

Canada's opposition parties and trade unions join hands with Carney government in trade war with US

Roger Jordan
30 August 2026

The leaders of Canada's main opposition parties met with Liberal Prime Minister Mark Carney last Tuesday to demonstrate their full-throated support for Canadian imperialism in the escalating trade war with the US.

The far-right Conservative Pierre Poilievre, social democrat Avi Lewis, and Yves-François Blanchet, the head of the pro-independence Bloc Québécois, all embraced Ottawa's retaliatory tariffs and demanded sacrifices from the population in the face of Trump's drive to crash the Canadian economy and annex the country.

Carney has responded with "dollar-for-dollar" retaliatory tariffs to Trump's August 22 imposition of 50 percent tariffs on a range of Canadian imports and his subsequent announcement that auto tariffs will be doubled at the beginning of 2027.

The same day that Carney met with the opposition leaders, his Liberal government unveiled a list of tariffs on about \$US20 billion of American goods scheduled to come into force September 8.

Trump's attacks on Canada are part of his strategy to subordinate the Western hemisphere to unbridled US imperialist dominance as a stepping stone in the intensification of world war against Washington's main rivals.

The fascist-minded US president escalated his aggressive "America First" over the course of last week. On Thursday, he signed an executive order renaming Lake Ontario to "Lake America." Jamieson Greer, Trump's trade representative, declared in a provocative interview with the CBC that Canada risked becoming a back door for Chinese imports and demanded that Ottawa take seriously its claimed desire to be part of "Fortress North America," i.e., by integrating its economy and military even more fully into Washington's economic and military-strategic offensive against Beijing.

Following his phone calls with the other party leaders, Carney issued a statement declaring that they "discussed the ongoing response and underscored the importance of a united Team Canada approach as Canada works to protect jobs, build the economy, and stand up for Canadian interests."

This nationalist propaganda aims to misdirect the genuine anger among workers and broad sections of the population over Trump's bullying and threats behind a strategy for the protection of corporate Canada's profits and the ruling class's imperialist interests. Carney, who previously served as the governor of Canada's central bank and a blue-chip executive, has exploited Trump's threats to push official politics sharply to the right.

His Liberal government is implementing Trump-style policies, including by pledging to spend 5 percent of GDP on war and related

infrastructure by 2035; offering tax cuts, business deregulation and other incentives for investors; handing refugees over to fascistic ICE agents; and imposing austerity through real-terms reductions to provincial transfers for health care and social programs. Carney has also continued where his predecessor Justin Trudeau left off in virtually abrogating the right to strike.

His government is working closely with the European imperialist powers to build up their respective military capabilities and to escalate the war with Russia over Ukraine, which is one front in the rapidly developing third world war.

At the same time, Carney continues to promote a possible "grand bargain" with Washington, in which Ottawa will give the US first dibs on critical minerals and other resources, if only Trump will recognize the Canadian ruling class's "sovereign right" to the lion's share of the profits extracted from Canada's workers and abundant resources and gives it guaranteed access to the US market.

Coming out of Carney's mouth, talk of "Canadian interests" means the predatory imperialist interests of the ruling class, not the interests of working people. Ottawa is itself an aggressive protagonist in the struggle among the great powers to redivide the world so as to secure control over natural resources, production networks, cheap labour, markets and strategic territories.

Carney has bluntly stated that his goal is to ensure Canada is at the "table" where the spoils of imperialist aggression and world war are divided up and not on the "menu" of other powers.

The conflict between American and Canadian imperialism is a reactionary dispute between two rival bourgeoisies in which workers should not pick sides.

A recent *Globe and Mail* editorial, entitled, "A free Canada is worth the sacrifice" underlined the equally predatory ambitions of both countries' ruling classes. Not for the first time, the mouthpiece of the Bay Street financial elite invoked Canadian imperialism's involvement in the two world wars of the 20th century and countless conflicts since in an appeal for national "sacrifice." "Mr. Trump should not mistake Canadian politeness for passivity," declared the *Globe*. "A country that fought and died in the charnel houses of the world wars, in Korea and in Afghanistan knows the value of standing up for its ideals."

To the extent that Carney and his Liberal government can pull off its two-faced pitch, it is thanks above all to the combined efforts of the social-democratic New Democratic Party (NDP) and its sponsors in the trade unions. NDP leader Avi Lewis, who was touted during the party's leadership campaign earlier this year as a "left," could hardly

restrain his enthusiasm for the torrent of nationalist, militaristic rhetoric unleashed by the trade war. Carney made a correct move by “walking away from a bad deal,” he declared, repeating word for word a statement from a few days earlier by Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) President Bea Bruske. Lewis added to CBC, “This trade war could and should hurt President Trump.”

In reality, the trade war hurts workers on both sides of the border through price rises, job cuts and plant shutdowns. Moreover, the trade war poisons political and social life by mobilizing the vast resources at the disposal of each bourgeois state—political parties, the media, big business, trade unions and universities—to pit workers against each other in a bid to make them believe that their interests lie with their “own” ruling class.

The NDP’s provincial premiers were even more aggressive than Lewis. British Columbia’s David Eby pointed to the efforts of the Canadian government to uphold Ottawa’s global imperialist ambitions by developing closer military and security ties with the European imperialist powers. He declared, “Your friend kicks you in the back, you don’t turn around and buy \$12 billion of fighter jets from them,” a reference to Ottawa’s planned purchase of F-35 jets from US producer Lockheed-Martin. The Carney government has placed the F-35 purchase under “review,” while it considers the viability of buying Gripen fighters from the Swedish manufacturer Saab.

Wab Kinew, the NDP premier of Manitoba, called for a “buy Canadian” campaign, commenting, “Canada is showing the rest of the world right now that you don’t have to take a knee, you don’t have to bow down, you can be proud, you can have backbone, and you can stand up for your own economy and your own jobs.

“I’m proud of our country right now, I’m proud of Canadians’ response right now.”

Workers from across all industrial sectors know from bitter experience that “buy Canadian” and other similar nationalist programs have never defended a single job. On the contrary, such positions, championed by the trade union bureaucracies, have led to the destruction of tens of thousands of jobs and sweeping contract concessions over the past four decades. Among the most prominent examples of this is the auto industry. Since the Canadian Auto Workers (now Unifor) split from the UAW in 1985, the union bureaucracies on both sides of the border have systematically pitted workers against each other, allowing the automakers to whip-saw jobs and conditions.

Bruske’s CLC now demands that workers rally behind a doubling down of this disastrous course. “We support the Prime Minister and Canada’s negotiating team in this crucial decision,” Bruske stated, referring to Ottawa’s decision to suspend talks with Washington and ratchet up the trade war. “But we are all in this together. Canada must stand firm, use our leverage to force Trump to back down, and make protecting workers and communities our number-one priority.”

No worker on layoff, labouring for a poverty wage, striking at National Steel Car for basic safety protections and an end to piecework, or risking their lives to make ends meet—as was so cruelly demonstrated by the death of a worker at Montreal Airport last week—should believe for a second that we are “in this together” with Canada’s more than 80 billionaires, banks, corporate executives or their political spokesmen. Canadian capitalism, no less than its US competitor, rests on ruthless class exploitation that gives rise to an irreconcilable conflict between the interests of the working class and the capitalists.

Bruske, Lewis and the rest of the NDP and union bureaucracies are lying to workers by claiming that they can be “protected” in alliance with Carney, the warmonger and austerity budget specialist, not to mention the far-right demagogue Pierre Poilievre.

The Tory leader, who also endorsed the trade war following his call with Carney on Tuesday, views the conflict as an opportunity to shift political and economic policy even further right. “As the US hikes tariffs, we must lower taxes for Canadians,” declared Poilievre. “Let’s all fight for our workers, our businesses and our country.” Invoking former Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Poilievre called for an “economic action plan” based on slashing the capital gains tax for investors, removing sales tax from “Canadian-made” automobiles, and scrapping the industrial carbon tax.

BQ leader Blanchet is the only major party leader to explicitly criticize Carney’s role in the trade talks. He declared Friday that he does not trust the prime minister’s claim that Trump’s demands for the scrapping of bilingual packaging and other protections for Quebec’s cultural industries caused the trade negotiations to collapse.

The BQ, and its provincial sister party, the Parti Québécois, have repeatedly attacked the Liberal government for supposedly putting Ontario and Alberta’s “interests” ahead of those of Quebec in the trade war. This is bound up with their push for an “independent” capitalist Quebec, which they calculate could forge closer economic and military-strategic ties with US imperialism at the expense of their rivals in English Canada.

Meanwhile, alone among the premiers, Alberta’s Danielle Smith has refused to endorse Ottawa’s retaliatory tariffs. The head of the far-right United Conservative Party (UCP), Smith has publicly proclaimed her readiness to put Alberta’s massive oil and natural gas reserves at the service of the Trump administration’s predatory “global energy dominance” strategy.

Workers in Canada must oppose Trump and everything he represents—oligarchy, dictatorship and militarism—but they cannot do so on the basis of Canadian or Quebecois nationalism, or by aligning with any faction of Canada’s imperialist bourgeoisie.

Genuine opposition to Trump’s imperialist aggression and Canadian imperialism’s predatory designs demands that workers in Canada unify their struggles with workers in the United States so as to mount a joint counteroffensive against austerity, authoritarianism and imperialist war.

This struggle must be guided by a socialist and internationalist program. The unification of workers in Canada, the United States, Mexico and internationally will provide the basis to halt the trade war and imperialist war, defend workers’ democratic and social rights, and carry forward the fight for workers’ power and the United Socialist States of the Americas.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact