

Canadian imperialism complicit in Trump's regime change operation in Cuba

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Canadian imperialism is fully complicit in the Trump administration's efforts to strangle Cuba's economy and starve its people in preparation for a potential military invasion.

Since it attacked Venezuela in January, kidnapped its president, Nicolás Maduro, and seized control of its oil exports, the US has imposed an oil embargo on Cuba. The move marks a massive escalation of Washington's decades-long economic war on the island-country and its people, whom American imperialism has never forgiven for the Cuban revolution of 1959.

Preparations for a military assault are far advanced. The Pentagon has positioned forces for an imminent strike, awaiting, according to media reports, only the White House's final go-ahead. Meanwhile, the Trump administration is working to fabricate a pretext for yet another illegal, unprovoked war of plunder. This includes touting lurid, unsubstantiated claims that Cuba has received a handful of drones from Russia and Iran as proof that Cuba represents a threat to US national security.

The fascist, would-be dictator has repeatedly and cavalierly spoken of a US seizure of Cuba. In a speech in Florida in May, Trump said, "On the way back from Iran, we'll have one of our big ... aircraft carriers stop about 100 yards offshore" and wait for the Cuban government to give up.

Canada has long posed as a "partner," even friend of Cuba, and has opposed the sweeping US sanctions on its economy. In 2013-14, Ottawa hosted and facilitated the secret talks between the Obama administration and Cuba's bourgeois nationalist regime that led to an easing of sanctions and lessening of tensions. Canadian capital has traditionally played a major role on the island, whose bourgeois nationalist regime—having relied on economic support from the Stalinist bureaucracy in the USSR following the 1959 revolution—became increasingly dependent on foreign investment from Canada and Europe after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

A February commitment of a derisory \$8 million in Canadian food aid, to be delivered through various NGOs and the UN, has been followed by silence.

Mark Carney's Liberal government has avoided making any critical noises about Trump's bullying and threats to illegally invade Cuba because Canadian capitalism is terrified at the prospect of a US seizure of substantial Canadian investments in Cuba. These seizures are already taking place effectively at gunpoint and for a spot price.

More fundamentally, Ottawa hopes that by avoiding conflict with Washington over Cuba it can facilitate the conclusion of an agreement to ensure some degree of privileged economic access to the US market under conditions in which Trump is slapping tariffs on Canada and threatening to annex it as the 51st state.

Carney has stated multiple times that his government is eager to be integrated into a "Fortress North America" led by the US economically and militarily—so long as Washington recognizes Canada's interests as a junior partner in the waging of commercial and world war against their geopolitical rivals. If Cuba is the price that has to be paid to secure this

role as American imperialist wingman, Ottawa would gladly pay it.

Cuba is Canada's largest bilateral trading partner in the Caribbean, with close to \$1 billion exchanged per year, and Canada is Cuba's second largest trading partner after the European Union. Canada provides Cuba with critical dietary staples, including wheat, pork and peas. Canadian tourism companies Sunwing and Blue Diamond Resorts, in partnership with the Cuban military-run Gaviota Corporation, have invested billions in the country.

With the criminal blockade of fuel supplies to Cuba, these operations have ground to a complete halt. Canadian air carriers have suspended all flights due to the inability to obtain jet fuel in Cuba or to service their aircraft there. Hotels, resorts and restaurants have shut down, throwing hundreds of thousands of Cubans out of work. Blackouts have shut down much of the country.

Cuba's dependence on tourism for economic survival arose out of the "special period" of economic collapse in the wake of Cuba's loss of Soviet support after the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. This turn was the basis for the increasing dependence of the Cuban economy on Canadian capitalist investment.

Canadian tourists have been the largest single group of foreign visitors to Cuba since 1972. The Canadian government developed Terminal 3 at Havana's Jose Marti International Airport in 1998 to accommodate them. Tourism provided approximately half of Cuba's foreign currency reserves until the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Numbers were recovering into 2025, but with the intensified US campaign to strangle the island, impose regime change, transform Cuba into a semi-colonial protectorate, this source of revenue has collapsed.

There is also a significant presence of Canadian mining companies, notably Sherritt, which has developed the Moa nickel and cobalt mine. Sherritt's Moa nickel mine was first nationalized by the Cuban government after the 1959 Cuban revolution, expropriating the former US owners, the Freeport Sulfur Company of New York.

Cuba possesses some of the largest reserves of these metals, with 6 percent of the world's cobalt reserves and 7 percent of the world's nickel reserves. Sherritt's operations are currently shut down due to the combined effects of the absence of fuel for its operations and the collapse of Cuba's foreign exchange regime, which has rendered the government unable to pay its bills. Sherritt is owed \$344 million USD.

Canadian companies face not only the threat of default by their Cuban state creditors but of outright seizure of their assets in favour of Trump and his cronies. Sherritt had initially declared in early May that it was quitting the island in response to Trump's May 1 Executive Order threatening foreign mining operations in Cuba.

On May 20, Sherritt suddenly announced that it had struck a deal to sell a majority stake in the company to Ray Washburne, a close confidant of Donald Trump who was appointed to Trump's Overseas Investment Advisory Board during his first presidential term. Thanks to the extreme pressure imposed upon Cuba by his old boss, Washburne is now in line to

scoop up Sherritt, and a notable percentage of the world's nickel resources, at a discount to Sherritt's already rock bottom price of 11 cents per share. In better times, Sherritt traded at \$16 per share.

The political and social significance of this fire sale cannot be overstated. It is a manifestation in world geopolitics of the personalist dictatorship being established in Washington. The state machine is being used to forcibly seize vast sources of untapped wealth in foreign countries and dole them out to Trump, his family, political friends and business partners.

Further, the sale clearly flouts long established US economic sanctions, despite U.S. State Department claims that "they do not consider the transaction to be contrary to US laws related to Cuba," according to the *Globe and Mail*. How convenient! There is one set of laws for the US capitalist oligarchy and another for everyone else.

Canadian tourism operators could well be next. Trump could cynically seek to impose the US sanctions in order to appropriate various hotels and resorts. US sanctions forbid any economic deals with the Cuban military, which has a majority stake in most of these properties—unless of course Trump and his cronies are making the "deals." Multiple Canadian hotels, built in the 1990s and subsequently, are on a blacklist which makes it illegal for US citizens to even book a room there. The coastal land upon which many Cuban resorts were built was nationalized and expropriated from private owners, many of whom fled to Miami.

For decades the Cuban government, under the leadership of Fidel Castro and then Raul Castro, vowed that these so-called *gusanos* (worms) would never be permitted to return to the island or reclaim nationalized property. But today the return of these far-right forces is being negotiated in private by Raúl Castro's grandson Raúl Guillermo Rodríguez Castro, who holds no government office!

To grasp the criminal, counterrevolutionary character of these pending confiscations, 67 years after the Cuban Revolution, one only has to imagine an attempt by Queen Victoria to reclaim "stolen" British property in 1843 Boston, or an attempt by former Southern slave owners to assert property claims on the bodies of black American workers in 1934. The pretense of Cuba's former gangster ruling class to Cuban private property rights is equally outrageous and obscene. It is a measure of the bankruptcy of the Cuba's bourgeois nationalist regime that it is presiding over such a historic reversal.

Canadian imperialism's investments in Cuba have been based on the assertion of its "independent" capitalist interests in the Caribbean. Canada, along with Mexico, were the only countries in the Western Hemisphere which maintained diplomatic relations with Cuba after the 1959 Revolution.

Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Canadian prime minister from 1968 to 1979, famously visited Fidel Castro in 1976, developing a close personal friendship, such that Castro was one of the pallbearers at Trudeau's funeral in 2000. In a speech to tens of thousands in Cienfuegos, Trudeau angered Canada's US allies by declaring, "Viva Cuba y el pueblo Cubano! Viva el primer ministro comandante Fidel Castro!" But this political theatre had nothing to do with any imagined support for "socialism" and everything to do with opening up a diplomatic relationship with Cuba independent of the United States, to assert Canadian imperialist interests.

When the US Congress passed the Helms-Burton Act in 1996, sanctioning foreign investors in Cuba, Canadian imperialism responded with the Foreign Extraterritorial Measures Act, which protects Canadian companies from US sanctions via a suite of measures, including state-backed counter lawsuits against US claimants.

Thirty years later, the irresolvable contradictions of world capitalist development under private ownership and national management are driving American imperialism to abandon the international legal norms and arrangements which permitted both the "independent" existence of

Cuba on a bourgeois nationalist basis and the "independent" interests of its erstwhile Canadian ally in Cuba's economy.

The imperialist powers, Canada among them, are seeking to redivide the world by force. Washington has asserted the so-called "Trump corollary to the Monroe Doctrine," which declares American imperialism's claim to complete economic and military domination over the entire Western Hemisphere, including both Cuba and Canada.

"Canada, more than probably any other nation, is caught in a vise grip," said Mark Entwistle, Canada's envoy to Havana from 1993 to 1997, in an interview with *Bloomberg* about the vulnerability of Canada's Cuban investments. Entwistle referred to the ongoing attempt to renegotiate favourable Canadian trade terms with the United States. Canadian interests in Cuba, he said, were being held hostage at gunpoint in these "negotiations."

While the Cuban people are being starved with Canadian state complicity, Canada's trade union bureaucracy and pseudo-left continue to foster illusions in both the viability of Cuba's bourgeois nationalist "independence" and in the possibility of an "independent" Canadian foreign policy based on something other than naked imperialist self-interest and double dealing. They posit that Canadian imperialism can be magically transformed into its opposite by mouthing a few empty phrases in the style of the elder Trudeau, while promoting the lie that Canadian capitalist interests in Cuba are less voracious than its US competitors.

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), which has long maintained relations with Cuba's National Union of Public Administration Workers in Havana (SNTAP), launched a parliamentary petition in April under NDP MP Alexandre Boulerice, calling for the Carney government to "stand with Cuba" by opposing all military action and economic coercion, and expanding Canadian economic and humanitarian activities on the island. It was signed by 12,296 people and presented to parliament on May 7, but it was not debated and does not appear to have prompted a response from the Liberal government to date.

The Canadian Network on Cuba, which is supported by both the Stalinist Communist Party of Canada and the pseudo-left Socialist Action group, issued a nationalist, pro-capitalist statement demanding "the right of Canadian companies to conduct lawful business free from foreign coercion and intimidation." It called on the government to enforce the Foreign Extraterritorial Measures Act in defence of Canadian capitalist interests.

NDP leader Avi Lewis has made similar bankrupt appeals, in remarks to the CUPE Ontario convention that were picked up by the Cuban embassy in Canada, he declaimed that Canadian imperialism "must come to the defence of Cuba, and fight for a free Palestine."

What a fraud! Lewis, Socialist Action and the Communist Party know full well that the right-wing Liberal government of Mark Carney will do no such thing. Their primary purpose in making these bankrupt appeals is to divert the growing opposition to imperialist wars and aggression among workers in youth in Canada behind Canadian nationalism and impotent appeals to the political establishment. This goes hand in hand with the continued promotion of the Castro regime as "socialist" and justifications of its attempts to buy its survival by demonstrating through sweeping privatizations and other pro-market reforms that it can transform the island into a profitable source of cheap labor and natural resources for US corporations.

The Castroite regime has made no appeal to the international working class for support. As the *World Socialist Web Site* has explained, its current prostration before imperialism is the outcome of its bourgeois nationalist character and capitalist program. It was always hostile to the independent power of the working class. This was manifested both in its suppression of all forms of working class political and economic self-organization on the island, and the bargain that it made with the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy, under which, in return for economic aid, it

supported the Kremlin's strangling of world revolution.

Canadian workers must unequivocally oppose Washington's criminal campaign to starve the Cuban working class and reverse the little that remains of the social gains of the 1959 Cuban Revolution and Canadian imperialism's complicity in it.

Such a campaign cannot be left to the trade union bureaucracy or the NDP, and it cannot be based upon appeals to American imperialism for "rights and freedoms" for Canadian mining corporations or for the political representatives of the Canadian imperialism to come to the aid of the Cuban people. It must be animated by a socialist internationalist program—that is, the fight to mobilise workers across the Americas in a common struggle to put an end to imperialist militarism and the capitalist system that is its source.



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