

Canada rules out overture to China, vows to extradite Huawei CFO to US

By Roger Jordan
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Canada's Justin Trudeau-led Liberal government has rejected out of hand a plan to defuse tensions between Canada and China by using its powers under Canadian law to block extradition to the US of Meng Wanzhou, the chief financial officer of Chinese tech giant Huawei.

Relations between Ottawa and Beijing have dramatically deteriorated since Canadian authorities, acting at Washington's behest, seized Meng while she was changing planes in Vancouver last December 1. The daughter of Huawei's founder and principal shareholder, Meng is currently under house arrest awaiting the outcome of a hearing on a US request she be extradited to face trumped-up charges of circumventing US sanctions against Iran.

Last week, the *Globe and Mail* revealed that former Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chrétien was advocating in discussions with business leaders that Ottawa seek to mend fences with China by using its legal prerogative to shut down the Meng case and send her home.

Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland hastened to shoot the idea down, reiterating the government's phony claims that global geopolitics played no role in Meng's "lawful" arrest.

In the preceding weeks Chrétien had been widely touted in establishment circles as a possible special emissary to Beijing. Canada's prime minister from 1993 to 2004, Chrétien has numerous contacts in China's oligarchy and capitalist restorationist political elite due to his role in spearheading Canadian-Chinese business ties in the wake of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre and his family connections to the Desmarais clan. The billionaire Desmarais family were among the earliest western investors in China.

Those supporting dispatching Chrétien to Beijing had argued he would be well-positioned to plead for a reset in Canada-Chinese relations. Beijing has responded to Meng's arrest, and to Ottawa's initiation—again at Washington's urging—of an inquiry into Huawei's possible exclusion from the country's 5G network, by arresting former Canadian diplomat Michael Kovrig and businessman Michael Spavor on charges of undermining state security. Beijing has also restricted imports of Canadian canola and pork.

Speaking in Washington last Thursday after meeting with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Freeland declared that any

talk of releasing Meng would set a "very dangerous precedent." Canada, she insisted, must not "alter its behavior when it comes to honouring an extradition treaty in response to external pressure.

"We could easily find ourselves in a situation where, by acting in a single specific case, we could actually make all Canadians around the world less safe," Freeland continued. "And that is a responsibility I take very seriously."

Freeland's argumentation is absurd, given that Canada initiated "external pressure" on China when it chose to arrest Meng on Washington's behalf, knowing full well that her effective kidnapping could only be viewed by Beijing as a calculated provocation.

In reality, it is the aggressive policies pursued by the Trudeau government, including in multi-billion dollar modernization of Canada's armed forces, and the deepening of Canada's partnership with US imperialism in its aggressive policies around the world—including in its reckless military-strategic offensives against Russia and China and its drive for regime-change in Venezuela—that represent the chief danger to Canadian citizens, wherever they may be.

Freeland also repeated the government's lying claim that there has been "no political interference" in the Meng case.

In reality, Trudeau was informed about the plans to detain Meng at Vancouver airport several days ahead of time. She was seized on the very day that US President Donald Trump met Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the Buenos Aires G20 summit with the aim of bullying Beijing into accepting US trade demands or face the imposition of tariffs on hundreds of billions of dollars worth of goods and services.

Moreover in the half-year since her arrest, it has become ever more apparent that Huawei is in Washington's cross-hairs as part of an economic, diplomatic and military offensive aimed at thwarting China's ambitions to become a major player in cutting-edge high tech industries.

Trudeau and Freeland's determination to support the US in its confrontation with China is bound up with Canadian imperialism's dependence on American economic and military power in advancing its own predatory global interests. Since 2013, the Canadian Armed Forces has been party to a secret pact with the American military that allows personnel and

information sharing as part of a military build-up in the Asia-Pacific region aimed at isolating and preparing for war with China. Canadian warships and submarines have participated in provocative US “freedom of navigation” exercises in and around the South China Sea.

Freeland’s firm rejection of any rapprochement with China sets the stage for Trudeau to meet with Trump at the White House today. During their talks, Canada’s prime minister is expected to urge the US president to publicly pressure Beijing to release Kovrig and Spavor. Trudeau and Freeland are thus providing Trump with yet another pretext to escalate his reckless trade war with China, which threatens to plunge the world economy into a deep crisis and is laying the basis for a global military conflict.

Trudeau is also expected to confer with Trump about speedy passage of the renegotiated North American Free Trade Agreement, which goes even further than its predecessor in transforming the North American continent into a protectionist trade bloc, from which US and Canadian imperialism can vie with their rivals around the world for markets and profits. Rebranded by Trump as USMCA, the new agreement gives Washington a veto over any free trade deal that Canada or Mexico might strike with China.

None of this means that those in the capitalist establishment like Chrétien and former Business Council of Canada head John Manley who advocate Canada defy the US in the Meng affair represent any sort of progressive alternative. Their differences are simply over how best to advance the rapacious interests of Canadian imperialism.

Their efforts to avert the further unraveling of Canada-Chinese ties are driven by their fears that Canadian big business is too reliant on the US economy, and thus highly vulnerable to Washington’s turn to “America First” protectionism and unilateralism.

When the Trudeau government came to office in the fall of 2015, there was widespread support within ruling class circles for its objective of significantly expanding economic ties with China. Reversing the policy of the previous Conservative government, Canada joined the Chinese-led Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and announced exploratory talks with Beijing on a Canada-China free trade pact.

But long before Washington, to use Chrétien’s words, “trapped” Canada into arresting Meng, this had begun to unravel as a result of the intensifying conflict between Washington and Beijing.

The Trudeau government effectively abandoned its free trade initiative some 18 months ago, and the corporate media, spearheaded by the *Globe and Mail* and *National Post*, initiated an increasingly shrill campaign to portray China as a strategic threat and menace to “Canadian democracy.”

The Meng arrest and Beijing’s retaliatory moves have been used to effect a further shift in Canada’s foreign policy.

While under Trudeau and Freeland Canada has become ever

more deeply integrated with US aggression and intrigue the world over, important sections of the ruling elite are pressing for Canada to tuck even closer to the US in its anti-China drive.

The *Globe and Mail* has published numerous editorials denouncing China as the aggressor and portraying Canada as an innocent victim of Chinese bullying. It has also regularly turned over its columns to US political leaders like Democratic Senator Mark Warner and Republican Marco Rubio, so they can rant against the threat Huawei purportedly represents to US and western security. Last week, the *Globe* trumpeted the results of a poll it had commissioned and which it claimed shows that a majority of Canadians want Huawei banned from the country’s 5G network.

With Canada’s federal election only four months away, Conservative Party leader Andrew Scheer is staking out an even more hardline position vis-à-vis China than Trudeau. In a foreign policy speech last month, Scheer vowed to launch a complaint against Chinese trading practices at the World Trade Organization, restrict Chinese state-owned companies’ access to the Canadian market, and pull Canada out of the AIIB. Underscoring the incendiary implications of such steps, Scheer also denounced China as a threat to Canada’s “security and prosperity in the 21st century,” and promised to open negotiations with Trump on joining the US-led ballistic missile defence shield, which is aimed at making a nuclear war “winnable.”

For their part, the trade union-backed New Democrats have endorsed Meng’s detention, claiming they have confidence in the “rule of law” in Canada, and have signaled their support for banning Huawei from the country’s 5G network.

While remaining conspicuously silent on Canada’s military alignment with Washington against Beijing, the NDP and their union backers have championed economic nationalist and protectionist measures aimed at China. The most prominent example of this was the role played by leading union officials, like Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) President Hassan Yussuf and Unifor’s Jerry Dias, in supporting the Trudeau government during the NAFTA renegotiations. The CLC and United Steelworkers opposed Trump’s tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum imports with the argument that Canadian-produced steel and aluminum is needed for US warplanes and other weaponry.

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