

The Alberta independence referendum and the fight against Trump and the far right

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The result of Monday's referendum on the independence of Alberta—Canada's oil-rich, fourth most-populous province—is a rebuke to the far right and the Trump administration.

With a voter turnout that far surpassed most recent federal and provincial elections in Alberta, 75.5 percent of Albertans voted to remain in Canada, while 24.5 percent voted for the holding of a “legally binding” referendum on independence.

In Edmonton, 86 percent voted to remain, and in Calgary, 83 percent—totals that would have been higher had recent immigrants been able to vote. Support for separation was concentrated in rural Alberta, including communities hit by Big Oil's post-2014 drive to boost profits by slashing conventional drilling, which has eliminated some 50,000 oil-related jobs.

With polls showing the referendum was certain to fail, the White House did not formally endorse secession. But State Department officials and Republican Party operatives met repeatedly with separatist leaders. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent called Alberta Washington's “natural partner,” and Elon Musk, the world's wealthiest person, declared that Alberta “should separate.”

Since returning to the White House in January 2025, Trump has refused to renew the US-Mexico-Canada trade agreement, imposed a barrage of tariffs on key sectors of Canada's economy and repeatedly declared his intent to reduce Canada to a vassal state or annex it outright. This is part of a drive to establish unbridled US hegemony from the Arctic to Tierra del Fuego and conscript the hemisphere's resources for war with China and America's other great-power rivals. Washington invaded Venezuela in January, has threatened to seize Greenland and the Panama Canal and has tightened its blockade of Cuba.

Trump's trade war tariffs and annexation threats have

provoked mass opposition across Canada. They were a major factor in the 2025 federal election defeat of the Pierre Poilievre-led Conservatives, who were viewed as too close to Trump and his MAGA movement. They were likewise a key determinant of the outcome of Alberta's October 19 referendum.

The Alberta separatist leaders boasted of their ties with Trump and affinity for his fascistic views, while making their own pledges to expel immigrants, remove all restraints on capital, dramatically slash taxes on big business and the rich and prohibit elementary public health measures.

The separatists were encouraged at every step by Premier Danielle Smith and her United Conservative Party (UCP) government. This is the outcome of decades in which sections of the political establishment tied to Alberta's oil barons have promoted “Alberta First” and western regionalism to drag Canadian politics to the right, from the Reform Party to Poilievre's Conservatives and the UCP.

Smith, who seized the UCP leadership and Alberta premiership in 2022 by mobilizing the pro-separatist far right, slashed the numbers of signatures needed for a citizen-initiated referendum by more than two-thirds to assist them in forcing a referendum on secession. Then, when the courts ruled the referendum could not proceed in the form originally proposed, she herself placed the independence issue on the ballot.

To recognize the significance of this result is not to lend a shred of support to the pro-Canada campaign of the Carney Liberal government and the most powerful sections of Canadian capital, backed by the trade union bureaucracy and the New Democratic Party. These forces exploit popular outrage against the gangster Trump to whip up Canadian nationalism, suppress the class struggle and bind working people to the dominant faction of Canada's imperialist bourgeoisie.

The Canadian Labour Congress, the Alberta Federation of Labour, Unifor and the NDP opposed the separatists, not to unite workers across North America against Trump and corporate Canada but because secession would damage investment and weaken Canadian imperialism. Through “Forever Canadian,” they made common cause with CEOs and veteran operatives of all the establishment parties, while ex-NDP Premier Rachel Notley teamed up with Smith’s UCP predecessor, Jason Kenney.

The same bureaucrats channel opposition to Trump behind “Team Canada” and demand harsher trade war measures whose burden falls first on American workers. They are bitterly opposed to uniting the struggles of workers in Canada with the growing counter-offensive of American workers against Trump and the oligarchy behind him.

Workers have every reason to oppose Trump and everything he represents—oligarchy, social reaction, dictatorship and war. But to do so they must separate themselves from all the rival factions of the bourgeoisie and all their various political representatives—from Carney, Ontario Premier Doug Ford and other advocates of “Canada Strong,” to those like Smith pushing for greater power for the Alberta elite to the proponents of Quebec and Alberta separatism.

Insofar as the Canadian bourgeoisie opposes Trump, it is solely from the standpoint of defending its own profits and privileges. They are rankled and rattled by his refusal to recognize their “sovereign” right to the lion’s share of the profits to be derived from exploiting the workers of Canada and its abundant natural resources, and by his denying Canadian capital privileged access to the US market in return for its further integration into a Fortress North America.

Under the cover of opposing Trump, the Carney-led Liberal government is implementing Trumpian-type socio-economic policies on behalf of Canada’s own financial oligarchy. This includes massive military spending increases, “mega” corporate tax cuts, sweeping social spending cuts, deregulation and privatization. With the newly introduced “Building Canada Strong Act” (Bill C-39), it is “normalizing” the newly arrogated, authoritarian governmental power to criminalize strikes, without even the fig leaf of parliamentary consent, under a concocted “reinterpretation” of Section 107 of the Canada Labour Code.

To push back against Trump, Ottawa has forged a military-security alliance with the European powers on the basis of their shared aim of pursuing the NATO-

instigated war with Russia to “victory,” no matter the cost in lives, and at developing their military capabilities independent of the US and American technology so they can pursue their own predatory imperialist interests and ambitions independent of Washington.

In the immediate aftermath of Monday’s referendum, which also included a series of loaded UCP government-drafted questions scapegoating immigrants for the deplorable state of public services and the high cost of living, Carney announced his government was ready to discuss with Smith Alberta’s proposals to restrict immigration and deny “non-Alberta approved” immigrants their right to public services.

The separatists’ defeat brought a sigh of relief from the dominant faction of Canadian capital. But the centrifugal pressures on the Canadian nation-state are rooted in the breakdown of the US-led world order and the contradiction between an integrated world economy and its division into rival nation-states.

As Canadian imperialism rearms and restructures class relations for trade war and global war, the conflicts among regionally based ruling class factions will only sharpen. Where they are united is in placing the full burden of the crisis on the working class, gutting democratic rights and stoking reaction, above all, anti-immigrant chauvinism.

Workers in Canada must take advantage of the weakness of Canadian imperialism to assert their class interests through the intensification of class struggle and by reviving the traditions of joint struggle with their most proximate class allies, the workers in the United States.

This requires repudiating the nationalist-corporatist politics of the trade union bureaucracy—Team Canada and the Quebec nationalist-cemented tripartite alliance of the unions, business and the state in Canada’s lone majority French-speaking province—making socialist internationalism the axis of their struggle. To oppose austerity, war and reaction, workers in Canada must forge a unity with workers in the US and Mexico in a common struggle for workers’ power and a socialist North America.



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