

Canada: Why is the *Globe and Mail* denouncing Harper's latest "anti-terrorism" bill?

By Roger Jordan
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The *Globe and Mail*, Canada's "newspaper of record" and the traditional mouthpiece of its financial elite, has published a series of editorials that criticize Bill C-51—the new "Anti-Terrorism" bill Prime Minister Stephen Harper unveiled with great fanfare on January 30—in unusually sharp tones.

The *Globe*'s editors have little difficulty in puncturing the government's claims that Bill C-51 is aimed at protecting Canadians from terrorist attack and in demonstrating that the legislation will dramatically expand the reach of Canada's national-security apparatus, threatening Canadians' core democratic rights.

That a newspaper hitherto so supportive of the Harper government and so closely identified with the Canadian ruling class's embrace of imperialist war and austerity is expressing alarm over Bill C-51 should give workers pause.

The *Globe* is articulating the apprehensions of important sections of the ruling elite as to the implications and ramifications of such a serious and open break with traditional bourgeois democratic forms of rule. These apprehensions, as attested by the *Globe*'s general support for Harper's reactionary agenda, are not motivated by any genuine concern for working people's democratic rights. Rather, they are born of the fear that the legislation is so manifestly an authoritarian power grab that it will undermine the credibility and legitimacy of the government and state among broad layers of the population.

Bill C-51 will give the country's premier domestic intelligence, the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS), the power to actively intervene to "disrupt" groups or individuals deemed to be endangering the national security of Canada and to violate the law and the Canadian constitution's Charter of Rights and Freedoms in so doing. While the government is promoting the bill as an answer to the ostensible threat posed by Islamist terrorism, CSIS's new "disruption" power can be deployed against all threats to "national security," including "subversion" and threats to the country's economic stability and security. These formulations are vague and expansive and deliberately so. They would give CSIS a pseudo-legal cover to "disrupt" strikes, political, protests,

socialist organizations, and a wide of array of anti-government groups.

Bill C-51 also lengthens to seven days, from 72 hours, the period the police can detain a person it suspects "may" be involved in a terrorist plot without charge. It makes it easier for the authorities to place legal restrictions on the movements of "terrorist suspects" who haven't been charged with let alone convicted of any criminal offense. Bill C-51 also creates a new criminal offense of "advocating" or "promoting" terrorism.

The *Globe*'s first editorial on Bill C-51 was published on February 1 under the headline "Parliament must reject Harper's secret policeman bill." It began by attacking Harper's propaganda drive to portray Canada as a country under siege by Islamic extremists led by ISIS. The editorial declared, "Under the cloud of fear produced by his repeated hyperbole about the scope and nature of the threat, he now wants to turn our domestic spy agency into something that looks disturbingly like a secret police force."

The *Globe* went on to warn of the threats posed by the additional powers CSIS agents will gain to break into people's homes, confiscate documents or other information and tamper with bank accounts. It also raised concern over the new advocacy and promotion of terrorism offence, writing, "Will it be illegal to show support for Hamas, a group the Harper government has designated as a terrorist organization? How much support will cross the line? That's a good question."

In a second editorial, published on February 5 and entitled "Anti-terrorism bill will unleash CSIS on a lot more than terrorists," the daily pointed to the effective criminalization of anything deemed to endanger the "security and territorial sovereignty" of Canada, or its "economic and financial stability." The *Globe* wrote, "If a terrorist blew up critical infrastructure—a pipeline, for instance—wouldn't that be terrorism? So what is this other class of security-underminer the bill refers to? A political party that advocates Quebec independence (there goes our 'territorial integrity')? Indian activists who disrupt a train line? Environmental activists denounced as radicals by a cabinet minister? These things are on a par with terrorism now?"

The editorial follows this up by acknowledging, “On close inspection, Bill C-51 is not an anti-terrorism bill. Fighting terrorism is its pretext; its language reveals a broader goal of allowing government departments, as well as CSIS, to act whenever they believe limply defined security threats ‘may’—not ‘will’—occur.”

The *Globe*’s denunciation of Bill C-51 stands out all the more given the opposition parties’ cowardly acquiescence to Harper’s bill. The trade union-based New Democrats (NDP) have repeatedly put off taking a clear position on whether they are for or against the bill. But the party leadership has signaled that what criticisms it does make will focus on the lack of independent “oversight” of the national security apparatus, not the new powers being given to it. The Liberals, meanwhile, have publicly declared that they will vote for the legislation even if the government rejects all of the amendments they intend to propose.

The *Globe*’s second editorial made a point of chastising the opposition parties for their failure to firmly oppose Bill C-51. It called the Liberal stance “a bit like buying a bull because you hope its excrement can be sold as perfume,” and remarked irritably that the NDP may yet “do its job and oppose the legislation.”

Anyone familiar with the *Globe and Mail* will know that it has strongly supported the Harper government during its nine years in office as part of its push for a more aggressive assertion of Canadian imperialist interests abroad and a more aggressive drive to dismantle public services and workers’ social rights at home.

This has included defending the Harper government’s increasing resort to authoritarian forms of rule. Indeed, in endorsing the re-election of the Conservatives in the May 2011 federal election, the *Globe*’s editors explicitly commended Harper’s “bullheadedness,” that is his readiness to run roughshod over opposition and traditional democratic norms in implementing the agenda of big business.

With such language, the *Globe* reaffirmed its support for Harper’s anti-democratic constitutional coup of 2008, where he prevailed on Canada’s unelected Governor General to shut down parliament so as to prevent the opposition parties from exercising their constitutional right to vote no-confidence in the government.

It also constituted an implicit stamp of approval for the brutal state crackdown on G-8 protesters in Toronto in 2010.

Since 2011, the *Globe* has repeatedly voiced support for the criminalization of working class opposition, including the Harper government’s repeated outlawing of strikes, including by Canada Post, Air Canada and CP Rail workers, and the massive police violence and draconian anti-protest law (Bill 78) the Quebec Liberal government deployed against the 2012 Quebec student strike.

But on this occasion, the *Globe and Mail* is concerned that Harper has dangerously overstepped the mark. The *Globe*’s

editors are acutely aware that there is mass popular disaffection with the political establishment and fear that so brazen an attack on democratic rights and one so manifestly based on fear-mongering will only feed the sentiment that the existing political order is impervious to the needs of working people and rigged on behalf of the rich and powerful.

It also fears that the government’s invocation of the terror threat to justify sweeping attacks on democratic rights will undermine support for Canada’s participation in the new Mideast war and more generally the aggressive use of Canada’s military to assert the interests of the financial elite on the world stage.

Above all, it fears the emergence of an opposition from the working class that ties resistance to the assault on public and social services and workers’ wages and jobs to opposition to the revival of Canadian militarism and the attack on basic democratic rights.

Its criticism of Harper’s Bill C-51 notwithstanding, the *Globe* and the entire ruling class would respond to the development of such a movement by mobilizing the full force of the state. Thus for all their criticisms of the government’s anti-democratic proposals, the *Globe* editorialists never raised a word of protest against Canada’s already existing draconian 2001 Anti-Terrorism Act, nor the vast buildup of the national security apparatus that has taken place since the turn of the century.

Nor was any mention made of the blanket surveillance of electronic communications carried out by Canada’s signals intelligence agency (the Communications Security Establishment), or the all-encompassing definition of “terrorism” in the 2001 law which already permits acts that disrupt “economic” and “national” security to be designated as terrorist acts. On the contrary, the *Globe* explicitly defended the current set-up, writing that, “Our existing laws and our society are strong enough to stand up to the threat of terrorism without compromising our values.”

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