

Canada's official opposition attacks Trudeau for "appeasing" China

By Roger Jordan
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Andrew Scheer, the leader of Canada's official opposition Conservative Party, denounced the Liberal government at a press conference Tuesday for practicing "appeasement" towards China. His inflammatory remarks, likening the Liberal government's policy towards Beijing to British imperialism's attempt to reach an accommodation with Nazi Germany in the late 1930s, marks a new high point in the anti-China campaign that has gripped the entire Canadian political establishment.

"Don't be fooled by Mr. Trudeau's phony statements about China right now," declared Scheer. "We have been raising the alarm about this government's failure to stand up for Canada and its policy of appeasement to the regime in the People's Republic of China."

Scheer, who made a point of publicly accepting a donation of 500,000 face masks from Taiwan last week, directed his comments at the Trudeau government's support for a Trump administration-led initiative to grant Taiwan observer status at this week's World Health Organization assembly. They were also aimed at Trudeau's public criticisms of China's handling of the coronavirus pandemic, which Scheer labelled disingenuous.

After the Liberal government indicated this week its support for an investigation into the World Health Organization and China's reaction to the initial coronavirus outbreak, Trudeau remarked, "I think as we move through this crisis ... we will have to be asking questions about the independence and the strength of those organizations... There will be some real questions around China, of course, in the coming months and years that need to be answered, and we will be part of that."

Trudeau's criticism of Beijing, albeit somewhat more restrained than Scheer's, is just the latest example of how Canada's entire ruling elite has swung full square behind Washington's aggressive bi-partisan anti-China campaign, which was launched with Obama's "Pivot to Asia."

North America's imperialist powers are now using the coronavirus pandemic to escalate their attacks on Beijing.

In close alliance with Trump's aggressive denunciation of

the Chinese authorities and calls from his far-right supporters to force Beijing to pay "reparations" for the damage done by COVID-19, the Canadian Macdonald-Laurier Institute (MLI) co-sponsored an open letter last month that labelled the coronavirus China's "Chernobyl moment." The letter, which was signed by Scheer and the two main contenders to succeed him as opposition leader, Erin O'Toole and Peter McKay, also attacked the WHO for allegedly downplaying the threat posed by the virus. (See: **Canadian elite promotes anti-China campaign over coronavirus**)

The vicious anti-China campaign is aimed in part at covering up the responsibility of the US and Canadian ruling elites for the devastating impact COVID-19 has had in North America. Contrary to the MLI's claims, China informed the WHO as early as January 3 about the existence of a new coronavirus and published the genome sequencing of the virus on January 11. The WHO issued its highest state of alert on January 30.

Yet Canadian authorities did nothing to prepare for the inevitable outbreak of infections, shown above all by their failure to purchase supplies of medical equipment and protective gear in time. Only on March 10 did Ottawa even formally ask the provinces about the availability of critical medical supplies and potential shortages. Later the same week, governments across Canada were announcing unprecedented lockdowns in a desperate attempt to prevent the rapid spread of COVID-19.

Beyond the immediate goal of blaming China for the current health, social, and economic crisis, the driving force of the anti-China campaign is Canadian imperialism's intimate military-strategic partnership with the United States. The Liberal government has aligned itself closely with Trump's economic and military push to isolate and prepare for war with China. The Trudeau government's conclusion last year of an updated version of the North American Free Trade Agreement with the US and Mexico was aimed at consolidating a North American trade bloc under Washington's leadership to confront its global rivals.

That this principally means Beijing was shown by the new deal's effective ban on free trade agreements with "non-market economies," a euphemism for China.

On behalf of the Trump administration, the Trudeau government also ordered the December 2018 arrest of Meng Wanzhou, the chief financial officer of Chinese tech giant Huawei, on the basis of bogus charges of violating Washington's sanctions on Iran. Beijing retaliated by detaining two Canadian citizens, Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, a fact that has been seized upon by the corporate media and right-wing politicians to bolster disingenuous claims that Canada is the target of Chinese "aggression" and "intimidation."

With support from Trump administration officials, who have threatened Canada with a downgrading of intelligence-sharing if it fails to fall into line, right-wing media outlets and Conservative politicians have demanded Ottawa ban Huawei from Canada's 5G network. The Liberal government is currently studying the issue.

Under the Liberals, Canada has also vastly expanded its military activities in the Asia-Pacific region, including in the highly contested South China Sea. The Trudeau government is increasing military spending by over 70 percent by 2026, and the military and leading defence policy experts are pushing for additional funds to upgrade the North American Aerospace Defence command (NORAD). This project will raise the question of integrating Canada into the United States' nuclear-capable ballistic missile defence shield and is viewed as critical to strengthening Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic, where China is seen as a direct competitor.

This record underscores the fact that, far from "appeasing" China as Scheer claims, the Trudeau government is playing an important role in supporting US imperialism's aggressive economic and military-strategic offensive against Beijing. The Stalinist Communist Party bureaucracy in China, which restored capitalism by viciously suppressing the working class during the late 1980s, has nothing to offer in opposition to this imperialist war drive but the whipping up of reactionary nationalism and militarism.

Even so, sections of the ruling elite believe Trudeau has not gone far enough and are demanding that Canada take an even harder line. In addition to Scheer, Alberta Premier Jason Kenney has spoken out in favour of "disconnecting" the Canadian economy from China and consolidating strategic production capabilities in North America. In remarks echoing Trump and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Kenney has declared that China must face a "great reckoning" for the COVID-19 pandemic.

Richard Fadden, the former head of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), the country's top domestic spy agency, was cited in a front-page *Globe and Mail* article this

week as saying that the planned purchase of a gold-mine in Canada's far north by a Chinese company represents a threat to Canada's national security and must be stopped. Michael Byers, a professor of international relations at the University of British Columbia who ran as a candidate for the New Democratic Party in the 2015 federal election, added that the potential takeover raises concerns of national sovereignty. Byers told the *Globe*, "As a very large powerful authoritarian state acquiring assets in the Canadian Arctic, that concern is legitimate."

Fadden added that gold should be included in the Canada-US strategic cooperation plan to ensure supplies and reduce dependence on China for militarily and economically crucial rare earths and metals. He noted that in addition to its economic value, gold plays a critical role in nuclear weapons technology. (See: **Canada's involvement in US-led war drive against China: an election non-issue**)

In the *National Post*, Derek Burney, a long-serving senior diplomat who was also chief of staff to Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, urged the government to take advantage of the mounting criticism of China over the coronavirus to escalate the simmering conflict over Meng. "The minister of justice should use all the power of his office to obtain a speedy verdict on the extradition of Meng Wanzhou," wrote Burney, who provided a lengthy list of inflammatory steps the Trudeau government should undertake. "Once the Meng extradition is resolved, summon the Chinese ambassador and give him an ultimatum demanding that the two Michaels be released within two weeks. Failing that, the ambassador will be declared persona non grata and expelled from Canada."

While all factions of the ruling elite support the campaign against China, the explosive character of the tactical differences over how far to go in supporting Trump's incendiary declarations cannot be underestimated. A recent editorial in the right-wing Post Media group of newspapers implicitly threatened Trudeau with removal from office if he fails to adopt a sufficiently hard line against Beijing. "Now that the pandemic has only heightened Canadians' concerns about China," stated the editorial, "Trudeau will need to pivot and decouple Canada from China. If he can't or won't do it, then Canadians may opt for another Prime Minister who can."

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