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**Limit Freedom of Expression**  
**and Criminalize Political Dissent**

*- Anna Di Carlo -*

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### **Trudeau Liberals' Anti-Democratic Electoral Reforms**

## **Government Endorses Police Plans to Limit Freedom of Expression and Criminalize Political Dissent**

- *Anna Di Carlo* -

On November 14, Minister of Democratic Institutions Karina Gould issued the government's Official Response to a senate committee report entitled *Controlling Foreign Influence in Canadian Elections*. The report of the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs particularly targets third parties as the potential agents of foreign electoral influence, and calls for heightened regulation of them. A "third party" is defined in the *Canada Elections Act* as "a person or a group, other than a candidate, registered party or electoral district association of a registered party."



Minister Gould expressed general support for the Senators' recommendations and said that she looks forward to working with the Senate committee on electoral legislation that the Liberals are expected to table before the end of the year. This indicates that the Liberal electoral legislation will be one step further along the dangerous course of putting police powers in place to intimidate, suppress and criminalize the expression and formation

of public political opinion.

The report of the Senate Standing Committee shows how electoral reforms are being enacted on the instructions of the intelligence agencies, whose main aim is to disinform Canadians by diverting attention from the sell-out and warmongering direction in which the country has embarked by blaming the Russians and other "foreign interference" for all the problems. The concern about "foreign interference" in the electoral process casts profoundly anti-democratic doubts and suspicion on people who do not share what the ruling elite consider "Canadian values," such as support for NATO and acceptance of capitalist liberal democracy. Registered political parties that stand against these values will be suspect, while it will be nigh impossible for "third parties," which include unions and non-governmental organizations fighting for a safe natural and social environment and economic and social justice, to express their opinions during an election without facing accusations that they are serving a foreign agenda. In the name of opposing "foreign interference" in the democratic process, foreign intelligence agencies and police powers are dictating what can and cannot be discussed in Canada.

The Senate report references a January 6, 2017 report from the U.S. Director of National Intelligence, jointly drafted by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the National Security Agency (NSA). The CIA-FBI-NSA report, entitled *Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent U.S. Elections*, states: "We assess Moscow will apply the lessons learned from its Putin-ordered campaign aimed at the U.S. presidential election to future influence efforts worldwide, including against U.S. allies and their election processes."



The U.S. spy agencies say the aim of the alleged Russian interference is "to influence U.S. public opinion [...] to advance its longstanding desire to undermine the U.S.-led liberal democratic order." The Russian campaign is described as a blend of "covert intelligence operations -- such as cyber activity -- with overt efforts by Russian Government agencies, state-funded media, third-party intermediaries, and paid social media users or 'trolls'."

One of the key operators identified by the FBI, CIA and NSA in the "overt campaign" is Russia Today (RT) America programming. The examples given of what constitutes "Russian" propaganda include the following:

- programs that highlight "criticism of alleged U.S. shortcomings in democracy and civil liberties."
- programs portraying "the U.S. electoral process as undemocratic [and reporting on] calls by U.S. protesters for the public to rise up and 'take the government back.'"
- from November 2012, "numerous reports on alleged U.S. election fraud and voting machine vulnerabilities contending that U.S. election results cannot be trusted and do not reflect the popular will."
- programs that "broadcast, hosted, and advertised third party candidate debates [*parties other than*

*the Democrats and Republicans -- TML Ed. Note]* and ran reporting supportive of the political agenda of these candidates."

- assertions that "the U.S. two-party system does not represent the views of at least one-third of the population and is a 'sham.'"

- 2012 documentaries about Occupy Wall Street that "framed the movement as a fight against 'the ruling class' and described 'the current U.S. political system as corrupt and dominated by corporations.'"

- reports that "characterize the United States as a 'surveillance state' and allege widespread infringements of civil liberties, police brutality, and drone use."

- reports that focus "on criticism of the U.S. economic system, U.S. currency policy, alleged Wall Street greed, and the U.S. national debt."

- programs that report on "anti-fracking ... highlighting environmental issues and the impact on public health."

- programs opposing "Western intervention in the Syrian conflict and blaming the West for waging 'information wars' against the Syrian Government."

### **Recommendations of Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs to Control Third Party Spending**

The Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs recommends that the Liberal Government should review and revise the *Canada Elections Act* particularly in regards to fund-raising by third parties and their communications on the internet and in social media.

Currently, the activities of third parties are only regulated if they spend money on election advertising during the official election campaign in an amount exceeding \$500. Once they exceed \$500, they must register with Elections Canada. The maximum amount a third party can spend in any riding is \$4,225 for a 37-day campaign, while the national limit is \$211,200 (2017 figures). Third parties must disclose contributions they receive during the six-month period prior to the election that paid for the advertising expenses they incur. These contributions are not subject to the same limits imposed on political parties and candidates. For example, a third party can receive funds from a corporation, while a candidate or a political party cannot. There is a prohibition against collusion between third parties and political parties or candidates to circumvent election expense limits, as well as collusion among third parties for the same purpose. Activities other than election advertising and related costs of production and distribution are not covered by the law.

The Senators are proposing that the six-month period be extended, without proposing exactly for how long third parties would have to report their contributions. This would leave the door open to violating the right to freedom of association, which necessarily includes freedom to raise funds for purposes approved by governing bodies without state scrutiny.

Furthermore, the Senators are suggesting that election spending limits should include not only election advertising, but other activities as well. For example, at this time, if a third party organizes a political rally, even if it specifically opposes a political party, it is not considered "election advertising" and is not captured by the law. The Senators expressed concern about this, as well as activities such as conducting polling.

The Senate is also proposing that the *Canada Elections Act* be reviewed to "modernize the regulation of third parties' involvement in elections to address present day realities, particularly



concerning election advertising made through internet-based communications and social media." Already, paid advertising through any medium, including websites and social media, is subject to regulation. What additionally the Senators are suggesting should be the target of the electoral law is thus far not specified.

The regulation of third party spending first emerged following the introduction of spending limits on political parties and candidates in 1974. This marked the first step in officially entrenching the privileged status of political parties within the electoral process and subjecting electoral political discourse to the law, in the name of protecting "free and fair elections." Since spending limits were set for political parties and candidates, it was argued that collusion to circumvent the limits should also be prohibited.

Organizations and individuals other than candidates and political parties were prohibited from conducting any election advertising, but a "good faith" provision was included under the *Elections Act* to protect political expression. The *Elections Act* could be used against political activities only if there was evidence of collusion with a political party to circumvent election spending limits. The "good faith" provision exempted activities aimed at "gaining support for views held ... on an issue of public policy, or for the purpose of advancing the aims of any organization or association, other than a political party or an organization or association of a partisan political character."



The first case of an organization being charged under the "third party" provisions occurred over 40 years ago and the approach of the courts to the charge reveals a drastic difference between the prevailing official view at that time and that today. During a by-election in Ottawa-Carleton, Daniel Roach, then-president of Local 767, Ontario Housing Corporation Employees' Union, an affiliate of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, rented a plane to tow a banner reading: "OHC Employees 767 CUPE Vote, but not Liberal." The banner flew on October 16, 1976, the same day that the CUPE local adopted a policy opposing the Liberal government's "Anti-Inflation Program," known as "Wage and Price Controls." This program was opposed by workers from coast to coast who held rallies, protests and marches against it. CPC(M-L) at that time raised the call to stop shifting the burden of the crisis onto the backs of the working class and people and Make the Rich Pay!

The Returning Officer for Ottawa-Carlton saw the banner flying overhead and called in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) to charge Roach with violating the two-year-old "third party" provision in the *Canada Elections Act*. Roach was acquitted of the charge and the Liberal government appealed, but the appellant judge dismissed the appeal and upheld the lower court's ruling.

The courts acknowledged that the banner directly opposed the Liberal Party. However, the judge argued that the banner was flown with the aim of publicizing the local's policy against wage and price controls and there was no evidence that the union was acting either directly or indirectly in collusion with another political party.

The court concluded: "The accused in this case was clearly expressing the views of his association

on an issue of public policy. [The law] must be interpreted having regard to the right to free public discussion, and if Parliament had intended to prohibit the act alleged against the accused the language used should have been much clearer."

To bolster its argument, the court referred to earlier judgments dealing with freedom of expression and political discourse. The ruling stated: "There can be no controversy that such institutions [government] derive their efficacy from the free public discussion of affairs, from criticism and answer and counter-criticism, from attack upon policy and administration and defence and counter-attack; from the freest and fullest analysis and examination from every point of view of political proposals. [...] Even within its legal limits, it is liable to abuse and grave abuse, and such abuse is constantly exemplified before our eyes; but it is axiomatic that the practice of this right of free public discussion of public affairs, notwithstanding its incidental mischiefs, is the breath of life for parliamentary institutions."

Thus, even before the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* was adopted in 1982, the fundamental right to freedom of speech was recognized as inherent to the right of the people to elect a government. Writing in 1957, Justice Abbott of the Supreme Court described "the right of candidates for Parliament or for a Legislature, and of citizens generally, to explain, criticize, debate and discuss in the freest possible manner such matters as qualification, the policies, and the political, economic and social principles advocated by such candidates or by the political parties or groups of which they may be members" as a right necessarily flowing from and implicit in the very existence of a parliament that is supposed to represent the people.

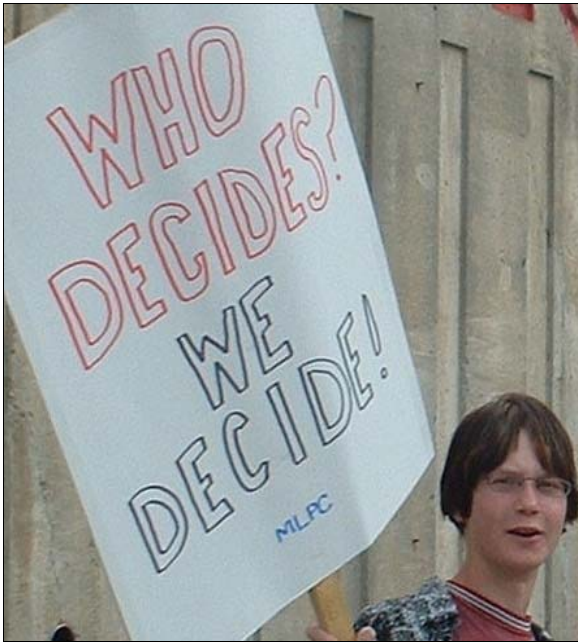
In 1983, the Liberal government of the day removed the "good faith" provision for third parties. A series of Charter Challenges ensued, resulting in the current regulation. The irony of post-Charter regulations on third parties and court challenges is that the courts have used the "reasonable limits" provisions of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* to justify and approve limitations on freedom of speech during elections. Even more ironically, they have argued that limits on what third parties can spend should necessarily be restricted, with reasonable limits, in order to prevent elections being overwhelmed by the wealthy. All the while, the cartel party system has adopted legislation turning the political parties of the rich into heavily-subsidized appendages of the state in receipt of tens of millions of dollars to dominate electoral discourse.

In the name of controlling how money is spent during elections, we have now come to a point where freedom of speech is severely curtailed through myriad regulations and controls precisely during the period that is said to be the most crucial period in the existing democratic process -- elections. The legislation to be released by the Liberals will present further restraints that capture political activities outside of the "official" electoral campaign period.

## **There Is an Alternative**

What is also lost in the arguments is that the party-dominated system of representative democracy has arrived at a road-block where it can only go in one of two directions.

One direction is to increasingly regulate, monitor, intimidate and police the political activities of the people to preserve the power and privilege of the political elite who represent the economically powerful. This course is pushing the Liberal establishment, with the support of the Conservatives and NDP, to take perilous shelter under police powers that curtail freedom of speech and criminalize political opinion. The mechanisms of electoral regulation that previously promised "free and fair" elections are as exhausted as the system itself.



The other direction in which the striving of the people for empowerment is pushing, is to eliminate all forms of privilege and power that are used to keep the people marginalized. It entails the introduction of mechanisms that will enable all citizens to participate in setting the agenda, selecting candidates and exercising control over the elected. This would entail ending the public funding of political parties and instead publicly financing an electoral process with a public authority that ensures all can participate as equals regardless of their membership in a political party, their wealth or social status. It requires fighting for the human right to engage in political discourse in order to humanize the natural and social environment. It is a matter of affirming the right to freedom of expression on a new historical basis -- the basis which affirms

this not as a civil right which has already been taken away but as a human right without which neither human beings nor their society can flourish.




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### Round 5 of NAFTA Negotiations

## Violations of National Sovereignty Continue

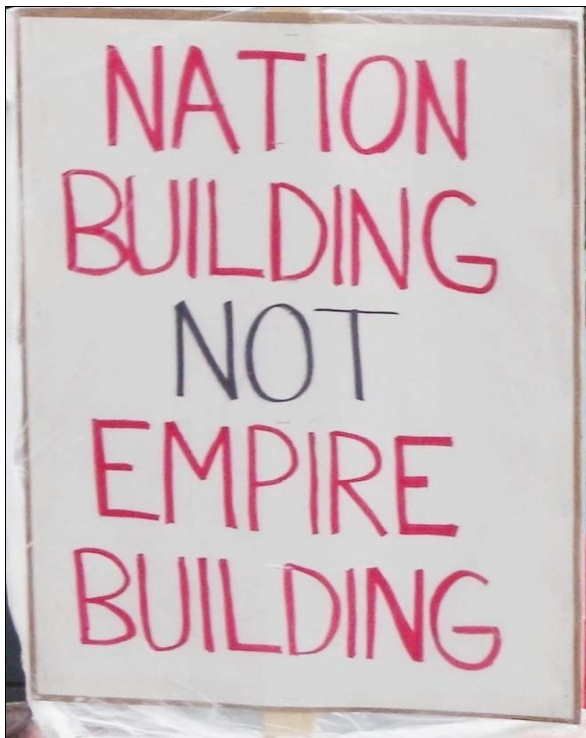


Official NAFTA negotiations continued with Round 5 in Mexico City from November 17 to 21. Contention and collusion between and amongst the monopolies and their spokespersons was once again on public display at the end of the round with the negotiators presenting a show of "pessimism" about reaching a deal. This pessimism hides the reality that Mexico, Canada and the United States continue to work out how to eliminate any and all barriers to the monopolies in the areas where agreement has been reached, while making a big show about areas of disagreement to give the appearance that each country's delegation is standing up for their own national interest as well as for the public interests and workers' rights. In fact, each government and their negotiators



are standing up for private interests which are seeking to make as much headway as possible at the expense of one another while violations of national sovereignty continue.

Reports quote Canada's Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland saying much of the "good progress" achieved (in Round 5) was in areas "highly technical" in nature and are where integration is taking place. She says the three parties -- Canada, the U.S. and Mexico -- agreed to provisions on anti-corruption and good regulatory practices, telecommunications, areas relating to sanitation, and customs and trade facilitation. These are areas where not only the economies of the three countries but also the decision-making processes, are being integrated into a new United States of North American Monopolies. This is a Fortress North America at the disposal of the U.S. imperialist superpower, which considers itself "indispensable." The bitter irony is that far from upholding any national interest, decision-making takes place on a supra-national basis and thus, *ipso facto*, eliminates any sovereign right of the countries involved to exercise control over any decisions which affect them. Everything is done to make sure there is no national sovereign body to pass or maintain regulations identified as "barriers to trade." Nothing must interfere with the "right" of the monopolies to regulate themselves and pursue their aim to maximize profits.



Reports that the U.S. wants to expand an existing "tracing list" to demand more products -- including all steel -- originate in North America, show how it seeks to dominate all strategic sectors of the economy and also how much trouble this causes. The article "NAFTA Rules of Origin" by Lawrence Friedman, describes the tracing list in the automotive sector in the following way:

For example, electric motors are traced material. Thus, if a car seat manufacturer uses a non-originating motor in the production of a car seat it sells to a passenger vehicle manufacturer, the VNM [value of non-originating materials] of the vehicle must include the value of the non-originating motor. The corollary to this is that if the non-originating materials are not on the tracing list, they are treated as originating. This produces a benefit for some parts of the industry. Tracing, therefore, places a difficult burden on

producers to collect cost data from suppliers.

Upon hearing this demand to expand the tracing list, the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, made up of auto monopolies operating globally, including GM and Ford, warned that such requirements are too onerous. CBC reports the Alliance saying, "An expanded tracing list would actually lead to further job losses as companies could simply move manufacturing offshore to China, use whatever parts they want, and then export the car back to the U.S. paying a relatively marginal tariff of just 2.5 per cent."

For their part, the global steel monopolies with mills in North America have expressed concern about competing with Chinese steel. They suggest that an expanded tracing list would be a boon for their businesses. Hidden in the claims to trace and ensure the purchase of North American steel is the fact that the global steel monopolies with mills in the U.S. continue to dump steel made in the U.S. in Canada. Dumping steel made in the U.S. in Canada has in fact increased with the destruction of Canadian integrated steel production such as at Stelco in Hamilton. A similar



situation is unfolding against Algoma Steel in Sault Ste. Marie.

All of it shows that the suggestion that disagreements are manifestations of the delegations of the three countries defending their sovereign interests is a cover-up for the wheeling and dealing going on to further the private interests involved. It does not serve the interests of the working class and people of any of the three countries to take sides. They must fight to turn the direction of the economy around and on this basis defend the rights of all.



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## **Get Canada Out of NAFTA! For Us Accountability Begins at Home!**

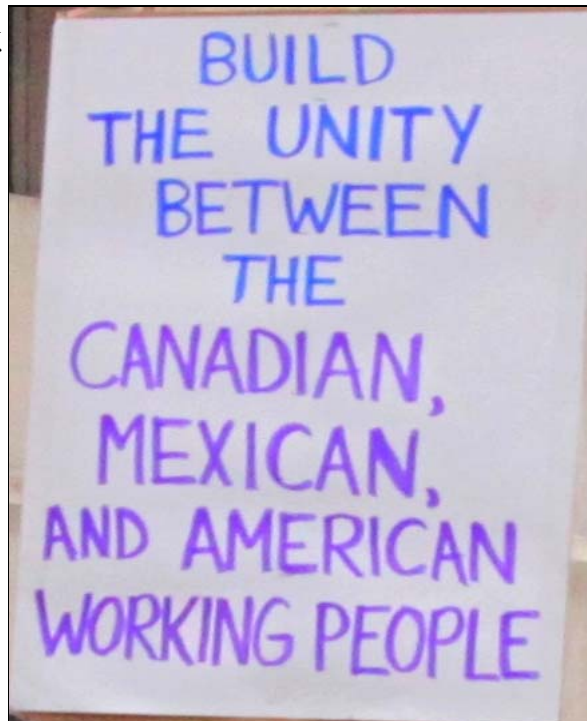
**- Enver Villamizar -**



**Demonstration in Mexico City, August 16, 2017, denounces NAFTA talks and demands a completely different approach based on mutual benefit.**

A peculiar position is being pushed in the NAFTA negotiations that the role of the working people of Canada and the U.S. is to rally behind their own ruling class and the monopolies they represent supposedly to raise working standards in Mexico. This line that the workers of Canada and the U.S. have a responsibility to look out for Mexican workers is based on the notion that they are incapable of settling scores with their own ruling class and require the intervention of the governments of Canada and the United States to make sure their government looks out for them.

NAFTA is presented as guilty of failing to raise the standards of Mexicans -- something it was supposedly designed to do but which remains an unfulfilled promise. This particular nonsense about NAFTA is not discussed or exposed as a lie. In fact NAFTA always was and is about enshrining the rights of the monopolies by



violating the rights of workers and destroying national sovereignty. The basic aim of NAFTA has indeed been fulfilled. However, the success of fulfilling its real aim is being used to claim that while the concocted aim of raising Mexican working standards has gone unfulfilled, somehow today an "opportunity" exists to do so and to "make NAFTA more fair."

The alleged way to make NAFTA more fair is for the working people of Canada and certain unions to join with the Trudeau/Trump agenda to push the Mexican government to implement the new arrangements in labour relations passed in February as constitutional amendments, and to raise wages. This imperialist farce is occurring amidst the growing discontent and resistance of the Mexican workers to widespread violations of their rights by some of the very same monopolies that now claim they too support labour reforms in Mexico, including a higher minimum wage.

The Mexican working people are not pathetic victims. They are a contingent of the international working class that has fought tooth and nail the brutal violence of the global monopolies and their own government. Whether it was the garment monopolies, which used Mexico and its *maquiladoras* (sweat shops) as a means to make super profits from brutal working conditions and pay-the-rich schemes of corrupt governments, or today the voracious Canadian mining monopolies and their murderous security forces and those of the state, the Mexican working people are second to none in affirming their rights -- a tradition those who come to Canada as migrant workers bring with them.

Working people in Mexico are in fact at this very moment intervening in Mexico's presidential election to be held in July 2018. It is part of their fight to block the continuing neo-liberal project for Mexico and break the stranglehold that NAFTA has given the monopolies over the country's affairs. If a new Mexican government comes to power that seeks to abrogate NAFTA and restrict the appetite of the monopolies for profit, blood and sweat, will these same champions of Mexican workers cheer or will they claim that this is not good for the Mexican workers and demand regime change?

## **Accountability Begins at Home**

Canadians can make a contribution to the fight of the Mexican people by affirming their own rights and holding to account their own governments and monopolies for their violations of rights at home and abroad. They can do so by demanding Canada get out of NAFTA and enter into relations with the U.S., Mexico and other countries based on mutual benefit and development of the peoples and economies of each country.

Canadians are not served by being diverted from addressing the concrete conditions and problems facing Canada. Targeting Mexico and its problems serves to divide the working people by presenting the problem as "out there" beyond our reach and control. Furthermore, it places the Canadian people in league with their own ruling class and the monopolies it represents and serves, which only care about maximizing their profits and doing whatever is required to do so, including violating the rights of all at home and abroad.

To create dangerous illusions that changes to labour laws in Mexico will hold the global monopolies to account and affirm workers' rights is to take Canadians from the task of holding the ruling imperialist elite to account and affirming the rights of all right here in Canada. In front of our eyes, labour and other laws in Canada are being strengthened and manipulated to be more effective in restricting workers' right to decide their wages and working conditions, to criminalize their resistance, steal what belongs to them by right such as their pensions, and to pay the rich from the treasuries of the state. The bankruptcy laws are routinely unleashed against workers; the federal Liberals with Trudeau and Morneau in control want to pass Bill C-27 to destroy defined benefit pensions; and the Ontario government recently criminalized the strike of 12,000 striking college

faculty, ordering them back to work so that it does not have to increase the funding of colleges to the existing Canadian standard.



## Hold Canadian Mining Monopolies to Account for Suppression of Mexican Workers' Rights!



While much is being said in Canada about the need for labour law reform in Mexico, Canadian mining monopolies there whose owners and executives are protected by the Canadian government in many ways are responsible for the ongoing suppression of workers' rights.

On November 18 two Mexican citizens, Victor and Marcelino Sahuanitla Peña, who were involved in actions to oppose the activities of the Canadian-owned Media Luna gold mine in the municipality of Cocula in the state of Guerrero, were killed by armed thugs. The mine is currently the centre of a conflict between the company, its "protection union" and the Mexican state agencies on one side, and striking workers who want to get rid of the "protection union" and join the National Union of Mine, Metal, Steel and Allied Workers of the Mexican Republic, known as Los Mineros, on the other.[1]

The Media Luna mine is owned by Canada's Torex Gold Resources. The company's President, CEO and founder is Fred Stanford, a long-time Canadian mining executive and former president of Ontario operations of Vale Inco. He has been a member of the board of directors of Cambrian College, Laurentian University and the Northern Centre for Advanced Technology (NORCAT), a private non-profit commercial incubator also based in Sudbury, Ontario. The workers are joined by the local community, which is also opposed to the actions of the company in their area.

Showing the role of the Mexican government and armed forces of the state in the conflict, just days before the killing on November 13, scores of armed federal police forces (*Gendarmería*, which report to the army) arrived at the mine. They took over the site in a show of force against the workers who had set up a blockade. By so doing, they set the stage for violent attacks. On the night of November 18, an armed group affiliated with the company's "protection union" attacked the



Media Luna strikers at a roadblock the workers had set up near the mine and the two brothers were killed.

The striking workers report that Mexican armed forces briefly detained the attackers, but released them shortly afterwards, Los Mineros writes. The union also alleges that the armed attackers are linked to the same group responsible for the kidnapping and murders of 43 student-teachers known as the *Ayotzinapa 43* in Guerrero state in 2014 for which only cover-ups by the Mexican government have emerged and utter silence by the Canadian government, especially during the state visit of Mexican President Peña Nieto to Canada in 2016.



**Families of striking miners.**

In a statement entitled "Torex Clarifies Media Misinformation," the company claimed that the strike was "illegal" so as to paint itself as the victim of the workers and set the stage for the Mexican police agencies to intervene to crush the workers' resistance. "With regards to operations at the Company's ELG Mine, there is no strike. There is an illegal blockade," the company wrote. "Operations have been shut down at the ELG Mine site since November 3rd as a result of the illegal blockade, which arose because of a dispute between the union that legally represents the Company's workers (the 'CTM Union') and the union that wants to represent the workers (the 'Miners Union')," the company stated.

It adds, "Resolution of this dispute is now in the hands of the Labour Board, which the Company believes is working to engage the parties, including the Miners Union, in the legal process established to resolve this dispute and select a date for the union vote to take place. The federal *Gendarmerie* continues to be present at the ELG Mine for the protection of the Company's assets."

Clearly the company is hoping that using the Labour Board will take the initiative out of the workers' hands and give it to the Board and the agencies of the state, and provide a justification for the Mexican government to crush the workers' blockade.

As for those workers killed, the company dedicated just one line: "The two men were not employees of the Company."

## **Note**

1. A "protection union" is a mechanism in Mexican labour law that permits companies operating in Mexico to establish a company union, which is used to violate workers' rights to choose their own union or have a say over their wages and working conditions. In some cases, the union and the contract are established before the company begins operations to undermine any collective actions of the workers and to try to eliminate resistance in the form of strikes or grievances.





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## For Your Information

# Changes to Labour Law and Minimum Wage in Mexico

On February 24, a presidential decree amending Articles 107 and 123 of the Constitution of the United Mexican States came into force. The law firm Littler Mendelson provides the following summary of the reforms in the decree:

"a. Labor disputes will now be processed before federal or state labor courts that will be part of the Judicial Power of the Federation of each State. These courts will replace the current administrative Conciliation and Arbitration Labor Boards that resolve employer-employee disputes and are part of the Executive Branch of the Government.

"b. The Decree establishes a required pre-litigation conciliation hearing held at 'specialized and impartial Conciliation Centers' that will be created in each state. The conciliation stage will consist of a single mandatory hearing, with date and time expeditiously scheduled. Subsequent conciliation meetings will be held at the request of the parties.

"c. At the federal level, the conciliatory function will be performed by an independent agency, which will also be responsible for the registration of local- and federal-level collective bargaining agreements, registration of unions, and all related administrative processes. This agency will have its own legal authority, assets and liabilities, and full technical, operational, budgetary decision and management autonomy.

"d. In terms of collective bargaining, the Decree ensures free, individual, and confidential employee voting for resolution of inter-union disputes, execution of a collective bargaining agreement, and election of union leaders.

"In accordance with these constitutional reforms, Mexico's Congress and state legislatures must correspondingly amend secondary laws to conform to the Decree within one year of enactment. This means that the Federal Labor Law should be reformed within one year to adapt to the reforms contained in the Decree. Until these changes are made, both individual and collective labor disputes (as well as disputes between unions, the registration and administration of collective bargaining agreements, and the internal labor regulations) will continue to be administered by the local and federal Conciliation and Arbitration Boards."

## International Apparel Monopolies Support Labour Law Changes

This past July, fourteen brand name companies that sell textile and footwear products manufactured in Mexico and the Fair Labor Association (FLA) jointly released a letter to the Mexican government declaring their support for the constitutional reform of the Mexican labour court system.

The joint letter was an initiative of the Mexico Committee composed of international brands involved in procurement and/or manufacturing in Mexico, the FLA, the IndustriALL Global Union and the Canada-based Maquila Solidarity Network (RSM). The RSM acts as secretariat for the Committee.

The companies that signed the July 2017 letter are: adidas, American Eagle Outfitters, C&A, Fanatics Apparel, Fruit of the Loom, Gildan, Inditex (Zara), New Balance, Nike, Patagonia, Puma, PVH, Under Armour and VF Corporation.

The letter, addressed to the Secretary of Labor and Social Welfare, Alfonso Navarrete Prida, points out that this group of companies is pleased with constitutional amendments and the creation of new institutions as a part of the judicial system to replace the tripartite conciliation and arbitration boards, paving the way for Mexican workers to more fully enjoy their internationally recognized rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining, protected by ILO Conventions 87 and 98 and for a stronger Mexican labour justice system.

## Changes to Minimum Wage

In a speech delivered November 21, the day NAFTA negotiations closed, Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto announced that his government was raising the Mexican minimum wage as of December 1, 2017 to 88.36 pesos per day from 80.04 pesos (U.S.\$4.70 per day from U.S.\$4.20) -- a 10.4 per cent increase. He said that over the last five years (corresponding to his term in office) the minimum wage has increased by 20 per cent in real terms and 45 per cent nominally, something that has not happened in 30 years.

Nothing is mentioned about the rising cost of living. More importantly, according to a report in the *Financial Times*, the minimum wage does not apply to 60 per cent of Mexicans because they work in the "informal sector."

(Maquila Solidarity Network, *El Economista*)



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## **Crisis of Trudeau Government's Indigenous Policy Deepens** **Families of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Refuse to be Sidelined**

**- Philip Fernandez -**



**Families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls attend vigil on Parliament Hill, October 4, 2017. Trudeau, who attended the vigil was sharply held to account for the lack of progress by the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.**

Despite the best intentions of honest Commissioners and staff, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls continues to be plagued with problems. More than 22 staff members, including lawyers and one Commissioner, have resigned or been fired. Calls have emerged for the Inquiry's terms to be reset and to have more time and money to do its work. The families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls have stepped up their demand that the Inquiry fulfill their agenda, not that of the government.

A group called Families for Justice, which represents 18 families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, has hired a law firm and on November 20 it announced legal action to seek standing at the Inquiry to ensure that their voices and the voices of their deceased loved ones are not dismissed.

In this way, the families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls are continuing their fight to have an Inquiry that meets their demands. They are seeking to make sure that the Trudeau government does not sabotage the National Inquiry for which they fought so very hard.

But they face another development which presages more disappointment. On November 17, the National Inquiry announced that U.S. multinational public relations monopoly Hill+Knowlton has been retained to assist the Inquiry with improving its "communications" with the victims' families and allied organizations.



This is a mind-boggling development. Hill+Knowlton is known for its fraudulent and corrupt practices. It is the same outfit that staged the infamous "fake news" in which a 15-year-old Kuwaiti girl was reported to have seen invading Iraqi soldiers ripping Kuwaiti babies out of incubators and killing them by throwing them on the ground. This sensational "news story" was used to legitimate the U.S. imperialists' 1991 invasion of Iraq. Hill+Knowlton was paid U.S.\$10 million for services rendered.



**Sisters in Spirit vigil, Vancouver, October 4, 2017.**



Of greater importance, however, is the fact that if the Inquiry truly intended to do the work the families of missing and murdered girls and women want, there would be no "communications" problem. It does not add to the credibility of the Trudeau government's intentions that the Prime Minister and various members of the Liberal caucus speak about the important concerns of Indigenous peoples in a manner that reflects the following "tips" from an April 2016 article by Hill+Knowlton on how to "manage communications":

Sunlight disinfects. The sooner you tell your own bad news, the better. But tell it all. Otherwise, the drip, drip, drip can drag on for months.

Respect other points of view. Compassion and empathy generate good will. You can be sorry for harm that comes to others without accepting or assigning blame.

Denials supercharge headlines. Instead, focus the message on positives: what you have done, what you are doing, what you are committed to do and why.

Such "communications" have nothing to do with improving relations between human beings or improving the lives of the Indigenous families seeking justice.



**Sisters in Spirit vigil, Toronto, October 4, 2017.**

The "communications" problem arises because Indigenous peoples refuse to accept the status quo or the continued dismissal of their concerns. Since the launch of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Women and Girls in September 2016, the Trudeau Liberals have attempted to limit its scope in a manner that makes it ineffective. This is accompanied by the din that the government and the Prime Minister himself want to see justice done. It is a most crass expression of Liberal hypocrisy. If by justice the government means to quench the thirst of the mining, energy and other monopolies which covet the resources that lie beneath the surface of lands presently assigned to the Indigenous peoples as if these lands do not belong to them by right, then the Liberals can be considered well-intentioned.

If the National Inquiry is intended to investigate the causes of the historical violence against Indigenous women and girls it must investigate the Canadian state and its institutions that continue to perpetrate that violence. It must provide redress for the historical injustices against Indigenous peoples and remedy the dire social and economic conditions that foment the circumstances in which the abuse of women and girls in particular takes place.





**Sisters in Spirit vigil, Saskatoon, October 4, 2017.**

To date, all attempts to hide the crisis in which the National Inquiry is mired have failed. Does the Trudeau government really believe that Hill+Knowlton will succeed in covering up the reality in the face of the truth told by the militant families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, supported by the entire working class and people? Is this all about slick PR to achieve goals the government cannot get the people to agree to voluntarily through the free exchange of ideas and discourse? Or is it just another cowardly but convenient way to pay the rich in the name of high ideals? Either way, this measure will backfire on the government, and earn it even more contempt.

In November 2015, Indigenous women in Val-d'Or, Quebec brought forward complaints against local police of sexual assault. No charges have been laid against any of the 28 police officers accused after an investigation carried out by no less than the police themselves. This sends yet another clear and brutal message that governments and those who purport to "serve and protect" consider Indigenous women and girls dispensable and that those who treat them as such can get away with it. Different churches and governments tried to cover up the abuse in mission schools and orphanages and churches for decades and, even after all the scandals could no longer be contained, they have done everything in their power to protect the high and mighty.



**Sisters in Spirit vigil, Montreal, October 4, 2017.**



The issue facing the Inquiry is the refusal of the government to right historical wrongs and establish nation-to-nation relations in a manner which fully upholds the hereditary rights of the Indigenous peoples of this country. Instead, it is protecting the state-organized systemic abuse, violence and even the long-suspected cover-up of why the cases of so many missing and murdered women and girls remain unresolved. This feeds the suspicion that powerful interests are being protected no matter the cost and diverts attention from the aim to accomplish what past governments have failed to do and that is to complete the expropriation of the lands and resources which are the birthright of the Indigenous peoples.

It is only the struggle of the peoples themselves which does not permit the Liberals to extinguish the hereditary, treaty and constitutional rights of Indigenous peoples with impunity.

It is the fight that the Indigenous people are waging to see justice done through the Inquiry that is key, not some new "communications strategy" cooked up by Hill+Knowlton.



**Sisters in Spirit vigil, St. Mary's First Nation, New Brunswick, October 4, 2017.**



**Sisters in Spirit vigil, Windsor, October 4, 2017.**



**Make Canada a Zone for Peace!**

## **No to Meddling in the Affairs of Other Countries in the Name of Peacekeeping!**

**- Hilary LeBlanc -**



On November 15 Prime Minister Trudeau revealed his government's commitments to United Nations peacekeeping at a UN Defence Ministerial Conference in Vancouver. The Conference, while hosted by Canada, was spearheaded by the United States in keeping with its demand for the reform of UN peacekeeping to serve its empire building aims.[1]

In making the announcement Prime Minister Trudeau stated: "The nature of conflict has changed. So too have the demands of peace operations. Discrete offerings and one-off commitments have gotten us this far, but we won't be able to deliver true, transformative change without a real institutional change. Canada is prepared to help lead that charge; to rethink how we engage, not just where we engage; to close the institutional gaps that prevent us from being even more effective agents of peace in a world that sorely needs it. That's how we'll protect the world's children, empower women and girls, and build a more peaceful and a more prosperous world."

He followed with a number of specific announcements of the role Canada will play.[2]

The United Nations as a whole is in dire need of reform so that the aspirations contained in its Charter which oppose aggression and interfering in the affairs of member states can be realized and so that the rights of all nations can be affirmed. This was and continues to be the demand of humanity following World War II. However this is not what the reforms being pushed by Canada and the U.S. and other big powers are about. Instead, Canada is cherry-picking how many and where up to 600 Canadian troops will be deployed based on what serves the interests of the U.S. and NATO. The talk of changed conditions and "being more effective agents of peace" hides that it is about where Canada will deploy its troops rather than about making any contribution to peace.

From its inception peacekeeping has been used by the big powers to intervene in the affairs of UN member states.[3] In the period following the Cold War in particular, in the name of "human security" or "responsibility to protect" Canada has given itself the role of pushing the United Nations to legitimize aggression against other countries and of meddling in the internal affairs of other countries in the name of peacekeeping or what are now being called peace operations.[4]

Canada's latest announcements are said to show that it has returned to peacekeeping, following the Harper government's approach which from the get-go emphasized the use of force in international affairs, outside of the UN and without prior authorization from the Security Council. The Trudeau government is trying to resurrect the notion that Canada will seek a UN Security Council stamp of approval to use force in international affairs. When this fails, however, Canada is giving itself the option to operate outside of the UN in association with the U.S. or anyone else with the same aims, with whom it decides to ally, as it is doing with its sanctions and other aggressive actions against Venezuela.

Canadians do not support meddling in the internal affairs of other countries or the use of force to settle conflicts. Canadians' support for the idea of peacekeeping is based on their opposition to the use of force to settle conflicts between countries. It is based on the notion that Canada can play a role of active neutrality to assist parties to a conflict, either between nations or within a nation, by upholding established agreements between the warring parties and opposing aggression and bullying. Claims from high ranks of the military in Canada and internationally that there are no longer such agreements to uphold, whether true or not, are asserted to justify manipulating Canadians' support for this notion of peacekeeping and directing it towards support for aggression in the name of peacekeeping.

This is the case in Ukraine where Canada is intervening on one side of a civil conflict while at the same time participating in NATO's build-up of forces threatening Russia. It is a tightrope which the Trudeau government walks in its attempts to hide its aims. It is under U.S.-led NATO command, militarizing Eastern Europe and overseeing specifically the militarization of Latvia by foreign forces. It is putting more and more of Canada's territory in the grip of the U.S. military to use for placement of its missiles and troops. It is also seeking a role for itself in conflicts in Asia as the U.S. is said to be withdrawing, in particular targeting the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the most spurious manner with claims that it is threatening Canada. In fact it is Canada that is threatening the DPRK as it continues to be a party with the U.S. to the Korean war, refusing to push the U.S. to sign a peace treaty with the DPRK -- something the UN could help to enforce if a legitimate peace could be established. This is not however what Canada is demanding. Its whole program, aligned with that of the U.S., is to not permit a peace to be established and instead push for regime change while using the pretext of the "North Korean threat" to justify joining U.S. missile defence.

The more the government talks about peace while it incites, prepares for and participates in war, the more Canadians will come to terms with these nefarious activities and put forward their own demand for Canada to be a factor for peace in world affairs.



## Notes

1. See section "[Revamping Peacekeeping to Meet War Aims](#)," *TML Weekly* November 21, 2015.
2. During the conference Trudeau specifically announced the launch of the "Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers" created in partnership



with retired General Roméo Dallaire.

He also announced the "Elsie Initiative on Women in Peace Operations," saying "Through this, Canada and partner nations will provide assistance and incentives to increase the proportion of women deployed in UN peace operations."

Trudeau also stated that Canada will make a range of specialized military capabilities available to the UN. This will include a "Quick Reaction Force" with approximately 200 troops and accompanying equipment, and an Aviation Task Force of armed helicopters and tactical airlift support "to address critical gaps in the UN's ability to transport troops, equipment, and supplies to their missions."

Canada will also establish "new training programs designed to enhance the overall effectiveness of UN operations. This will include the establishment of a Canadian Training and Advisory Team to work with a partner nation before and during its deployments to peace operations, as well as contributions to UN centres, schools, and mobile training teams."

3. See "Myth of Canada the Peacemaker," Supplement, *TML Weekly* October 22, 2016.

4. See "'Peace Operations Strategy' for Foreign Occupation," *TML Weekly* February 6, 2016.



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## Imperialists' Morbid Preoccupation with Defeat on Display at Halifax War Conference



**During the Halifax International Security Forum the people of Halifax affirm No Harbour for War!**

The Halifax International Security Forum met in Halifax, Nova Scotia from November 17 to 19. The annual conference brought together over three hundred participants from more than 80 countries to discuss the theme: Peace? Prosperity? Principle? Securing What Purpose?

The theme reflects the crisis facing the imperialist system as the much longed-for peace, prosperity and lack of any principles haunts them. The peace promised by the imperialist powers following the fall of the Soviet Union has not emerged. The global economy is facing more serious and regular crises. The failure of the imperialist ruling elites to live up to their promises that a free market

economy, multi-party elections and "human rights" would bring freedom, peace and prosperity chips away at the fraud that this period represents the end of history and the only option is liberal democracy. This causes nightmares for the imperialists as do the heroic advances made by the peoples' forces in showing that history has indeed not come to an end.

Most notable was the opening speech delivered by the Forum's President Peter Van Praagh who began by revealing the imperialists' guilty conscience when he placed the forum in the context of the centenary of the Halifax explosion which took place on December 6, 1917. On that date, the SS *Mont Blanc*, a French ship loaded with ammunitions and explosives on its way to France from New York via Halifax, collided with the SS *Imo*, a Norwegian vessel in the Narrows, the strait connecting the upper Halifax Harbour to Bedford Basin. This explosion killed 2,000 people, injuring another 9,000. The blast was the largest man-made explosion prior to the development of nuclear weapons. A tsunami created by the blast wiped out the community of Mi'kmaq First Nations people who had lived in the Tufts Cove area for generations.

According to Van Praagh it "was the Halifax Explosion that in many ways brought home to North America the reality of the War in Europe." What Van Praagh did not say is that it brought home the reality that the imperialist system which gives rise to war between rivals causes grave suffering to the peoples of the world. Then turning truth on its head he stated that "1917 was also the year that brought the United States into the war, ensuring its outcome."



The refusal to deal with the Great October Revolution which took place on November 7, 1917 and established soviet power, shows the inability of the imperialists and their spokespeople to come to terms with the role that the people, in this case the Russian people, played in ending that imperialist slaughter by overthrowing their rulers and taking Russia out of the war. Instead of even recognizing this fact Van Praagh sought to bury it and said the Russian revolution was the first "great rival system" to "liberal democratic capitalism" in the 20th century. This clearly shows that for the imperialists and their henchmen they only see potential rivals and not human beings aspiring for a new and modern society. They cannot see the future because they think everyone is like them.

For good measure, to make sure Canadians do not identify with the Great October Socialist Revolution but instead with war criminals and genocide, he added that 1917 was "the same year that a young David Ben Gurion arrived in Nova Scotia to train with a British battalion that would eventually make its way to the Holy Land, the Balfour Declaration that would set in motion seismic changes in The Middle East was issued 100 years ago this month."

The Forum and its agenda represent the imperialist world which is in utter crisis. It cannot justify its existence and has set for itself the impossible task of securing its rule amidst all the contradictions inherent within it. The Forum's agenda reflects the morbid preoccupation with defeat of one section of the ruling class internationally amidst perceived threats to its existence. Within this the role of the people, their fight for peace, democracy and their rights also become threats to their existence.





Van Praagh closed his opening remarks stating: "As China challenges, as Russia interferes, as North Korea threatens, and as international terrorism continues all at a time that the world adapts to a new style of American leadership, the conversations held this weekend will, indeed, have some bearing on how future generations 100 years from now judge how we identified and secured our common purpose."

Common purpose is precisely what the ruling class cannot attain, yet it holds forums such as these to try and try again to unite its own warring factions for fear of losing everything.

Halgionians, as they have since its inception, rallied outside the Forum holding high the banner of peace, for an anti-war government and for Canada to get out of the warmongering NATO alliance. Their refusal to permit the warmongers to plot and scheme under cover of the Trudeau government's warm embrace and security apparatus shows that indeed, one hundred years later, the people of Halifax affirm No Harbour for War!



## Note

### 1. HALIFAX INTERNATIONAL SECURITY FORUM 2017 DRAFT TOPICAL AGENDA

#### Plenary Sessions (On-the-Record)

Peace? Prosperity? Principle? Securing What Purpose?

Nukes: The Fire and the Fury Weaponizing Capital: One Belt, One Road, One Way

Making Peace with Women

Rapprochement with Russia: Post-Putin Prep

Satellite Armies: The Race in Space

Rebuilding the Middle East: From Civil War to Civil Society

Climate Change: Houston, We Have a Solution

**Large Group Sessions (Off-the-Record)**

Real Conflict Solutions: The World After Vancouver

North Korea: Jaw Jaw or War War?

The Uninvited Voter: Rigged by Cyber

ISIS: Did We Win?

India -- China Relations

Living and Dying in Russia's Neighborhood

**Small Group Sessions (Off-the-Record)**

Afghanistan, Afghanistan

AI: Awesome Initiative or Apocalypse Impending?

Arab Spring, Hope Eternal

Cyber Rules Tomorrow

Earthquakes, Volcanoes, and Floods: Who You Gonna Call?

Four Famines: Food For Thought is Not Enough

From Belfast to Baghdad: The Evolution of Terrorism

GCC: Gulf of Cooperation?

The Geopolitics of Energy: What's New Under the Sun?

Immigration: The Canadian Fix

Including Africa: Lessons to Learn

Intelligence: From Spying to Lying

Israel: A Century After Balfour

Japan's Strategic Options

Make Latin America Great Again

Merkel and Macron: The Axis of Europe



The Press: Responsibility to Inform (honestly, completely)

Securing the Seas: Asia's Troubled Waters

Soft, Smart, and Hard: Balancing Power

Southeast Europe Today

(UN)civil Wars: Bringing Peace Home

Where is My Home? The Refugee Question

Who the People? The Future of Democracy

Who's Afraid of Global Trade?



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