

# Canada's NDP and trade unions posture as opponents of the US-Israeli war on Iran

**Our Reporters**  
**18 March 2026**

Canada's social-democratic New Democratic Party (NDP) and the party's sponsors in the trade union bureaucracy have "condemned" American imperialism's criminal war of extermination against Iran.

Their opposition is aimed, however, at preventing, not mobilizing working class opposition to imperialist war and Canadian rearmament. It articulates the interests of Canadian imperialism, which is seeking to advance its own "independent" predatory interests amid the ever more violent imperialist struggle to redivide the world; and is aimed at politically neutering the widespread hostility to the war within the working class.

A poll conducted by Ipsos in early March revealed that 61 percent of Canadians oppose the US/Israeli war on Iran and 66 percent worry about Canada being dragged into the conflict. Only 23 percent of respondents said they approved of the war. Protests against the war have taken place in major cities, including a demonstration of several thousand in Toronto last Saturday to mark Al-Quds Day—a protest held in the face of a failed attempt by the provincial Tory government to ban it.

Within hours of the beginning of the air bombardment February 28, the NDP's foreign affairs critic, Alexandre Boulerice, declared in a statement,

The NDP strongly condemns the American and Israeli bombings of Iran. This is a dangerous escalation that risks dragging the entire region into a major conflict. The oppressive and bloody regime of the Ayatollahs is reprehensible, but its nuclear program must be managed through the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)...

The NDP deplores the Carney government's decision to blindly support this dangerous venture by Israel and Donald Trump's administration. We want Canada to be a voice for diplomacy, peace, and international law.

The NDP must take workers for fools. The statement made no reference to the fact that the Trump administration and Israel's far-right Netanyahu government used "diplomacy" as a cover to prepare their criminal assault on Iran. Bombs began raining down on Tehran less than 48 hours after US and Iranian negotiators met in Geneva for a third round of talks. One could just as well call on the mafia to "negotiate" with a target on their hit list.

The NDP obviously thinks that workers have no memory when it claims that Canada can be a "voice for peace, diplomacy, and international law." For more than three decades, Ottawa has participated in a series of US-led wars of aggression around the world—all of which the NDP has backed—because they have served Ottawa's own predatory imperialist interests. Canadian imperialism is a major player in the ongoing NATO war on Russia in Ukraine, which aims to inflict a military defeat on Russia and subordinate the huge country to a semi-colonial status. The NDP, it

should be added, has supported the tens of billions of dollars in military and financial support that successive Liberal governments have funneled to the far-right regime in Kiev, which ruthlessly suppresses the Ukrainian population through the enforcement of martial law. Bogdan Syrotiuk, a socialist opponent of the war who advocates the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers against all the belligerents, has been confined to a Ukrainian prison cell for close to two years without any member of the Canadian establishment breathing a word of protest. So much for Canada's special credentials to have a "voice for diplomacy, peace and international law"!

During a non-voting "take-note" parliamentary debate on hostilities in Iran and the Middle East March 9, NDP interim leader Don Davies condemned the US-Israel assault as a "patently unlawful act of aggression" and warned that it had already triggered "a rapidly escalating conflict with massive damage and the loss of innocent lives."

Davies denounced the United States and Israel for prosecuting the war with "appalling brutality and disregard for international humanitarian law." He noted the attacks had deliberately targeted civilian infrastructure, including a girls' elementary school, hospitals, desalination plants, oil refineries and historic cultural sites. Such actions, he declared bluntly, "are war crimes."

This is all true enough, but it only begs the question as to when the NDP suddenly discovered its concern for international law and the slaughtering of civilians? Over the past two-and-a-half years, it has propped up the Liberal government, first under Justin Trudeau and now Prime Minister Mark Carney, as it gave full-throated support to Israel's imperialist-backed genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza, during which the Zionist regime has laid waste to the enclave and massacred well over 75,000 people. The NDP has participated in the witch-hunting of anti-genocide protesters as antisemites and expelled Sara Jama from its Ontario caucus for condemning the assault on Gaza and expressing support for the national rights of the Palestinian people.

In fact, the NDP has endorsed every major war in which Canadian imperialism has participated over the past thirty years. The social democrats have been propping up the warmongering Liberals since 2019. During these past seven years, Liberal governments under Trudeau and now Carney have imposed the biggest rearmament program in Canada since World War II and fueled the US/NATO war on Russia with billions of dollars and weapons shipments. The war has turned into a meat-grinder, claiming the lives of hundreds of thousands of young Ukrainians. Yet the NDP supports Canada's participation in the "Coalition of the willing," put together by the European imperialist powers to ensure the war continues and that Trump and Putin don't reach a "peace agreement" at the expense of the other NATO powers.

This record makes clear that the NDP's "opposition" to the war against Iran has nothing to do with a principled rejection of the destruction of an historically oppressed country by an imperialist power, and everything to do with the interests of Canadian imperialism. The party's posture comes

less than two months after it wholeheartedly endorsed Carney's speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, where the Prime Minister proposed a coalition of "middle powers" to advance Canadian imperialist interests. Underscoring the predatory character of such an alliance, Carney declared that it was necessary for Ottawa to be "at the table" of imperialist geopolitics in order not to end up "on the menu." His speech went hand in hand with his plan to spend 5 percent of Canada's GDP on the military by 2035 and efforts to join the European imperialists' massive rearmament program.

Adopting Trump's war propaganda, Carney declared within hours of the US and Israel launching their illegal, unprovoked attack on Iran that Canada "supports efforts to prevent" Tehran gaining nuclear weapons and to compel it to halt support for its allies in the region. However, he went on to express concern about the abrogation of international law and disregard of multilateral institutions, which Canada as a second-rank imperialist power has traditionally relied upon to pursue its global interests. More specifically, Carney and the ruling class confront Trump's threat to annex the country as the 51st state of the US, which would deprive the Canadian ruling class of "first rights" to appropriate the profits squeezed out of their "own" workers.

The Carney government's response to the war on Iran follows the same reactionary pattern it adopted toward the US assault on Venezuela in January, which expressed Trump's determination to impose unfettered American imperialist dominance over the entire Western Hemisphere. As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained at the time, Ottawa welcomed the abduction of President Nicolás Maduro. It voiced concern only over Washington's unilateralism and Trump's assertion that the regime change-operation was only a first step in enforcing his "Donroe Doctrine." This demands that US imperialism should have the "right" to seize assets and territories across the Americas to ensure US hegemony and exclude China and other great-power rivals.

Carney pointedly reaffirmed Canada's longstanding support for regime change in Caracas, then pleaded for crises to be resolved through "multilateral engagement"—that is, through arrangements in which Canadian imperialism has a seat at the table.

The significance of this precedent for Iran is clear. If sections of the Canadian ruling class are troubled by the war on Iran, it is not imperialist war as such that concerns them—Ottawa has repeatedly backed such wars against Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Libya, and Russia. Rather, they worry that unrestrained US aggression will cut across Canada's own strategic and economic interests and ambitions. Even so, the longer the war continues, the more likely it becomes that Canada and the European imperialists will join it. Sections of the ruling elite are already demanding a more aggressive response from Carney, with the *National Post* issuing an editorial under the title "Iran is no longer a foreign war" and the *Globe and Mail* criticizing Carney for posturing as a champion of international law, when it stipulates that the war of launched by the US and Israel on Iran is a criminal war of aggression.

The NDP's criticism of the war reflects the views of powerful sections of the ruling class about the threat American imperialist unilateralism represents to their interests. In so far as it is a response to the overwhelming working class opposition to the war, it is aimed at politically stifling it. Just as it promotes "Team Canada" nationalism to subordinate workers to the interests of corporate Canada in the ongoing trade war with Trump, the NDP defends the interests of Canadian capital in the Iran war and the developing global war of which it is part.

Davies' main focus in his parliamentary speech was to politely address a series of proposals to Carney. Between the issuing of Boulgerice's initial statement on February 28 and Davies' March 9 House of Commons address, Carney had hypocritically sought to cover up his initial full-throated statement endorsing the US-Israeli bombardment by making several vaguely worded appeals for "de-escalation" and all parties to

"respect" international law. This was apparently enough for the social democrats to tone down their criticism of the Prime Minister, whom Davies was no longer "deploring" as Boulgerice had done, but merely accusing of pursuing a "contradictory" policy on the war. He suggested that Carney and the Liberal government "condemn the war and explicitly recognize that it violates the UN Charter, categorically rule out any Canadian military participation, and call for an immediate ceasefire and a return to multilateral diplomacy."

In a subsequent exchange with Green Party MP Elizabeth May, who provided grist to the mill of pro-war propaganda by denouncing the "brutal regime" in Tehran, Davies reiterated that opposition to the war must remain within the framework of diplomacy and international institutions. Declaring that Canada should "stand by the people of Iran," he insisted that support should come "in a peaceful way...with diplomacy, with economic sanctions, with help and with nuclear proliferation processes that actually work."

Contrary to Davies' touting of economic sanctions as "peaceful," they are in fact tantamount to an act of war. A recent report published by *The Lancet* found that the pre-2015 UN-backed sanctions regime disrupted the import of life-saving medicines, causing the cost of some medications to skyrocket by up to 300 percent, and cut life expectancy in the country by more than one year as Iranians were unable to access lifesaving treatments. In 2018, when Trump unilaterally abrogated the UN-backed nuclear accord with Tehran, Washington imposed still more punishing globally enforced sanctions on Iran to crash its economy and provoke regime change.

The statement put out by the Canadian Labour Congress on the war against Iran covered much of the same ground as the NDP but was perhaps even more effusive in its embrace of Carney. Canadian Labour Congress President Bea Bruske declared, "We welcome Prime Minister Carney's clarification of his position regarding the US and Israel's aggression against Iran and support his call for a 'rapid de-escalation of hostilities' in the region."

The fact of the matter is that Carney's phrases about de-escalation followed much clearer statements that fully endorsed the war of extermination that Washington and Tel Aviv launched illegally and without provocation. During his visit to Australia, Carney even refused to rule out deploying Canadian troops to join the war. The CLC left no doubt about its support for Carney's pro-war stance, since its statement drew an equal sign between the American imperialist onslaught and Iran's acts of self-defence. The CLC is "deeply concerned by and strongly condemns the escalating cycle of violence launched by the United States and Israel against Iran and by Iran's retaliatory strikes," Bruske declared.

Neither the NDP nor the major trade union bureaucracies have lifted a finger to mobilize working class opposition to the war. This reflects their fear, which is no less pronounced throughout the ruling class as a whole, that the economic consequences of the war and its brutality will radicalize millions of workers and put at risk the stability of capitalist rule. Already within the first three weeks, energy and fuel prices have soared under conditions in which workers' wages have stagnated and declined for decades, jobs have become precarious and governments are slashing social programs to the bone.

Workers opposed to the war in Iran cannot take a single step forward in the struggle against it in alliance with the NDP and its trade union sponsors, or any faction of the Canadian imperialist bourgeoisie. Their first task must be to politically recognize the fraudulent character of the social democrats' anti-war posturing, so that workers in Canada can advance their own principled opposition to imperialist war in alliance with their class brothers and sisters in the US and internationally.

Workers in Canada, the United States, Iran and throughout the Middle East share common class interests that stand in direct opposition to the war aims of their respective ruling elites. Stopping the war requires the

conscious political mobilization of workers against their own governments and against the capitalist system that drives the imperialist redivision of the world.

In breaking politically with the NDP and the union bureaucracy, workers must develop new rank-and-file organizations of struggle based on the independent mobilization of the working class and build the Socialist Equality Party as the political instrument to lead the working class in taking political power and putting an end to capitalism. Only through the linking of opposition to war with the struggle against the social and economic onslaught on workers' living conditions on the basis of a revolutionary socialist program can the escalating cycle of militarism and war be brought to an end.



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