

Canada ramps up anti-China campaign as US threatens action against Huawei

By Roger Jordan
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Canada's Liberal government and corporate media have ratcheted up their denunciations of China ahead of next week's World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Launched with the arrest December 1 by Canadian authorities of Meng Wanzhou, the chief financial officer of Huawei, China's largest technology firm, the campaign is aimed at bringing the Canadian ruling elite fully into line with US imperialism's aggressive course of confronting Beijing, both economically and militarily.

On Thursday, Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland declared that the Canadian delegation to Davos would raise the issue of two Canadians in Chinese custody with other attendees and appeal for them to speak out publicly against Beijing. Her reference is to former diplomat Michael Kovrig and businessman Michael Spavor, who were detained in China in the days following Meng's arrest and accused of endangering national security.

A third Canadian, Robert Schellenberg, who was recently sentenced to 15 years in prison on a drug conviction, had his sentence hastily increased to the death penalty last Monday in what the Canadian government says is further retaliation for Meng's arrest. Both Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Freeland have issued statements appealing for clemency for Schellenberg, with prime minister denouncing the application of the death penalty as "arbitrary."

Freeland boasted that Canada has already secured public statements denouncing China from the United States, Britain, the European Union, France and Germany, among others. For its part, China attacked Canada for internationalizing the issue of the three detained Canadians and demanded that Ottawa respect the sovereignty of China's courts.

Meng's arrest, coming the same day as US President Donald Trump met Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the G-20 summit to negotiate a solution to the US-China trade conflict, was unprecedented in its brazenness. Even former Liberal Deputy Prime Minister John Manley acknowledged that it may have been wiser to have quietly warned Meng not to fly through Canada so as to evade the US extradition. The Trump administration, which instigated Meng's arrest, is calling for her extradition on trumped-up charges of bank fraud related to Washington's illegal sanctions against Iran. If deported and convicted, Meng could face 30 years in prison.

The Canadian government feels it can act so provocatively because its demonization of China is part of a broader offensive against Beijing led by US imperialism. On Thursday, a report revealed that the US is considering charging Huawei with stealing trade secrets, in what would mark a major escalation of Washington's conflict with Beijing. German officials also indicated that Berlin is considering banning Huawei from its 5G network.

These moves come in the context of the intensification of Trump's drive to economically isolate China. Tariffs on \$200 billion worth of Chinese imports have been imposed by Trump, as well as a ban on US government agencies doing business with Huawei over national security concerns. This has been accompanied by comments from supporters of Trump's aggressive strategy calling for the US economy to "decouple" from trade with China, a policy that recalls the protectionism of the 1930s that played a major role in setting the stage for World War II.

The US ruling elite, supported by its Canadian ally, is determined to prevent China's rise as an economic rival, which is calling US global hegemony into

question. In doing so, Washington is not merely relying on economic means, but is more than ready to resort to all-out war. Last October, Vice President Mike Pence delivered a bellicose speech in which he railed against Chinese expansion and vowed that the US was preparing for a direct military conflict with China—a conflict which would be fought with nuclear weapons.

Having served as US imperialism's closest military-strategic partner for over seven decades, Canadian imperialism is playing a key role in this aggressive agenda. It has been intimately involved in US military operations in the Asia-Pacific since the Obama administration's "pivot" to Asia. This includes a secret agreement with the US military on the joint management of resources, and the deployment of Canadian ships and personnel to the highly volatile South China Sea and Korean Peninsula. In 2017, the Liberal government also identified China as a "global threat" in its new defence policy.

However, factions of the US and Canadian establishments, led by the military-intelligence chiefs and the corporate media, remain dissatisfied with Canada's supposed failure to go far enough in confronting Beijing. Underscoring the bipartisan character of the anti-China campaign in the US, Senator Mark Warner, vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, and Republican Senator Marco Rubio have both warned Canada that its failure to ban Huawei from its 5G network as the US, Australia and New Zealand have done would result in a downgrading of intelligence sharing between Washington and Ottawa.

Ward Elcock, former director of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, the country's primary spy agency, told the *Globe and Mail* Thursday that such threats from the US must be taken seriously. The same *Globe* article noted that assistant director of intelligence at CSIS, Michael Peirce, issued a warning to Canada's research universities last October about doing business with Huawei.

For some, even banning Huawei, which would cost Canadian telecommunications providers hundreds of millions of dollars to replace Huawei-made equipment, wouldn't go far enough. Writing in the *Toronto Star*, business columnist David Olive urged the Trudeau government to break off diplomatic ties with Beijing over their detention of Kovrig and Spavor. "China

needs to know in forceful ways that its continued brutal treatment of Canadians will come at a heavy price," Olive wrote. "This is a time for severing diplomatic relations with China. It's also appropriate for Ottawa to revoke its approval of the \$40-billion LNG Canada mega-project in B.C. unless state-owned PetroChina relinquishes its stake in the consortium."

In the neoconservative *National Post*, Kelly McParland attacked China for its "boorish, threatening and ill-tempered" behaviour.

The bourgeois press has further inflamed the dispute between Canada and China since Meng's arrest. Both the *National Post* and the *Globe* explicitly welcomed her detention as an opportunity to shift public opinion on Canada's policy to China. Although important sections of the ruling elite have been pushing for some time for a free trade agreement with Beijing to open up new markets for Canadian energy and raw material exports, the past several months have demonstrated that the overwhelming majority of the establishment stands full square behind Washington's provocative anti-China drive.

Incapable of appealing to the international working class to oppose the imperialist onslaught against China, the regime in Beijing, which represents the interests of a wealthy capitalist oligarchy, has reacted by whipping up reactionary nationalism. At a press conference Thursday, Chinese ambassador to Canada Lu Shaye vowed that Beijing would retaliate against Canada if it bans Huawei. "I hope Canadian officials and relevant authorities and bodies will make a wise decision on this issue," said Lu. "But if the Canadian government does ban Huawei from participating in the 5G networks, I believe there will be repercussions."

Responding to the Trudeau government's call for the release of the arrested Canadians, Lu denounced Canada for "white supremacy" and "Western egotism." Beijing also issued a travel warning for Chinese visitors to Canada.

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