

Canada's Carney government attacks basic democratic rights as it seeks deal with America's would-be dictator Trump

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Canada's federal government under former Goldman Sachs executive and Bank of England governor Mark Carney is pushing forward with two bills containing sweeping attacks on democratic rights and immigrants. Elected on a wave of popular revulsion to the fascist spectacle of Trump's first three months in office, Carney has repudiated the cynical pose of opposition to Trump he struck for the cameras during the campaign.

Groveling before the aspiring fascist dictator in the Oval Office earlier this month, Carney praised Trump as a "transformative president." A similar "transformation" of Canadian social relations is underway—from bourgeois democracy to authoritarian police state.

The Carney government's first substantive piece of legislation after April's election was the so-called "Strong Borders Act" Bill C-2, an omnibus bill amending multiple existing laws. The bill combines a sweeping power grab for the police, spy agencies and Cabinet together with a full-frontal attack on immigrants and refugees. Since its introduction in June, the bill has provoked widespread opposition, with multiple campaigns for its repeal from initiated by the Migrant Rights Network, Green Peace and other refugee-support, civil rights and internet privacy groups.

The government has been forced to change tack due to the posturing by the opposition Conservatives and New Democrats as opponents of Bill C-2, at least in its current form. On October 8, Public Safety Minister Gary Anandasangaree tabled a new bill, C-12, containing only the attacks on the rights of refugee-claimants and immigrants, with the aim of adopting them as quickly as possible. Underscoring that the Liberals still intend to implement the new spying and police powers, they left the remainder of Bill C-2 on the legislative agenda. On October 11, he declared that the police spying measures would not be abandoned but rather introduced separately, after being "refined" to eliminate "overreach."

The Carney government proposes to give the police and Canadian spy agencies sweeping powers to eavesdrop on private communications, forcibly enlist doctors, accountants and other providers of "services" as state informants, and force postal workers to open private mail—all without a warrant. In a series of attacks on the rights of immigrants and refugees, it creates the legal basis for a regime of mass deportation.

There is no mass support for any of these measures. The government did not win an election on attacking immigrant rights or on expanded police powers, nor could it have. They won an election by posturing as opponents of the man whose playbook they are moving to adopt ever more completely: Donald Trump.

The legislation cannot be understood apart from the deepening inter-imperialist competition between Canada and the United States, the escalating crisis of world capitalism, and the Canadian bourgeoisie's effort to accommodate itself to the fascist in the White House. The Trump regime has whipped up hysteria about the supposed "insecurity" of the Canada-US border, advancing its fraudulent claims that fentanyl and "illegal migrants" are flowing from Canada to the USA in order to justify after the fact its decision to impose tariffs on Canadian goods. Bill C-2 was ostensibly introduced in order to appease these entirely concocted "concerns" and assist the government's ongoing efforts to negotiate tariff-free access to US markets for Canadian business.

At the same time, the Canadian ruling class, like its US counterpart, recognizes that the greatest threat to its interests comes from below—from the working class entering into mass revolutionary struggle against moribund capitalism—which is why it is determined to strengthen the powers of state repression.

Workers must be repressed in any event in order to transfer hundreds of billions of dollars from social spending to war and "infrastructure investments" under Carney's upcoming fall budget. In a televised address to the nation Wednesday evening, Prime Minister Carney made clear it would include crushing social austerity to fund corporate handouts and massive increases in military expenditures to prepare for world war. As in the United States, Canada's ruling class is seeking to pre-empt the inevitable wave of working class opposition with state repression.

Already the Liberal government has moved to effectively abolish the right to strike, using a newly concocted "reinterpretation" of Section 107 of the Canada Labour Code, to legalize strikes by railway, port, and Canada Post workers; and the Quebec government has followed suit, imposing draconian limits on the right to strike in the country's second-most-populous province.

But the Carney government knows that it must proceed by degrees. As in the United States, the weakest and most vulnerable sections of the working class will be attacked first. And the most vulnerable sections of the working class include immigrants and refugees.

Bill C-12 contains multiple provisions attacking refugee and immigrant rights. It:

- Significantly limits who can claim refugee status in Canada, including barring refugee claims from anyone who failed to make a claim for refugee status in Canada within one year of their first arrival, retroactive to 2020.

- Further restricts the ability of refugees fleeing to Canada from

third countries via the United States to claim refugee status in Canada.

- Requires refugees to claim refugee status upon their first entry to Canada, denying all claims to anyone who had previously entered Canada, for any purpose.

- Grants sweeping power to the Minister of Immigration to cancel individual refugee claims, and to cancel claims en masse, based on criteria such as country of origin or political affiliation.

Major attacks on privacy and democratic right in Bill C-2 include provisions that would:

- Authorize law enforcement, including Canada Border Services Agency officers, prison guards and “special constables,” to make warrantless demands for information about surveillance targets from the providers of digital services, including cell phone companies, internet service providers and social media providers.

- Empower state authorities to order Canada Post workers to open private mail without obtaining a warrant.

- Grant CSIS, Canada’s domestic spy agency, and other national security and police agencies warrantless access to the data of individuals, based merely on suspicion that a “law passed by Parliament” had been breached. According to the *Globe & Mail*, “Police could reach out to doctors, abortion clinics, hotels, rental car companies and other entities and service providers,” who would be obligated to inform on patients and clients, under gag orders not to reveal their informant activities. Those who refuse to collaborate could face stiff penalties or prison.

This sweeping power grab aroused an enormous amount of opposition, of both a principled and opportunistic variety.

The Migrant Rights Network correctly objected that the measures directed against refugees would make the Canadian government complicit in the Trump regime’s witch hunt of immigrants and refugees. “Previously,” they explain, “migrants crossing from the US between official ports could apply for refugee status after 14 days. Bill C-12 removes this completely, trapping vulnerable people under Trump’s xenophobic policies. The sweeping powers granted to the Minister of Immigration to deny refugee and permanent residency claims create the legal basis for Canada to engage in the kind of mass deportations and grotesque abuses of human rights that are ongoing in the United States.”

These powers could also conceivably be used to reject political refugees fleeing the savage campaign of state repression which is developing in the United States. Donald Trump has signed a document called “NSPM-7” (National Security Presidential Memorandum) which criminalizes opposition to fascism and designates opposition to capitalism and Christianity as thought-crimes. The journalist Ken Klippenstein has revealed that the FBI is “drawing up lists” of people to be targeted for repression under NSPM-7. It is entirely possible that political opponents of a fascist crackdown by the Trump regime could flee to Canada, as did tens thousands of draft resisters and other American opponents of the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s. The Carney government would be collaborators in their repression.

Internet privacy advocates have pointed out that government’s new requirement that internet service providers and social media outlets create “digital back doors” so as to allow the state rapid access to private subscriber information would leave Canadian workers vulnerable to cyber-crime, including identity theft, fraud, harassment and blackmail. CSIS is already permitted to grant access to information they obtain to the spying agencies of the United States, Britain, Australia and New Zealand, under the so-called “Five Eyes” spy treaty.

These spying measures, for which CSIS and the police have long campaigned, have nothing to do with the government’s latest proffered justification of “border security.” University of Ottawa professor Michael Geist opined to the CBC that the spying powers contained in the bill constitute an effort to “sneak” old provisions from failed legislation into this bill—“about which there’s very little to do with lawful access.”

Geist’s comment points towards the entirely unprincipled nature of the objections to these new spying measures on the part of Canada’s parliamentary opposition. The Liberal’s power-grab has given the Conservatives the stage to pose—entirely fraudulently—as champions of civil rights and privacy. Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre cynically declared, “We don’t think that law-abiding Canadians should lose their liberty to pay for the failures of the Liberals on borders and immigration.”

The previous Conservative government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper attempted and failed to pass similar spying measures in 2014, on the fraudulent basis that civil rights stood in the way of stopping child pornography. Poilievre voted for those powers.

Further, Poilievre is perfectly content if immigrants should lose their liberty. His Conservatives have been whipping up xenophobia against immigrants and refugees, especially Muslims, equating opposition to Israel’s genocide in Gaza with “terrorism.” Conservative MP Michelle Rempel-Garner is campaigning to revoke birthright citizenship, in a further attempt to align Canadian policies with those of the fascist Trump regime.

In April’s election, the Conservatives’ defeat, which included Poilievre’s loss of his own parliamentary seat, was bound up with the widespread recognition that the Tories shared Trump’s far-right politics. This includes his warmongering, drive to establish authoritarian forms of rule, and commitment to savage attacks on the working class.

The NDP’s posturing against Bill C-2 is no more credible. This is a party that propped up the Liberals in parliament for six years as they enforced a massive rearmament program, slashed public spending, and undermined democratic rights. The NDP is sponsored by the trade union bureaucracy, which demonstrates in every workers’ struggle its bitter hostility to the democratic and social rights of workers by imposing concessions and riding roughshod over widespread support for a fight against capitalist austerity and war.

The Liberal government campaign for vast police powers and against refugees demonstrates that there is no political constituency within the Canadian ruling class for basic democratic rights. As in the United States and in every other country, the only social force which can turn back the tide of reaction and authoritarianism in Canada is the working class, united in struggle with workers in the United States, Mexico and other countries on the basis of a socialist program.



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