

Canada's social-democrats advocate “national unity” to wage tariff war on US

E.P. Milligan, Keith Jones
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The trade union-sponsored New Democratic Party (NDP) is rallying round the Canadian bourgeoisie in its impending tariff war with Washington. Canada's social democrats and union bureaucracies are determined to corral workers behind the ruling class's drive to protect its predatory interests and block the emergence of a cross-border movement of American and Canadian workers against the continent's twin imperialist powers.

NDP leader Jagmeet Singh has called for “national unity” in the face of US President Donald Trump's tariff threats. He is urging Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to set up a semi-permanent, tripartite roundtable of political, corporate and trade union leaders to plot Canadian imperialism's response to Trump and oversee implementation of bellicose retaliatory measures against any US trade actions targeting Canada.

To extract concessions on trade, foreign and energy policy and military spending, and lay the groundwork to coerce Canada into a political union with the US, the fascist American President has vowed to impose 25 percent tariffs on all of Canada's \$440 billion in annual exports to the US as early as this Saturday, February 1.

Trump has directly tied his conflict with Canada and Mexico, Washington's other USMCA “free trade” partner, to threats to use military force to seize Greenland and the Panama Canal—all of which he justifies as necessary to strengthen US “national security.” Trump and the American oligarchs for whom he speaks are determined to secure unbridled dominance and control over North America as part of their preparations for all-out war with Russia and China.

The developing Canada-US trade war, which has been accompanied by threats by Trump to use “economic force” to annex Canada, is a reactionary conflict between rival imperialist powers that is being waged at the expense of workers on both sides of the border. It is part and parcel of the imperialist drive to repartition the world through aggression and war, so as to secure control over natural resources, strategic territories, production networks and outright plunder.

While American imperialism is very much in the forefront, Canadian imperialism is also a protagonist in this drive to redivide the world. It is playing an ever more important role in the three fronts of what is a developing US-led global war—against Russia in Eastern Europe, China in the Indo-Pacific and Iran and its allies in the Middle East.

The Canadian bourgeoisie, which for more than eight decades has viewed its military-security partnership with Washington as the essential framework for the pursuit of its global interests and ambitions, “opposes” Trump only to the extent that it wants its prerogatives as a junior partner of US imperialism duly recognized and not subject to revision at will by Washington.

All its bickering regional-based factions are determined to uphold the Canada-US alliance. Their only concern is for their profits and predatory interests, which they are seeking to secure by pressing for the most advantageous position within a US-led Fortress North America.

Thus, even as they declaim against Trump, all the political representatives of the bourgeoisie—from Trudeau and Ontario Premier Doug Ford to Quebec's Francois Legault and Danielle Smith, the far-right, “Alberta First” premier of Canada's principal oil-producing province—are calling for the expansion of the Canada-US strategic alliance. They are also pledging that Canada will “share” more of the burden of “defending” a US imperialist-led world order.

Their complaint is that Trump is destabilizing what they tout as a “highly successful” partnership, thereby damaging both American and Canadian imperialist interests.

The NDP and unions' role in mustering the working class behind Canadian capital

Canada's social democrats are fully on board with all this.

With the ruling class staggered by Trump's threats and seeking to gird itself to meet what it sees as an existential challenge, the NDP politicians and their close allies in the trade union bureaucracy are determined to play their designated role—which is to rally the working class behind Canadian capital.

In an open letter to Prime Minister Trudeau dated January 15, Singh declared: “We cannot afford to sit back and watch events unfold—Canadians expect the government to take a proactive approach that brings Canada together to fight this assault in a coordinated way. . . Canada's premiers, the leaders of all federal parties represented in Parliament, Indigenous organizations, labour unions and industrial and business leaders need to be brought together immediately to chart a united response to Donald Trump's tariffs.”

Given the significance of the crisis in Canada-US relations, Singh's proposal for an ongoing tripartite mechanism to oversee the trade war with Washington and manage its socio-economic, geo-strategic and political fallout is, in effect, a call for a government of “national unity.”

The NDP, it need be underlined, has been propping up the minority Liberal government, with the blessing and encouragement of the trade unions, for the past six years.

In the name of ensuring “political stability,” the social democrats responded to the outbreak of the NATO-instigated war with Russia by entering into a formal governmental alliance with Trudeau and his Liberals in March 2022. And they have continued to provide the Liberals with the parliamentary votes needed to cling to power, even as the government has lurched ever further right. This has included staunchly supporting Israel's genocidal assault on the Palestinians; massively increasing military spending; implementing “post-pandemic” austerity; breaking strikes using a cooked-up reinterpretation of Section 107 of the Canada Labour Code; and otherwise imposing large inflation-driven real

wage cuts on working people.

The NDP MPs' votes to sustain the big business Liberals in office have been the parliamentary complement of the unions' efforts to contain, derail, and diffuse the massive strike wave that has swept through all sectors of the economy across the country since the fall of 2021. Last month, as the NDP was again voting "confidence" in the Liberal government, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) were enforcing Trudeau's latest patently illegal strikebreaking order, corralling 55,000 Canada Post workers back on the job.

Now the labour bureaucrats are using Trump's threat to justify deepening their anti-worker alliance with big business and the state.

Underscoring that it stands with the NDP and Canadian big business, the CLC issued its own flag-waving call for "national unity" two days after Singh's appeal to the prime minister. "It's time for Canada's political leadership to recognize the urgency and address this before it becomes a full-blown crisis," declared the country's principal labour federation. Its statement called on the government to develop "a long-term industrial strategy that protects Canadian workers from the whims of any foreign administration."

The CLC and its affiliates, like the United Steelworkers (USW), and Unifor, the country's largest industrial union, have long pressed for Canada to have privileged access to the US market on the grounds that Canadian-made steel and aluminum are vital for the tanks and fighter jets that feed the US war machine. Although this point was not expressly mentioned in the CLC's statement, the unions will undoubtedly raise it soon enough in lobbying American political and corporate leaders and whipping up nationalism and militarism among workers.

Heeding Singh's advice, Trudeau has assembled a hastily convened Council on Canada-US Relations to address Trump's tariff threats. The council represents a corporatist alliance of Canadian big business and the trade union bureaucracy. Its members include former Canadian trade negotiator Steve Verheul; former Quebec Premier Jean Charest; former Canadian ambassador to the US David McNaughton; Unifor President Lana Payne; the president of Automotive Parts Manufacturers' Association, Flavio Volpe; Trudeau's former national security adviser and deputy Defence Minister Jody Thomas; and Hassan Yussuff, who headed the CLC from 2014-21.

"If I am prime minister," said Singh in a recent statement to the press, "I'll fight like hell for Canadian jobs and to stop prices from climbing even higher. The stronger our response to the Trump Tax, the shorter the trade war will be." Singh has proposed the imposition of dollar-for-dollar retaliatory tariffs against the US. Revenue generated by these tariffs would, he says, go toward creating "good union paying jobs by building what we need here." In effect, this means funds would go toward investment in Canadian big business and building up the military to wage imperialist war.

Singh has also proposed a temporary cut-off of the supply of critical minerals to the US, as well as "diversifying" Canada's trade partners. And he has committed to hiring thousands of new border officers—who would work with the Trump administration in its anti-immigrant witch hunt and assist in further sealing off and militarizing the US-Canada border.

The NDP, led by Manitoba NDP Premier Web Kinew and with the support of Singh and British Columbia NDP Premier David Eby, is also pressing for Canada to rapidly exceed the NATO minimum spending target of 2 percent of GDP and to push forward with the modernization of NORAD, the joint Canada-US aerospace and maritime defence command.

Singh peddles the fraud of a "kinder, gentler" Canadian capitalism

All of this is accompanied by Canadian nationalist tub-thumping.

Extolling the reactionary nationalist myth that Canada represents a "kinder," "more humane" form of capitalism than the rapacious dollar republic to the south, Singh claimed in a January 21 statement that "Canada is a country where we take care of our neighbours, and we believe in kindness and fairness. But Trump should not confuse our kindness for weakness."

What rubbish! Canadian capitalism and its "democracy" have a bloody record of exploitation and colonial and imperialist violence, beginning with the dispossession of the native people. In so far as there have been any differences in social policy and worker rights between Canada and the US in recent decades, this has only been because the working class in Canada was able to wrench concessions from the ruling class through explosive class struggles in the 1960s and 1970s, which Canada's ruling class, being weaker than its US counterpart, was less able to resist.

As in the US, whatever the working class won in an earlier period has been under systematic attack for the past four decades, under Conservative, and union and NDP-supported "progressive" Liberal governments alike. Public services are today in a state of collapse, with Medicare dying the death of a thousand cuts.

Moreover, the bourgeoisie is now poised to replace Trudeau with the far-right, "Canada First" Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre, who at its behest is primed to carry out a Trump-style social counter-revolution. This will involve savage austerity, massive tax cuts for corporate Canada and the rich, the gutting of environmental and all regulatory restraints on capital, and further massive military spending hikes.

Poilievre's path to power has been paved by the trade unions and the NDP. It is their suppression of the class struggle and support for the Trudeau government that has enabled Poilievre to make a demagogic appeal to the anger and frustration of working people facing increasing socio-economic distress.

There is one other element in the NDP's response to the advent of a second Trump administration and the impending Canada-US trade war that merits comment.

The NDP is claiming to be working with "progressive" forces in the United States to promote "international cooperation" and thwart Trump's tariffs.

This purported attempt to build a "progressive" alliance against Trump centres on forging ties with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and US Senator and twice-failed candidate for the Democratic Party presidential nomination Bernie Sanders.

These cynical maneuvers are the exact opposite of a turn to fighting to unite Canadian and US workers against the North American imperialist ruling classes. They underscore that the NDP, DSA, and their union allies are combining to intensify their suppression of the class struggle on both sides of the border by keeping workers bound hand and foot to the supposedly "progressive" faction of their respective bourgeoisies, i.e., the Democrats in the US and the Liberals in Canada.

The DSA and Sanders, working in tandem with United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain and other sections of the union bureaucracy, have worked systematically to smother the struggles of the working class and politically subordinate it to the Democratic Party and the Biden administration. No less a party of Wall Street and the CIA than the Republicans, the Democrats focused on waging the US imperialist-led war on Russia and preparing one with China, then ensured a "peaceful transition" to Trump. Now, Sanders and DSA members of Congress like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez are pledging to work with Trump to implement "parts" of his "America First" agenda, like intensified trade war on China.

On January 17, Singh and Bernie Sanders met on a video call to discuss how they could work together to shore up the trade union bureaucracies, which on both sides of the border have worked to prevent workers in

Canada and the US from waging joint struggles even when confronting the same employers, and to prevent Trump's fascist policies from provoking an explosion of class struggle. Last week, four NDP MPs met with Detroit-area Congresswoman and DSA member Rashida Tlaib (D-Michigan) for similar discussions.

Trump is a menace to the workers of the world. But Canadian workers cannot oppose him and all that he represents—dictatorship, fascism, imperialist war, and oligarchical rule—by supporting their own imperialist ruling class in its maneuvers to defend its “fair” share of the spoils of capitalist exploitation and strike a better bargain with Trump.

Rather, they must intensify the class struggle, resolutely oppose all the rival factions of the Canadian ruling class, and all their political representatives from Poilievre, Legault and Danielle Smith to Trudeau and Jagmeet Singh, and forge unity with their class brothers and sisters in the US, Mexico and beyond.

To oppose imperialist war and the ruling class's drive to eviscerate social and democratic rights, all of the struggles of working people must be fused into an independent working class industrial and political offensive fighting for workers' power and a socialist North America. This requires the building of new organizations of working class struggle, rank-and-file committees, independent of the pro-capitalist, pro-war trade union apparatuses, and a mass revolutionary party based on a socialist-internationalist program—the Socialist Equality Party.



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