

Trudeau slashes immigration as part of a lurch still further right

Keith Jones
3 November 2024

The Justin Trudeau-led Liberal government is dramatically reducing both the number of new permanent residents Canada will accept over the next three years and the number of people allowed to temporarily reside in the country.

Amid a mounting wave of worker struggles, the right and far-right have been agitating for the federal government to slash the number of new entrants to the country on the grounds that “excessive immigration” is responsible for soaring housing costs and homelessness and the breakdown of public services.

The Liberal government’s embrace of this filthy Canadian nationalist argument goes hand-in-hand with its waging of aggressive war in alliance with the United States around the world, which requires the subordination of society’s resources to military spending and the whipping up of a fake “national unity” against external enemies. Workers across Canada must repudiate the pervasive anti-immigrant agitation now being mounted by the entire ruling class.

At an October 24 press conference, Trudeau and Immigration Minister Marc Miller announced changes to Canada’s immigration targets and policies whose net outcome will be the first ever decline in Canada’s population.

The number of persons admitted as permanent residents—the immigration category that provides a path to citizenship—is to be cut 21 percent next year and by 27 percent by 2027, falling from half-a-million this year to 395,000 in 2025, 380,000 in 2026 and 365,000 in 2027.

The government’s curtailing of so-called temporary migration is even more drastic. Thanks to the regressive changes it has made to the “temporary foreign worker” and “international student” programs over the past year and the erection of new barriers to those seeking refugee status, the government aims to slash the total number of people temporarily residing in Canada by 900,000 by the end of 2026 or more than a quarter.

As a result of these changes, said Miller, Canada’s population will fall by 0.2 percent by the end of 2026, and the government projects 670,000 fewer new homes will be built over the next three years.

At their joint press conference, Trudeau and Miller tried to distance themselves from the most virulent far-right anti-immigrant rhetoric, claiming their aim was not to bar immigration but ensure continued “support” for it.

However, this was only a matter of degree. They promoted the lie that immigration is responsible for much of the social crisis

roiling the country. Immigration, declared Trudeau, “must be controlled, and it must be sustainable.” Miller said it was “undeniable” that the volume of migration has “contributed” to the “affordability” crisis.

Trudeau—whose government has presided over the worst inflation in decades, imposed high interest rates and used a battery of legal mechanisms to strip workers of their legal right to strike—sought to dress-up his efforts to deflect social anger onto immigrants and migrant workers in phony anti-big business rhetoric. “Businesses,” he proclaimed, “should no longer rely on cheap foreign labour.”

In reality, it is workers who will bear the full brunt of the government’s slashing of immigration levels. Business organizations already report that large numbers of Temporary Foreign Workers are being expelled from the country as the government refuses to extend or renew their work permits. The Bank of Canada and numerous economists are forecasting the dramatic cuts to new permanent and temporary residents will be a major drag on the economy and may help push it into a recession.

The most reactionary forces were quick to celebrate and claim credit for Trudeau’s “U-turn.” However, the far-right Conservative Party leader, Pierre Poilievre, Quebec Premier and CAQ leader François Legault and Parti Québécois leader Paul St. Pierre-Plamondon, the latter two who are competing as to who can make the most inflammatory Quebec chauvinist appeals, complained that the cuts in new residents didn’t go far enough.

For its part, the rabidly right-wing *Toronto Sun* crowed that the Liberals have legitimized their foul anti-immigrant appeals. “We aren’t going to fault Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for admitting his high immigration policies were a mistake that contributed to today’s affordability crisis,” affirmed a *Sun* editorial, “We do fault him for his government’s false depiction of Canadians who were raising these concerns long before he did, as racists.”

The billionaire would-be dictator and Republican nominee in the Nov. 5 US presidential election Donald Trump also welcomed Trudeau’s announcement, writing in a social media post, “even Justin Trudeau wants to close Canada’s borders.” Trump has placed at the centre of his campaign anti-immigrant incitement, calling for the establishment of internment camps and the deportation of ten million “illegal” migrants.

Anti-immigrant agitation: a spearhead of social reaction

Workers must beware. In Canada, as in the US and Europe the scapegoating of immigrants is being used to push politics far to the right, cultivate fascist forces and split the working class. Fascist forces like Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National in France, the AfD in Germany, and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and her Brothers of Italy party are spearheading the anti-immigrant and anti-refugee incitement. But everywhere, it is being embraced by the ruling class and its traditional parties of government as a means of scapegoating the most vulnerable sections of the working class for the social dislocation and misery caused by the capitalist profit system. Anti-immigrant/anti-refugee agitation also serves to justify the strengthening of the state's repressive apparatus, the militarization of borders, and the whipping up of a strident bellicose nationalism.

Canada is a rich, advanced capitalist country with abundant land and resources. If public services are collapsing and there is a shortage of affordable housing, even in the midst of great wealth and a technological revolution, this is the outcome of a one-sided class war. For decades, the political representatives of the capitalist ruling elite have imposed austerity, eviscerated social housing, slashed taxes on big business and the rich and otherwise gutted all constraints on capitalist exploitation to redistribute wealth upwards. This process has been accelerated in recent years by the massive state bailouts of the financial elite, the ruinous profits-before-lives response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the diversion of ever greater resources to preparation for and the waging of war.

In so far as there is a global "migration crisis," it is directly attributable to the predatory actions of US and Canadian imperialism and their European allies—to the social devastation wrought by decades of US-instigated wars, IMF-dictated capitalist "structural adjustment" programs and capitalist-induced climate change.

Trudeau has long claimed to be a champion of refugees and an "open, diverse" Canada. His call for a hike in Canada's intake of Syrian refugees at a time when Stephen Harper and his Conservative government were promising to establish a "snitch line" for Canadians to denounce immigrants' "barbaric practices" played a role in the Liberals' 2015 come from third-place election victory.

However, Trudeau's pro-immigrant and refugee posturing was always a fraud. Under his government Canada has continued to have one of the world's most "market"—i.e. big business—driven immigration policies in the world. The government, especially after the near-total freeze on new entrants to Canada during the first two years of the pandemic, did increase the number of new permanent residents. But far and away the bigger increase over the last two years and throughout the Liberals' nine years in office was in the in-take of temporary workers, who are denied basic rights and whose right to remain in the country is tied to a single employer. As the result of a comprehensive investigation, the UN Special Rapporteur on Slavery recently condemned Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker program as akin to modern slavery.

That said, the Trudeau government's raft of measures to limit the intake of new permanent residents and expel temporary residents en masse is part of an ever-widening and accelerating lurch to the right. It is giving unstinting support to the NATO-instigated war against Russia, and to Israel's genocidal assault against the Palestinians and rampage across the Middle East. It has pledged to double Canada's military budget to \$82 billion per year by 2032 and is systematically gutting workers' right to strike.

In pursuing imperialist war abroad and class war at home, the Trudeau government has been able to rely on the political support accorded it by the trade union bureaucracy and the trade union-sponsored NDP. The NDP formally ended the confidence-and-supply agreement under which it had been propping up the Liberal government for two-and-a-half years in September. But it and the unions continue to promote the Liberals as a "progressive" ally in countering Poilievre and his Conservatives, while working to systematically isolate and suppress the mounting wave of workers' struggles and the opposition to the imperialist-backed genocide.

Trump and the Trudeau government

Asked by the CBC what he thought of Trump's social media post welcoming the change in Canada's immigration policy, Immigration Minister Miller reprised the government's oft-stated position that Ottawa will not comment on the US election campaign and that Canada "will be able to work with" whomever is the next president.

To be sure, the Trudeau government and the Canadian ruling class as a whole would much prefer that the Democrat Kamala Harris succeed Joe Biden. But this is only because they view Trump as untrustworthy in wisely pursuing the common predatory interests of North America's imperialist powers and fear his explicit plans for the establishment of a fascist dictatorship will incite mass social unrest and class struggle on both sides of the border. However, Ottawa's response to Trump's 2020-21 coup plot, which was to remain silent until it was clear that Biden would take power, underscores that they will place an alliance with a dictator Trump before any principled defence of democratic rights.

Over the past year, the corporate media has been full of commentary that the best way to "insulate" Canadian imperialism from a second Trump presidency is to make Canada "indispensable" to Washington, by massively expanding Canada-US military-security cooperation around the world and by ensuring Canada is a linchpin in the US transition to a "war economy." Such cooperation, as Miller's comments indicate, would also mean assisting Trump, were he to secure the White House, in his plans to unleash state violence and expel ten million immigrants.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact