have for decades shackled the working class to capitalist politics and suppressed mass opposition to austerity and war by arguing that they must ally with the big business Liberals to block the coming to power of the

Conservatives, the most open proponents of reaction. Given this, it is hardly surprising that in the face of the threat from Trump, support for the NDP collapsed. Most of the 11 percentage-point surge in Liberal support came at its expense.

The Carney Liberal government will be a government of austerity, rearmament and war, as already indicated by its cribbing of key Conservative policies. In the name of strengthening "Canadian sovereignty" and "economic resilience," it will implement the Trump-like policies that the ruling class is buying for. These include: massive social spending cuts to finance corporate tax cuts and tens of billions of dollars per year in increased defence expenditure; the evisceration of all environmental and other regulatory restraints on capital; and the permanent prohibition of strikes impacting transport, logistics and other critical infrastructure.

Insofar as Carney, Ontario Tory Premier Doug Ford or any of the political representatives of the Canadian ruling class oppose Trump, it is entirely from the standpoint of defending the predatory economic and geopolitical interests of Canadian imperialism.

Far and away the preferred option of the Canadian bourgeoisie is to maintain its longstanding economic and military partnership with US imperialism and secure a duly recognized role as a junior partner of Washington and Wall Street in a Trump-led Fortress North America aimed at securing US global hegemony against China and all comers.

The day after the election, Carney announced he will soon be meeting with Trump toward that end. However, should such negotiations collapse in acrimony, Ottawa—as Carney has already indicated by joining the British, German and French governments in pressing for the continued prosecution of the war on Russia—will seek to secure the Canadian ruling class's mercenary interests by joining with other imperialist powers in aggression and war.

Trump is a menace to the workers of Canada and the world.

However, workers can only oppose him, social counter-revolution and war by opposing the capitalist ruling class, all its political representatives, and Canadian imperialism's federal state, uniting their struggles with those of workers in the US, Mexico and beyond and developing a mass movement for socialism.

The principal obstacle to such a struggle are the trade unions, the NDP and their pseudo-left appendages.

For decades they have suppressed the class struggle, while integrating themselves ever more fully into a corporatist partnership with big business and the state.

From the fall of 2021 through the state suppression of the postal workers' strike last December, workers mounted a major strike wave. But at every point, working in tandem with the NDP-backed Liberal government, the unions isolated and strangled these struggles.

An essential element in this was the blocking, by the union apparatuses on both sides of the Canada-US border, of joint struggles by workers employed by the same companies, as in auto, on the West Coast docks and the railways, even when they were without contracts simultaneously and were confronting similar concession demands.

The political-ideological cement of the labour bureaucracy's corporatist partnership with big business is reactionary Canadian and Quebec nationalism, based on the lie that Canadian capitalism constitutes some type of "progressive," "gentler, kinder" society to the rapacious dollar republic to the south. Thus, even as the ruling class lurches ever further to the right, the union apparatus and NDP are enjoining workers to rally behind it in the trade war in the name of defending "Canadian values."

The unions and NDP justify the backing they have given to the Liberal government's onslaught on workers' rights and living standards and their incessant flag-waving nationalism during the trade war by claiming that these policies will stop the far-right threat of Trump and Poilievre. In fact, they succeeded not just in strengthening Carney, a ruthless representative of the financial oligarchy, but also in driving some workers behind the far-right demagogue Poilievre, who made a cynical social appeal, exploiting workers' anger at the union and NDP-supported Liberal government's responsibility for their economic distress.

The honeymoon of Carney's minority government will prove short-lived. Although it will receive unstinting support from the unions and parliamentary backing from the NDP, the Liberals' program of austerity, imperialist war, and increased military spending, and its imposition of the costs of trade war on workers, will bring it into direct conflict with the working class. Millions of workers who voted for the Liberals believing they were opposing Trump, and no small number of those duped by Poilievre's demagoguery, will rapidly realize that they were sold a bill of goods.

These struggles will emerge alongside the mounting social opposition in the American working class to Trump. It is to this force—the "enemy within" that Trump has labelled the "greatest threat"—to which workers in Canada must turn.

Canada and American workers, as Trump's trade war has so disruptively demonstrated, are exploited by the same giant multinationals and objectively united in the integrated

production of innumerable commodities. They also have powerful traditions of joint struggle, which the unions and pseudo-left have long sought to denigrate and obscure.

As the SEP (Canada) explained in its election statement:

All the major upheavals of the working class in North America—from the Knights of Labor through the sit-down strikes of the 1930s, and the mass social struggles of the 1960s—galvanized support on both sides of the Canada-US border, including among the French-speaking workers of Quebec. The task today is to appropriate the best elements of these traditions and infuse them with a new, higher socialist content.

The same systemic crisis of global capitalism that is driving Trump to erect a fascist dictatorship in the US and redraw the map by seizing Canada, Greenland and the Panama Canal in preparation for war with China is compelling the Canadian imperialist bourgeoisie to resort to no less ruthless methods to intensify worker exploitation and secure its place in the barbarous redivision of the world that is already well underway.

The fight against Trump must be developed as the fight against American and Canadian imperialism, and for the unity of Canadian, American and Mexican workers in the fight for a socialist North America. This means repudiating all efforts to pit workers against each other in trade warfare and divide them along national, ethnic or linguistic lines, like those of the Quebec separatists.

It means coming to the defence of all workers' rights, including the right of immigrant workers to live and work wherever they choose without fear of state persecution. Above all, it means workers must take up the struggle to build the revolutionary leadership on the basis of the socialist and internationalist program demanded by the intractable world capitalist crisis.

The fight for this program will be the central axis of this Saturday's International Online May Day Rally. We urgently appeal to all workers who want to fight imperialist war, the threat of fascist dictatorship and the onslaught on their jobs and conditions to make plans to attend.



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