

Anti-democratic “foreign interference” bill whisked through Canadian parliament amid contrived anti-China furor

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In the name of countering “foreign interference” in Canadian politics, the Justin Trudeau-led federal Liberal government and all four opposition parties have joined forces to rush through parliament and into law legislation that greatly expands the powers and reach of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and otherwise attacks democratic rights.

Bill C-70, *An Act respecting countering foreign interference*:

- Creates an entire new category of so-called “foreign interference” crimes subject to harsh criminal penalties;
- Gives CSIS, Canada’s premier spy agency, sweeping new surveillance and information-sharing powers;
- Further curtails the right to protest and threatens with prosecution for “sabotage” workers who disrupt the functioning of transportation and other critical infrastructure as part of a political strike or in defiance of court injunctions or “essential services” legislation.

The Governor General gave Bill C-70 royal assent last Thursday, June 20, just six weeks after it was introduced in parliament by Public Safety Minister Dominic LeBlanc and Justice Minister Arif Varani.

The ongoing, contrived furor over Chinese interference in “Canadian democracy” was used to claim that swift passage of Bill C-70 with next to no parliamentary review or public debate was a matter of national urgency.

Initiated by illegal CSIS leaks and fanned for over a year by the corporate media, government and opposition parties, the Chinese “foreign interference” furor has been used to justify Canadian imperialism’s full integration into Washington’s military-strategic offensive against China and the push for increased powers for the national-security apparatus.

The Conservatives, under their far-right, pro-“Freedom” Convoy leader, Pierre Poilievre, have spent much of the past year thundering against Trudeau and his Liberals for their purported inaction over Chinese “interference,” all but accusing them of treason. Yet, they were quick to embrace Bill C-70 and offered to work with the government to help steamroll it through parliament before MPs left for the summer recess last week.

The Liberals, Bloc Québécois and Green Party all consented

when the Conservatives tabled a motion in the House of Commons late last month to waive normal parliamentary procedures to ensure Bill C-70’s speedy passage. However, the trade union-sponsored New Democratic Party (NDP), which is bound by a “confidence and supply agreement” to prop up the Liberal government until June 2025, refused to provide the necessary unanimous consent, citing the complexity and sweeping character of the proposed changes.

This “opposition” proved to be as fleeting as a late May snow squall. With parliament in a tizzy over CSIS’s lurid, unsubstantiated claim that there are parliamentarians who have “semi-wittingly or wittingly” abetted China and other foreign powers, the NDP reversed course. It allowed the bill to be speeded through just six days of House of Commons Public Safety Committee hearings; then joined the other parties in giving it unanimous support at third and final reading.

The government and opposition parties have all claimed that if the bill had not been passed before the summer recess, one of its key provisions—the establishment of a “foreign agent” registry—could not be implemented prior to the federal election scheduled for October 2025.

What this registry will consist of and who needs to register or face possible criminal sanction remains largely to be defined by a yet to be named Foreign Influence Transparency Commissioner.

On the other hand, Bill C-70’s amendments to the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service Act came into effect immediately. The Liberal government has termed these amendments—which include greater power to surveil, store and mine electronic data with little to no judicial oversight—the “most significant” since Canada’s domestic spy agency was established in 1984.

The legislation’s new sabotage offenses and intelligence-sharing rules that allow CSIS to provide detailed briefings, including fingering alleged security risks to provincial governments, opposition parties and corporations will be effective as of August 19.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau hailed the legislation as it passed through parliament, declaring, “This bill will allow for

more rigorous and regular information sharing with the premiers of the provinces and territories on issues of foreign interference and national security that involve them. We are working in a respectful and collaborative way to fight to protect our democracy together.”

A proposed amendment from Senator Yuen Pau Woo to strike from the bill a phrase that makes it a crime for someone to merely engage in political activity “in association with” a “foreign entity,” if not duly registered, was summarily rejected. “I am concerned that Canadians looking to contribute to Canadian democracy will be criminalized for their civic actions because of a bill that could tag them as having done so secretly or deceptively—on the grounds that they are deemed to be ‘in association with’ a foreign entity,” Woo noted.

The Senator’s arguments did not sway his colleagues. Nor did a brief from Canada’s 15 principal research universities (U15) that warned the provisions concerning collaboration with foreign “entities” could have a “chilling effect” on their staff and students’ participation in international research. “It is simply impossible for large research-intensive universities to track individual research collaborations across their institutions and report this on the registry” within the required 14 days, they said in a written submission.

U15 also asked for clarification as to whether research partnerships and funding agreements with foreign publicly funded universities and other research institutions and funding agencies would fall under the registry and Foreign Influence Transparency Commissioner’s ambit.

Shakir Rahim and Anaïs Bussi res McNicoll of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA) testified on June 10 before the Senate Committee on national security, noting their organization’s “deep concern” over the rapid adoption of the bill which contains a vague definition of foreign interference and an “anti-sabotage” measure which will have a chilling effect on the right to protest and strike.

Their concerns are worth quoting at length:

While the CCLA acknowledges the importance of addressing any threat to Canada’s democracy, our review of this complex bill identifies several Charter issues that must be addressed before the bill passes into law. For instance, we are particularly concerned that the new proposed offence of sabotage (essential infrastructure) under Part 2 is overbroad and risks suppressing peaceful protest. If the provision remains part of C-70, in our submission we propose an amendment to strengthen protections for protest, advocacy, and dissent.

As for Part 4 of the bill, which purports to create the foreign influence transparency registry, it leaves crucial questions to future regulations, including which classes of persons and arrangements will fall outside of the

Registry’s scope and which information will have to be disclosed in the registry. This approach—which does not comply with the principle of democratic accountability—coupled with the vague and broad language used to define key terms within the bill, gives reason to fear that the registry could allow the government to monitor and surveil not only foreign influence specifically, but also the international engagement of various actors. For instance, it is possible that an individual who has been in contact with a foreign state-owned media or academic institution and who has then engaged with the public with respect to a Canadian political process would be required to provide detailed information to the registry as to the individual’s activities.

The bill’s passage has been eagerly welcomed by the Business Council of Canada, the country’s most powerful business lobby group. It noted, “Canadian business leaders have long called for the economic security measures contained within the Act, including the creation of new sabotage offences for threats directed against essential infrastructure, and authorizing greater threat intelligence sharing with Canadian businesses.”

Big business sees the law as a new tool for fingering and blacklisting socialist and radical workers, while further limiting workers’ rights under the pro-business collective bargaining system amid a rising wave of strikes and protests fueled by the surging cost of living and ever-rising social inequality.

Workers must be warned. As Canadian imperialism backs the Israeli genocide in Gaza, fuels the escalation of the NATO-led war against Russia in Ukraine and sabre rattles against China in the Indo-Pacific, it is establishing the powers needed to crack down on opposition at home.

Tellingly, the middle-class pseudo-left organizations and publications which operate within and in the orbit of the NDP—Communist Revolution (formerly Fightback), *Spring Magazine*, Socialist Project and Socialist Action—have not been roused by this latest attack on democratic rights in Canada. Apparently having no fear that their political activities, which ultimately prop up the capitalist order, will be affected in any way, they have said nothing about Bill C-70, or in the case of the Socialist Project, confined themselves to recycling the comments of the CCLA and like groups.



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