

Canada's universities and colleges to serve as cogs in war machine under Liberal government's Defence Industrial Strategy

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Canada's Liberal government is pouring hundreds of billions of additional dollars into the military as part of the ruling class's drive to rearm and violently lay claim to "its share" of the spoils in the imperialist redivision of the globe.

Ottawa pledged to ramp up defence spending to 5 percent of GDP at a NATO summit last summer in what observers have noted is the largest peacetime military buildup in the nation's history. The eye-watering sums involved—projected to reach nearly \$160 billion annually by 2035—will exceed the size of all federal transfers to the provinces for healthcare, social welfare, post-secondary education and equalization.

The fact that this agenda entails the creation of a war economy was outlined earlier this year in the government's Defence Industrial Strategy. This comprehensive document not only presents Prime Minister Mark Carney's roadmap to massively expand military procurement and production to reach the 5 percent spending target. It also proposes policies to strengthen Canadian "sovereignty" in recognition of the fundamental breakdown in the Canada-US military-strategic partnership, which for over eight decades served as the basis for Canadian imperialism to aggressively pursue its worldwide interests. In this, Ottawa is heading in the same direction as all the imperialist powers in Europe, the Asia-Pacific and North America, first and foremost the United States, which is planning a record budget of \$1.5 trillion under the fascist dictator Trump.

Amid Trump's threats to annex Canada as the 51st state and crash its economy, the strategy document sets as a target sourcing at least 70 percent of all military procurements domestically. It also announced the creation of a new Defence Industrial Agency, staffed by unelected civil servants, to ensure that decisions on military procurement and investment are even more insulated from any democratic control.

The strategy outlined five main pillars designed to help the ruling class prepare for world war. These include engaging more effectively with industry, securing supply chains, procuring strategically and working with Indigenous groups and other domestic actors, particularly in the North. One of the pillars, "Investing purposefully to strengthen an innovative Canadian defence sector," is largely devoted to integrating the country's colleges and universities into Canadian imperialism's war machine, and recruiting students and professors to serve as the brains behind new killing machines for future wars of plunder.

Universities as weapons of war

The government's Defence Industrial Strategy pulls no punches when it comes to laying out the purpose of its strengthened collaboration with post-

secondary institutions—waging war. The introduction to pillar III of its strategy declares:

The changing nature of war is reshaping global security. Conflict now extends beyond traditional battlefields into cyberspace, space, and the digital domain, driven by technologies such as AI, quantum, autonomous systems, robotics, and advanced cyber and space capabilities. Countries are racing to harness commercial innovations not only to safeguard sovereignty, but also to capture the economic advantages they bring.

The Government is committed to positioning Canada at the global forefront of defence R&D and innovation. This will require a comprehensive approach stretching from fundamental research, through applied R&D, to the development and demonstration of technologies in the field, and ultimately, enable the scaling-up and commercialization of Canadian enterprises. Canada also needs to become better at rapidly bringing the most important discoveries out of the laboratory and into real-world application and to pushing the frontiers of high-risk, high-reward discovery.

Ottawa will deepen its links with colleges and universities as incubators of talent by "establishing mechanisms to better connect universities and colleges to defence priorities," the document announced. The new budget earmarks \$1.6 billion to "attract and equip world-class researchers."

The strategy document announced the establishment of a new Science and Research Defence Advisory Council, designed to "bring together leaders from Canada's post-secondary sector with key federal partners: the Department of National Defence; Innovation, Science and Economic Development; the three granting councils [i.e., the Canadian Institutes of Health Research; the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council; and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council], CFI [Canada Foundation for Innovation], and National Research Council (NRC); and BOREALIS [Bureau of Research, Engineering and Advanced Leadership in Innovation and Science]." The BOREALIS program alone will be funded to the tune of \$68.2 million over three years.

Through programs like the Department of National Defence's Mobilizing Insights in Defence and Security (MINDS), the federal government is seeking to fund technologies such as quantum computing so as to develop their application across the military-security-surveillance domain. Last year the Centre for International and Defence Policy (CDIP) at Queen's University announced it was the recipient of two grants examining the effect of advances in quantum computing on security. Pointing to the central role universities will play, the director of the

institute noted “The intersection of technology and security is becoming an increasingly important area of focus for security and defence conversations within Canada and around the world.”

The *Globe and Mail* recently examined the growing links between universities and the military establishment. Cash-strapped universities are eager to receive some of the billions the federal government has promised for defence-related applied research and engineering. A spokesperson for a group of the nation’s 15 leading research universities commented, “There’s a lot of possibilities there in bringing academia and industry together for the benefit of defence research. We can be a serious engine for technological innovation in this country, particularly with dual-use research.”

One example the *Globe* highlighted was the University of Alberta’s Centre for Applied Research in Defence and Dual-use Technologies (CARD-TECH). Some of the work they featured includes the development of coating material for the hulls of ice-breaking ships, applications for drone technology and biomedical sensors for troops. Other examples cited in the *Globe* report included a submarine parts initiative at Dalhousie University in cooperation with Defence Research and Development Canada, as well as work on dual-use space technology and cybersecurity at the University of Waterloo.

The *Globe* was careful to note that this growing integration of the military and higher education would be resisted by students, highlighting the nervousness the ruling class has about popular opposition to its war plans.

The repeated invocation of “dual-use” is meant to blunt resistance to the militarization of society. Likewise, the constant reference to “defence” spending and initiatives for the “defence industry” cover up the reality that there is nothing defensive about this comprehensive mobilization of society’s resources for waging imperialist wars across the globe.

At Niagara College, a new Defence Systems Engineering Technology program will train students on building drones and autonomous systems, in hopes, in the words of its dean of School of Media, Trades and Technology, of preparing students for careers in “a rapidly evolving field that is shaping the future.” In the Ottawa region, the new Defence Innovation Hub Strategy aims to work directly with the University of Ottawa, Carlton University, and Algonquin College in improving the military’s capabilities.

These individual initiatives are backed up by the government’s creation of a drone innovation hub at the NRC, which received a start-up budget of \$105 million and the ability to acquire new research platforms worth \$460 million over five years, as part of the Defence Industrial Strategy.

The ruling class is investing considerable sums of money to create the ideological glue for the rearmament drive. The federal government has touted its MINDS Program—created in the aftermath of the outbreak of the NATO-instigated war with Russia over Ukraine—as a means to link academia to policy planning for NATO’s war against Moscow and strategizing for imperialism more generally. These programs build on links between academia and the military established under the previous Justin Trudeau-led Liberal government. It launched the Innovation for Defence Excellence and Security (IDEAS) initiative for developing “new cooperative partnerships with the private sector, universities, and academics,” with funding to the tune of \$1.6 billion over 20 years.

Recruiting students and workers as the warriors of the future

The government is also planning to dramatically increase the size of the armed forces. Chief of the Defence Staff Jennie Carignan told CBC recently that she will soon present a detailed proposal to government on

how to increase the military to 85,000 regular troops, 100,000 reserves, and an additional 300,000 reserves with light training who can be called upon in an emergency.

Noting the difficulties of marshalling such immense resources, one think tank, the Institute for Research on Public Policy, wrote of how universities could be utilized to facilitate Ottawa’s plans (while claiming not to seek the militarization of campuses). It argued that schools could support logistics, personnel management and administration to help deal with an influx of new troops.

There is no popular groundswell of support for Canadian imperialism and its predatory foreign policy, with polls indicating that less than one-fifth of Canadians would volunteer to serve unconditionally in the armed forces. Despite the loosening of requirements including permitting permanent residents to join the military, the Canadian Armed Forces has consistently fallen short of its recruitment targets.

The government attempts to combat these problems in its Defence Industrial Strategy by laying out initiatives to promote apprenticeships in military-related fields and press industrial workers laid off due to the trade war with the US to switch careers into military production. The Canada Defence Skills Agenda unveiled in the Defence Industrial Strategy, which is being backed up with billions of dollars of government investments in various programs, aims to:

- Strengthen the “defence industry talent pipeline” by taking “decisive action to upskill and retrain existing workers, attract young people to the industry, and expand apprenticeships and trades.”
- Establish “new sectoral alliances that bring together employers, unions, and industry groups to develop strategies supporting businesses and workers in a changing labour market.”
- Make attracting the skilled labour needed for the military a focus of Immigration policy.
- Partner with Provinces, territories and Indigenous groups to fund skills training for military requirements.

What emerges from these proposals is a comprehensive restructuring of social and economic life in the interests of waging war for Canadian imperialism’s predatory profit and strategic interests. Students at universities and colleges, young workers and older workers thrown out of a job by the capitalist crisis and the “Team Canada” nationalist policies of the ruling class will be directed through a mixture of state-sponsored coercion and new career pathways to serve as cannon fodder for Canadian imperialism, whether by building the technology needed for the wars of the future or serving in uniform.

The arguments advanced by sections of the so-called “left” to justify support for Canada’s massive rearmament program are particularly pernicious. They assert that the tens of billions being invested in war and destruction can serve as a “job creator” and provide “skilled, good-paying jobs” for workers. The New Democrat-aligned Mayor of Toronto, Olivia Chow, has called for the new Defence, Security and Resilience Bank (DSRB) to be headquartered in the city claiming it would “create thousands of jobs.”

Spearheaded by the trade union bureaucracy, which has been spewing out “Team Canada” nationalist propaganda on behalf of the corporate elite in response to the trade war with the US, supposedly “left” forces are waving the Maple Leaf while providing ready-made justifications for expanding Canada’s military. *The Tyee*, for example, published an opinion piece last year that demanded, in response to Trump’s tariffs and threats, “we should be prepared to defend our sovereignty—not just with military spending, but with a population that is engaged, trained and ready.” Former NDP MP Charlie Angus has, for his part, welcomed the CAF’s proposal to massively expand the military reserves as a blueprint for a “people’s army.”

Leading union bureaucrats in Unifor, the United Steelworkers, and other unions have trumpeted their support for Canadian imperialist rearmament,

while emphasizing the need to ensure the weapon-systems are “Canadian-made” and joining in the anti-China hysteria that the Canadian and American ruling class are whipping up as they intensify their preparations for war with Beijing.

Workers and young people have no interest in being dragooned into serving the interests of Canadian imperialism in the rapidly developing third world war. Rather they must join the fight against militarism and war, for their futures and lives depend upon it. This struggle requires the independent political mobilization of the working class on a socialist and internationalist program to put an end to capitalism, the crisis-ridden social order that is at the root of imperialist war. Students opposed to the militarization of the campuses and the transformation of their apprenticeships and training programs into “pipelines” for the war machine must link their opposition to war and rearmament with the growing working class resistance to the gutting of public services, mass layoffs, and the ruling class’s evisceration of democratic and social rights. All those who agree with this program should join and build the Socialist Equality Party and its youth organization, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality.



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