

# Canadian unions mute as working-class opposition to Trump and his operation dictatorship surges

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Recent weeks have seen the emergence of a movement for a general strike in response to the ICE occupation of Minneapolis, the state murders of Renée Nicole Good and Alex Pretti, and, more broadly, Trump's drive to establish a presidential dictatorship.

These developments have profound significance for the class struggle in Canada, where the ruling class has exploited Trump's barrage of tariffs and threats to annex Canada to dramatically intensify their assault on workers' social and democratic rights.

The Liberal government has torn page after page from the policy prescriptions of Trump and far-right Conservative opposition leader Pierre Poilievre. Reorganized and repurposed under the former central banker and blue-chip executive Mark Carney, it has initiated a new austerity drive, slashing public services and tens of thousands of federal jobs, massively increased military spending, and all but eliminated the right to strike.

All the while, the trade unions and the union-sponsored New Democratic Party have provided the Carney Liberal government and ruling class essential political cover and support. In the name of "defending Canada" and "Canadian jobs," they have rallied behind the ruling class's "Team Canada" response to Trump's drive to strengthen the global position of US imperialism through aggression, trade war and military conflict.

Workers' struggles, above all those that directly challenge the Carney government, like those of Air Canada flight attendants and postal workers have been run into the ground. And with the unions' full support, the NDP has helped secure the minority Liberal government's survival in parliament, including passage of its budget.

In its "Team Canada" propaganda, the union bureaucracy claims to be the fiercest opponent of Trump.

Yet it has responded to the growth of mass working-class opposition to the would-be dictator president with either total silence or by issuing hollow, utterly meaningless statements of solidarity with the people of Minneapolis.

This is because the union bureaucracy "opposes" Trump from the standpoint of Canadian capital, not the working class.

Trump is a menace to the workers of the world. But workers in Canada cannot oppose him and all he represents—oligarchy, dictatorship, and war—by aligning with the Canadian ruling class or any of its squabbling, regionally-based factions.

In so far as they oppose Trump, the Canadian ruling class does so solely from the standpoint of defending its profits and privileges, beginning with first claim on the wealth derived from the exploitation of Canada's workers and abundant natural resources. Carney, Ontario

Premier Doug Ford and other political representatives of corporate Canada have made clear they would like nothing more than to reinvigorate the eight-decade-old Canada-US economic and military-security partnership. All that they ask is that Washington recognize Canadian imperialism's prerogatives as a junior partner in the exploitation of the Americas and the world.

The unions are ever so militant in agitating for "elbows up" when it comes to imposing tariffs and other trade war measures, the burden of which falls principally on workers on both sides of the border in the form of job cuts and price increases.

It is quite another matter when it comes to a working-class challenge to Trump.

Most of Canada's unions and labour federations failed to issue so much as a press release condemning the Trump administration's campaign of terror and intimidation in Minneapolis and welcoming the growing popular opposition.

Those that did failed to warn that Trump's mass deployments of ICE agents and National Guard troops to American cities are a key element in an ongoing operation to overturn all democratic-constitutional norms and erect a presidential dictatorship to enforce the American ruling oligarchy's program of global hegemony and social counterrevolution at home.

All were silent on the movement initiated from below, outside the trade union apparatuses, for a general strike.

After the killing of Good, Canadian Labour Congress President Bea Bruske posted a brief message on X expressing "outrage" while making no call for workers to take any action in support of the burgeoning mass opposition to Trump. In fact she did not even name Trump. Neither she nor the CLC said anything about the subsequent murder of Pretti, a nurse and union member.

The response of Unifor President Lana Payne, who like Bruske is a leading proponent of "Team Canada" and sits on the Prime Minister's Advisory Council on Canada-US relations, followed the same pattern. Rather than issuing an official statement or any appeal for solidarity action by Unifor's 320,000 members, Payne reposted a video of the January 23 protest, a statement by a US technology executive and a protest song by Bruce Springsteen.

There were no official responses from the Canadian sections of the United Steelworkers, Teamsters, United Food and Commercial Workers or Communications Workers of America—unions that purportedly exist to unite workers in Canada and the US.

Nor did the more than 700,000-member Canadian Union of Public Employees, the Public Service Alliance of Canada, or the Canadian

Union of Postal Workers make any comment on the events or the broader growth of working-class militancy south of the border. This includes weeks long strikes by 15,000 nurses in New York City and 31,000 Kaiser Permanente health care workers in California.

The Ontario Federation of Labour issued one of the few formal responses. Its statement endorsing the January 23 protest urged workers in Canada to wear purple, share social media graphics and donate to legal funds. While describing the situation in Minnesota as an “emergency with national consequences,” it avoided any call for workplace meetings to discuss the implication of the events there or make any call for collective resistance.

This posture is consistent with the OFL’s record. President Laura Walton rose to her current position after suppressing a developing general strike movement in Ontario in 2022, when education support workers defied a savage antistrike law imposed by the Ford government. Walton, who then headed the CUPE-affiliated Ontario School Boards Council of Unions, worked with the CLC, OFL, Unifor and national CUPE leadership to shut down the rebellion. Workers were forced back to work without any vote or say and with none of their demands having been met.

Walton, who is promoted by the pseudo-left as representative of a “new breed of militant labour leader,” appeared on a Zoom call with the head of the Minnesota AFL-CIO on January 22. In doing so, she was not solidarizing herself and the OFL with the burgeoning movement for a one-day general strike, but rather assisting the efforts of her fellow bureaucrats to suppress it.

The call for a general strike came from workers and young people mobilizing against the state-orchestrated violence by Trump’s fascist thugs in Minneapolis. The union bureaucracies intervened to smother this impulse for a broader mass movement against Trump and turn it into a harmless one-day protest. In the days preceding January 23, the Minnesota AFL-CIO and its major affiliates came out against a general strike, claiming it would violate workers’ collective agreements. They worked systematically to transform the planned worker action into a protest carried out hand-in-hand with employers and tied to the Democratic Party, a party of Wall Street and the CIA no less than Trump’s Republicans.

Statements from the National Union of Public and General Employees and the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions denounced the killings of Good and Pretti. They invoked nurses’ “duty of care,” while confining their response to vigils and appeals to the US Congress to implement reform.

The silence of the Quebec-based labour organizations was especially deafening. The FTQ, CSN, CSQ and CSD issued no statements either condemning the ICE killings or supporting the mass anti-Trump protests. This is in keeping with their longstanding efforts to quarantine the struggles of Quebec workers and limit their political horizons to the province, so as to derail mounting social opposition and uphold the political-ideological domination of the ruling class.

When more than 50,000 workers joined a mass demonstration last November 29 in Montreal, ostensibly called to defend workers’ rights, union leaders made no reference to the Carney government’s assault on the right to strike or to any developments beyond Quebec’s borders. In the run up to the provincial election to be held this fall, the Quebec union bureaucracy is reviving its longstanding close ties to the Parti Québécois—a big business party that has evolved in a far-right direction. The PQ competes with the ruling CAQ in anti-immigrant incitement and is courting Trump to support its plan for an independent capitalist Quebec.

The union bureaucracy is hostile to the development of a movement of the working class uniting workers across the Canada-US border.

For decades the union bureaucracy, NDP and the pseudo-left have promoted the lie that the Canadian state is more “progressive” and represents a “kinder, gentler” form of capitalism than that which prevails in the United States, and denigrated the American working class as hopelessly reactionary. The initial signs of a mass movement in the American working class are exploding these myths used by union leaders and the official “left” to keep workers politically tied to the Canadian ruling class.

A privileged caste of functionaries that systematically suppresses working class resistance and diverts it into establishment politics, the bureaucrats who staff the CLC, Unifor and Quebec unions fear the eruption of mass working class opposition to Trump and his operation dictatorship, and this for multiple reasons. Developing in the face of government repression and illegality, it will objectively be driven toward an unlimited general strike, posing the question of what class rules and the need to develop independent working-class political power. Moreover, such a movement will galvanize and radicalize working-class opposition in Canada, as workers confront the combined threat of Trump and the Canadian ruling class. Ottawa is determined to strengthen its position against Washington and secure its share of the spoils in the imperialist drive to repartition the world by escalating class war at home.

There is an indelible tradition of joint struggles uniting Canadian and American workers, from the emergence of the Knights of Labor and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to the formation of the United Auto Workers during the Great Depression and the mass social struggles of the 1960s and 1970s. Today, the conditions have emerged for class-conscious workers to revive these traditions and place them on a higher level, through the infusion of a socialist and internationalist program.

The popular response to the murders of Good and Pretti in Minneapolis show that a mass movement is beginning to develop against dictatorship in the United States. Canadian workers must consciously orient to this struggle, rejecting the nationalist poison of “Team Canada” and the Quebec nationalism promoted by the Quebec union bureaucracy. They must fight to fuse their struggles with those of their class brothers and sisters across the border.

This requires a break with the union bureaucracy and the building of independent rank-and-file committees, linked across industries and borders through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. Only through such a unified international struggle can workers oppose Trump, Carney, dictatorship, war and austerity, and put an end to crisis-ridden capitalism.



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