

King Charles III's Ottawa visit and what it says about the Canadian ruling class' “opposition” to Trump

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Amid great pomp and circumstance, King Charles III—the reigning British monarch who doubles as Canada's head of state—made a two-day visit to Ottawa this week. It culminated Tuesday with his delivering the Throne Speech that opened Canada's 45th Parliament. In Canada's 158 year-history, this was only the third time that the monarch personally presented the Throne Speech, which outlines the government's priorities.

The corporate media, and the political representatives and strategists of Canadian imperialism have touted the King's visit as a diplomatic and political coup in answer to US President Donald Trump's threats to use “economic force” to make Canada America's 51st state.

It “sends a message to people in Canada and the United States about why Canada is separate, why Canada is different,” quipped one expert. The King's “presence was a show of muscle,” a “senior government source” told the *Globe and Mail*, meant to “emphasize Canada's distinctive history and identity as a way of underlining its sovereignty in the face of US aggression.”

In truth, the visit and the regal and Canadian nationalist hoopla that surrounded it were a profession of bankruptcy and testament to the reactionary character of the Canadian ruling class, its state, and nationalist mythology.

To counter the fascist oligarch and would-be dictator Trump and assert Canadian imperialism's “independent identity,” the best that the Canadian bourgeoisie can do is to highlight its ties to, and reverence for, the British monarchy, an institution that embodies hereditary privilege, anti-egalitarianism, hostility to democracy, militarism and Empire.

One moreover that most Canadians, and an overwhelming majority of Quebecers, view with indifference or outright disdain.

Workers in Canada have every reason to oppose Trump and his threats of annexation. But, as the Socialist Equality Party has explained, they can do so only in opposition to the Canadian ruling class, all its regionally-based factions, and political representatives, and by fusing their struggles with those of workers in the US and Mexico in a common offensive for a socialist North America.

In so far as it opposes Trump, the Canadian ruling class does so only from the standpoint of defending its profits and predatory geostrategic interests and to uphold its “sovereign right” to the lion's share of the riches generated through the exploitation of Canada's workers and abundant resources.

The Canadian bourgeoisie is using Trump's barrage of trade war measures and annexationist threats as the political cover for implementing the class war agenda for which it has long been agitating.

Justin Trudeau, who Canadian capital viewed as insufficiently aggressive in pursuing its interests, was summarily dismissed and the Liberal Party, its traditional party of national government, placed under new management, with the ex-central banker and blue-chip corporate

chair Mark Carney placed at the helm.

In this, the trade unions and NDP social democrats have played a critical role. During the just completed election campaign, they promoted Carney and his Liberals as a “progressive” alternative to the Conservatives and their far-right leader Pierre Poilievre. And they have led the din of Canadian nationalist tub-thumping whipped up by the ruling class, while rallying behind “Team Canada”—the Carney-led, government-big business partnership established to plot and implement the bourgeoisie's trade war strategy.

War and reaction

In keeping with the reactionary traditions of monarchy, the speech delivered Tuesday by King Charles, of which all but a few introductory remarks were scripted by the government, signaled a further sharp shift right. It pledged to slash social spending and enforce “fiscal responsibility,” while “rebuilding, rearming, and reinvesting in the Canadian Armed Forces” and strengthening Canada's military capabilities in the Arctic. The government also vowed to preside over “the largest transformation” of Canada's economy “since the Second World”—a euphemism for intensified worker exploitation and the rapid implementation of environmentally destructive resource extraction projects.

In a veiled admission that a new frenzied drive of the imperialist powers to redivide the world through trade and shooting wars is underway, the speech declared the world to be “a more dangerous and uncertain place than at any point since the Second World War,” and referenced key battles from the world wars of the last century, in which Canada fought as one of the imperialist protagonists.

Even as the ruling class revels in its ties to the British monarchy and decries Trump's actions targeting Canada, its preference and primary objective is to secure for Canadian imperialism the status of a duly recognized junior partner in a Trump-led Fortress North America.

Negotiating “a new economic and security relationship between Canada and the United States” is at the very top of the Carney Liberal government's agenda. To underline this, the government made it the very first policy commitment in Tuesday's Throne Speech.

While the substance of these negotiations remain shrouded in secrecy, Carney last week talked up Canada's possible participation in Trump's “golden dome”—a scheme for a continental anti-ballistic shield aimed at giving US imperialism the capability to wage a “winnable” nuclear war.

The King's visit and the disgusting celebration of aristocracy and

wealth that surrounded it were not just an assertion of “Canadian identity.” They were also carefully choreographed as part of Ottawa’s efforts to woo Trump. King Charles and Queen Camilla adorned themselves with dress and jewellery that were in some way meant to convey their connection to Canada, and both spoke of their affection for their Canadian realm. Never, however, did they breathe the word “Trump,” let alone explicitly oppose his ambition to annex Canada. “The signal intended, I think is quite brilliant,” gushed former Canadian diplomat Colin Robertson, “Donald Trump, we know, loves the royals. He’d like to be King himself.”

At the same time, with a view to both asserting Canadian imperialism’s capacity to pursue its own interests and gaining leverage for redefining its relations with Washington and Wall Street, the Carney government committed to pursuing closer relations with the European imperialist powers, and others including Japan and Australia. The crux of Canada’s expanding partnership with Britain, the European Union and its leading powers, Germany and France, is their common determination to continue the war with Russia and build up their independent military capacities; and their opposition to Trump’s aggressive America First agenda, which has destabilized NATO and blown-up the world economic order, threatening their respective imperialist interests. The Throne Speech announced that the government “will boost Canada’s defence industry by joining ReArm Europe,” the EU’s trillion dollar initiative to rapidly procure the military means to act independently and, if need be against, the US.

Tensions with Britain over the monarch’s role

The King’s visit has been proclaimed by the media—which led by the state broadcaster CBC accorded it fawning, saturation coverage—a triumph that supposedly spoke to the “gravitas” of the moment.

What a pitiful and reactionary delusion, rendered all the more so by the fact that 2025 marks exactly 250 years since the thirteen colonies rose up in rebellion and ultimately revolution against the autocratic rule of King George III. In his great revolutionary tract *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine refuted the monarchical principle, with verve and wit, almost two-and-a-half centuries ago, declaring, “One of the strongest NATURAL proofs of the folly of hereditary right in kings, is, that nature disapproves it, otherwise she would not so frequently turn it into ridicule by giving mankind an ASS FOR A LION.”

In the weeks preceding King Charles III’s visit, there was much gnashing of the teeth as to whether the monarch could be prevailed upon to come to the defence of his Canadian kingdom, due to countervailing pressures from Britain’s Keir Starmer-led Labour government.

It had beaten Ottawa to the punch in playing the royal card. When Starmer met with Trump in the White House in February, he brought with him a hand-written letter from King Charles inviting the US president for a state visit. While never officially acknowledged, the British government clearly leaned on the monarch not to disrupt this ploy by doing anything that challenged Trump’s attacks on Canada.

This caused much consternation in Ottawa and within the ruling class, because it underscored Canadian imperialism’s isolation under conditions of a resurgence of inter-imperialist conflict, but also because it threatened to undermine what little legitimacy the Crown has with the broader public.

As one of his last official acts, former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was hastily dispatched to the King’s Sandringham estate on March 4 to plead with Charles to show support for “Canadian sovereignty.” A royal historian noted the differing interests of Canadian and British imperialism in the person of the King; “Prime Minister Trudeau is focused on the

threat to sovereignty, whereas Prime Minister Starmer is trying to keep a harmonious trade relationship with the United States.”

In the weeks that followed, official Ottawa and its media hacks searched in the tea leaves and coffee-ground patterns to see if the King was showing support for his beleaguered Canadian kingdom. Did the King’s donation of a ceremonial sword to Canada’s Usher of the Black Rod at London’s Canada House signify support? What about the signs transmitted by the various Canadian military medals which Charles sported on his chest? What signals were *they* sending? Was the wearing of a bright red coat and a string of enormous white pearls by the Princess of Wales to celebrate Commonwealth Day on March 11 a sign that the Royals were “donning Canada’s colours” as claimed by Canada’s High Commissioner to the UK, long-time Ottawa political operator Ralph Goodale?

All of this speaks to the venal and cloying character of Canada’s ruling class. But most importantly of all, to the extent to which it is ever more socially and politically isolated from the mass of the population—a phenomenon that is one of the hallmarks of a pre-revolutionary period.

The role of the Crown in upholding capitalist rule

That said, the Crown is not an incidental or ornamental part of Canada’s constitution and political order. The Crown stands at the apex of the state and it has been kept in place by the bourgeoisie, long after the sun set on the British Empire and Canada forged a close military-security partnership with Washington, for very definite, indeed fundamental, class reasons.

The Crown possesses vast, essentially unlimited “reserve powers” under Canada’s constitution. They are seldom used, but they permit the ruling class, acting through its state machine, to override democratic norms and, if need be, over the heads of the elected government and parliament in a period of extreme crisis.

These powers, once used only with great reluctance, lest their frequent deployment expose the true class nature of the state, have been increasingly resorted to as the crisis of world capitalism has escalated. In 2008, amid the world financial crisis, Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper instructed the monarch’s representative in Canada, the Governor General, to prorogue—that is shut down—parliament for close to two months to prevent his minority government from being toppled by the opposition parties in a vote of non-confidence.

We noted at the time, “The traditional bourgeois-democratic framework is breaking-down. This is due, on the one hand, to the intensity of disputes within the ruling class over how Canadian capitalism can retain its world position under conditions of mounting global trade and geo-political rivalries, and, on the other, to its inability to develop a large, stable base of popular support for its program of social reaction and militarism and its fear of an eruption of the class struggle.”

Eighteen years later, the processes identified by the *World Socialist Web Site* are now far advanced. Prorogation has become just one more tool in the kit of an executive, comprised of the Crown, cabinet and Prime Minister’s Office, which has accumulated nearly unchecked power, as seen by its increasing reliance on secret “Orders in Council” and even secret re-interpretations of the law. The latter arbitrary executive power was used by the government to enable its invocation of emergency powers to disband the 2022 fascist-instigated “Freedom Convoy,” with the “legal justification” subsequently hidden even from the judicial commission legally mandated under the Public Emergencies Act to review the government’s suspension of civil liberties. Similarly, the Liberal government has used a patently illegal, cooked-up “reinterpretation” of the Canada Labour Code to repeatedly criminalize strikes over the past

nine months, including by Canada Post, railway and port workers.

In Canada, as in all the imperialist powers, the bourgeoisie is turning to authoritarian forms of rule and promoting the resurgence and entry into government of far-right and fascist forces. This process finds its sharpest expression in Trump's drive to erect a presidential dictatorship but it is a universal process, as the ruling class is compelled to bring its political structures into conformity with the oligarchical character of contemporary capitalist society and the imperialist imperative to secure control over resources, production networks and strategic territories through aggression and war.

With this week's nauseating celebration of monarchy and ostentatious privilege and wealth, the ruling class is more and more dropping its democratic mask. Writing in the *National Post*, columnist Carson Jerema enthused over the fact that "in Canada, political authority is not constitutionally derived from the people. By convention, governments are appointed by the Crown (through the Governor General) based on their ability to command the confidence of the elected House of Commons.... But a typical prime minister, instead, views their legitimacy incorrectly as inherent, rather than coming from their role as the Crown's primary advisor."

"Left" Canadian nationalism and the struggle for the political independence of the working class

Among those who attended Tuesday's Throne Speech and celebration of King Charles III were the NDP parliamentarians, Unifor President Lana Payne, Senator and former Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) President Hassan Yussuff, and his successor and the current head of the country's principal labour federation, Bea Bruske.

For decades, the labour bureaucrats and the "left-liberal" organizations of the upper middle class have promoted the lie that Canadian capitalism and its state are a "progressive" alternative to the rapacious dollar republic to the south. This "left nationalism" has served as the political-ideological spearhead of their efforts to suppress the class struggle and subordinate the working class to the parties and institution of Canadian capitalism.

Traditionally, and very much in keeping with the origins of the Canadian bourgeoisie, which consolidated its control over the northern tier of North America in partnership with the British Empire and through the violent dispossession of the indigenous peoples, the main strands of Canadian and French Canadian/Quebec nationalism were explicitly right-wing. They rejected the United States as too democratic and too egalitarian, while celebrating Canada and Quebec respectively as British North America and the spiritual centre of Catholicism in North America.

Only in the 1960s, and very much in response to a growing insurgent movement in the working class, were Canada and Québécois nationalism reformulated, with the assistance of the Stalinists and Pabloite renegades from Trotskyism, and given a progressive gloss.

The working class will quickly come into headlong conflict with the Carney Liberal government and do so as mass struggles erupt across the border against Trump's drive to eviscerate social and democratic rights.

As the SEP noted in its statement on the April 28 federal election, "Oppose austerity, imperialist war, Trump and 'Team Canada'! Unite Canadian, US and Mexican workers in the fight for a workers' North America!"

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.

As Trump's trade war has so disruptively demonstrated, Canadian, American, and Mexican workers are exploited by the same giant multinationals and are involved in the integrated production of numerous commodities, from cars to food stuffs. Alongside the SEP US and our co-thinkers in the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the SEP fights for the objective unity of North American workers to become a conscious revolutionary strategy. To Fortress North America, and the predatory ambitions of American and Canadian imperialism, whether as partners or cut-throat rivals, we counterpose the mobilization of the working class in the struggle for workers' governments in a united socialist North America, as an integral part of a world socialist federation.

This perspective, based on the common class interests of workers around the world, is the only viable answer to capitalist breakdown. Every issue confronting humanity, from war to climate catastrophe, pandemics and the bourgeoisie's revival of fascism, is global in scope, and can only be addressed through a united movement of the international working class to put an end to capitalism.



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