In answer to Trump’s trade war, Carney advances Canada’s own imperialist agenda

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The trade war between the US and Canada intensified Tuesday after President Donald Trump announced a series of new charges and outright bans on approximately US$1 billion worth of Canadian goods imports. Earlier in the day, Ottawa’s “dollar for dollar” retaliatory tariffs of 15, 25, and 50 percent on some US$20 billion of US imports—a response to Trump’s imposition of imposts following the collapse of trade talks in August—came into force.

Trump’s aggressive strategy is based on the drive to annex Canada as the 51st state or at least reduce it to vassal status, with its trade, energy and foreign policies largely dictated by Washington. The so-called “Donroe doctrine” is premised on US control over the entire Americas, stretching from Greenland and Canada in the north, through Mexico and the Panama Canal, to all Latin America. With a stranglehold over the Western hemisphere’s economic supply chains and governments, Trump and the American oligarchy for which he speaks believe they can wage a world war against their rivals, above all China, to reassert American imperialist global hegemony.

The fascist-minded president demonstrated his commitment to this agenda once again over the weekend with a social media post showing American control over Greenland and Iceland in the North Atlantic, Canada, Mexico and the Panama Canal.

Trump’s executive orders signed Tuesday banned motorcycles, and some alcohol and dairy products outright, while imposing higher tariffs on other goods. He set September 29 as the deadline for this late barrage of trade restrictions to come into force.

The response from Prime Minister Mark Carney and his Liberal government has, since the outbreak of the trade war, been determined by the defence of Canadian imperialism’s own predatory interests.

Canada’s establishment does not oppose Trump’s far-right social and foreign policies—notwithstanding the sharp criticisms Carney, his ministers and political allies, including almost all provincial premiers, the NDP social-democrats, and the trade unions, have made of the US president. Rather, Canada’s political establishment has used Trump as a foil to shift politics sharply right. Their “opposition” to Trump is solely from the standpoint that his “America First” program fails to recognize Canada’s prerogatives as a junior partner of American imperialism and grant its ruling class “first rights” to the proceeds from exploiting the country’s working class and natural resources.

A program for imperialist war and attacks on worker rights

Ottawa is committed to hiking spending on the military and related infrastructure to 5 percent of GDP by 2035 and imposing ruthless austerity, slashing and privatizing public services, to pay for it. It has virtually abolished the right to strike through the “reinterpretation” of anti-democratic powers in Section 107 of the Canada Labour Code and oversees border guards that regularly hand refugees over to the fascistic ICE.

Their chief complaint with Trump is that he is using the close economic and military-security ties Canadian imperialism has forged with its larger southern neighbour as, to use Carney’s words, “vulnerabilities,” to push Ottawa and the Canadian economy into an explicitly subordinate relationship.

Since the outbreak of the second imperialist world war, the Canadian ruling class has pursued its imperialist interest through the US-Canada military-security alliance and US-led “liberal” world order, whose dismantling Trump is completing because it is deemed insufficiently tilted in favour of Washington and Wall Street. Ottawa was a staunch US ally through the Cold War, and over the past 35 years has backed US-led wars of aggression and “regime change” operations across the globe.

While staggered by Trump’s effective termination of the US-Mexico-Canada free trade agreement (USMCA) and cognisant that Trump could repudiate any deal within days of his signing it, Ottawa continues to plead for a reconfigured “partnership” with US imperialism, based on confronting their historic rivals, principally China and Russia.

In a video speech released Tuesday shortly after Canada’s retaliatory tariffs came into force, Carney explained his strategy as a “pivot” away from Canada’s reliance on its bilateral relationship with its southern neighbour, and accused Trump of trying to “break us to own us” and make Canada “dependent” on Washington.

At the centre of this pivot is an intensification of worker-exploitation to increase the global “competitiveness,” i.e., the profitability, of Canadian capitalism and the forging of closer ties with the European imperialist powers, as they rapidly rearm to pursue war on Russia and otherwise seek to aggressively assert their interests around the globe.

Carney and several leading ministers will host a two-day Canada Investment Conference in Toronto next Monday and Tuesday to this end. The event aims to initiate the process of attracting C$1 trillion in investments from the vultures of international finance capital. Prominent participants include top executives of BlackRock and Blackstone, Barclays Bank, Canada’s Big Five banks, and various pension and state “sovereign wealth funds.” One day later, Carney will attend European Union Commission President Ursula von der Leyen’s “State of the Union” address in Brussels before receiving the honour of giving an official address to the European Parliament.

The Investment Conference is based on the Carney government’s sustained drive for business deregulation to facilitate large “national projects” and a more rapid accumulation of corporate profits, as well as making Canada a key partner in the production of critical minerals and military equipment and their respective production chains. Big business and its media mouthpieces, like the *Globe and Mail*, are clamouring for an accelerated deployment of private capital into Canada’s ports, airports, and energy sectors to expand trade routes to the Asia-Pacific and Europe,

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and the shredding of environmental and other restrictions on the strengthening of cross-Canada economic, energy and transportation links. What this means concretely for the working class is the elimination of what little remains of job and other social protections, and the opening up of all economic spheres to rampant capitalist profiteering.

Carney left no doubt about this in his video speech. Alongside the usual "Team Canada" propaganda, he advanced a full-throated defence of the history of Canadian capitalism, which he declared had repeatedly been forced to fight against "American expansionism." He hailed Sir John A. Macdonald, the principal "father of Confederation," for overseeing the construction of the Canadian-Pacific Railway, an achievement Carney described as the creation of an "economic-military corridor" that bound the country together.

What the prime minister and former central banker left unsaid was that the dominant sections of the Canadian ruling class that backed Confederation in 1867 fought "American expansionism" under the wing of the British Empire, the most reactionary force on a world scale at the time, and by supporting the slave-owning South in the American Civil War. Nor did he note that the Canadian-Pacific Railway, the development of which was inseparably bound up with the conquest of the western half of the northern tier of the continent by Canadian capitalism, was only possible through the genocide of the native peoples and the transformation of their communal-held land into capitalist private property.

Carney's remarks also included a reference to President William McKinley, who at the end of the 19th century imposed 50 percent tariffs on Canadian imports to the US, with the goal, in Carney's words, of bringing about Canada's "annexation" by the US. However, Carney noted approvingly that the opposite occurred, stating, "Rather than getting weaker, Canada grew stronger. Instead of becoming more dependent, we diversified, changing who we did business with." This is an elliptical reference to Canada's emergence as an imperialist power in its own right at the beginning of the 20th century, culminating in its participation as one of the main protagonists in the century's two world wars, which proved to be the greatest periods of Canadian industrial expansion, producing bumper profits and increasing Canada's stature in the imperialist pecking order.

Canadian imperialism and the new redivision of the world

Carney invokes this history so enthusiastically because his government, like Trump's in the US, is determined to secure its share of the spoils in the new violent redivision of the world that is well underway. American imperialism undoubtedly expresses this drive in its most aggressive and repugnant form, but the fact that Canada is an imperialist power of the second rank, relying on allies to secure its share of the spoils, does not make it more progressive or worthy of support.

A major component of Ottawa's pivot or "diversification" strategy is a turn towards European imperialism, where Carney is searching for allies for his massive rearmament drive. Earlier this summer, he unveiled a C$100 billion package for the purchase and maintenance of a new submarine fleet from Germany's ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems. The agreement was no less a geopolitical move than a military procurement decision, integrating a key sphere of Canada's military capacities with a resurgent and aggressive German imperialism. The government is also considering abandoning plans to purchase new F-35 fighter jets from the US-based Lockheed Martin in favour of Swedish Saab's Gripen fighter jet. In his Tuesday speech, Carney lauded Montreal-based Marconi Technologies for becoming the first non-European company to secure a contract for military equipment under the EU's multi-billion-dollar rearmament program, SAFE.

Ottawa, unlike Trump, has lined up with the European powers in their reckless escalation of the war against Russia in Ukraine. With billions of dollars in financial and military aid, its ideological fostering of far-right Ukrainian nationalism, and backing for Ukraine's drone and missile attacks on Russia, Ottawa has made a major contribution to escalating the war, which poses the real danger of exploding into a nuclear conflagration.

On Thursday, Carney hosted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, whose government has outlawed opposition to the war, as shown by the 15-year sentence handed down to the Trotskyist Bogdan Syrotiuk because he has called for the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers to stop the war in articles posted on the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The eruption of inter-imperialist antagonisms and initial stages of the third world war have exacerbated the regional divisions that have always been a feature of Canada's ruling class.

None of these factions offer a progressive alternative to Washington or Ottawa.

In Quebec, the Coalition Avenir Quebec government responded to the latest tariff escalation by announcing a series of measures designed to favour Québécois and Canadian businesses. These included a 15 percent preference margin for bidders on government contracts with "value creation" in Quebec or Canada, and an option for certain contracts to be reserved for businesses with facilities in Quebec. The government also called for crown corporations to adopt a "Quebec focused" purchasing strategy.

The separatist Parti Québécois, which appears likely to emerge as the largest party in next month's provincial election, attacked the CAQ's proposals for failing to protect "Quebec's interests." The PQ's program calls for establishing an independent, "entrepreneurial" Quebec with closer ties to Wall Street, and as a full member of NORAD and NATO.

Like the PQ, Alberta's far-right United Conservative Party government led by Danielle Smith has refused to endorse Carney's retaliatory tariffs, in the hopes of currying favour with Trump. The province's substantial energy exports to the US and Smith's close alliance with Trump politically have resulted in the UCP attempting to carve out a separate agreement for the province with Washington.

Next month, the government is organizing a referendum asking Albertans to decide whether the issue of the province's separation from Canada should be put to a vote. While Smith presently declares her opposition to outright separatism, she has systematically fuelled Western regionalist tensions with Ottawa on the basis of claims for more provincial powers within Canada's federal structure and the evisceration of any environmental restrictions on oil tar sands expansion.

There is widespread and entirely legitimate hostility to Trump across Canada, but this can find no progressive outlet by lining up with the Canadian ruling class or any of its regional factions. Workers across Canada must instead unify their struggles with workers in the US and internationally, who all suffer the consequences of trade war, economic breakdown and imperialist war. As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote in a perspective this week,

> The urgent task is to revive the long traditions of joint struggle between American and Canadian workers, stretching back to the eight-hour-day movement in the 19th century and the building of the industrial unions in the 1930s, and infuse them with a new and higher socialist content. The only alternative to intensifying inter-imperialist antagonisms and world war is the fight for the socialist transformation of society.

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