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Urgent Need to Renew the Democratic Process

Liberals Limit Debate on Amendments to Electoral Law

- Anna Di Carlo -

On May 23, the Liberal government used its time allocation powers to limit debate in the House of Commons on Bill C-76, *An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other Acts and to make certain consequential amendments*. The bill was referred to the Committee on Procedure and House Affairs (PROC) on the same day, having been subjected to no substantive discussion at second reading. The exchanges in the House of Commons focused primarily on questions about why the Liberals introduced the legislation at such a late date, the failure of the Liberals to implement their promise to end the first-past-the-post system, and the debate limitation. Having limited debate at second reading, the Liberals say they look forward to "robust discussion" in the 10-member PROC.

Commenting on the limiting of debate and the failure of the Liberals to bring the other cartel parties into the drafting of the legislation, NDP MP Robert Aubin stated: "I unfortunately feel like I am acting in an old movie because the government seems to be assuming it does not need a consensus. The government is using our old parliamentary system to its advantage since that system allows the political party that holds a majority in the House to bulldoze -- and I do not think that is too strong a term -- its agenda through, rather than striving to reach a consensus."

The Conservative official opposition introduced a motion to decline second reading. The motion, which was defeated, argued "the Bill fails to address the high error rate in the National Register of Electors, and the high rate of erroneous Voter Identification Cards, reported at 986,613 instances in the 2015 election, and does nothing to deal with foreign interference in Canadian elections because the Bill proposes to double the total maximum third party spending amount allowed during the writ period and to continue to allow unlimited contributions in the period prior to the pre-writ period."

The Conservative opposition to the Liberal Party's restoration of pre-Harper voter identification requirements is serving as a foil for the Liberals to present themselves as the defenders of democracy who listen to the people. They dare to do this



notwithstanding their about-face on ending the first-past-the-post system so as to make the voting system more representative. Acting Minister of Democratic Institutions Scott Brison had the gall to tell the House of Commons, "The Harper Conservatives did not listen to reason. [...] Unlike the Conservatives, we are listening to Canadians. We want Canadians to be able to participate in our democracy."

Brison made this claim after citing self-servingly examples of opposition to the 2014 *Fair Elections Act*. He noted that 160 academics signed a *National Post* editorial stating that the Conservative legislation would "damage the institution at the heart of our country's democracy: voting in federal elections." He quoted then Chief Electoral Officer Marc Mayrand who stated that it would "undermine [the electoral law's] stated purpose and won't serve Canadians well." He referred to five *Globe and Mail* editorials which called for the withdrawal of the *Fair Elections Act*.

Brison was conspicuously silent about editorials and comments against Bill C-76, particularly concerning its lack of any amendments that would require political parties to respect privacy standards, starting with the standard of obtaining informed consent. As concerns this matter, in a *Huffington Post* interview, former Chief Electoral Officer Marc Mayrand questioned the refusal of political parties to subject themselves to privacy legislation: "How can they pretend to impose all sorts of rules on Facebook and Google and all other social media when they are declining to have them apply to themselves?" Mayrand said that there are "universal principles about privacy" that the government is ignoring. Referring to the robocall scandal in the 2011 general election where a Conservative Party list of non-supporters was used to steer them to wrong locations for voting, Mayrand said "Robocall was a breach of privacy when you think about it. It's somebody downloading a list from the database of a party, so that was a significant breach." He said, "We've all heard about people signing petitions and suddenly finding their way into the database of political parties, I don't think that those people signing a petition necessarily meant to consent to have their data collected and being used by political entities." On the matter of privacy, Acting Minister Brison told the House of Commons that he hopes that PROC will revisit the issue of "privacy and political parties and provide recommendations on the issue." Less than a year ago the committee studied the matter and "recommended no changes," he said. "I think all members would recognize that the ground has shifted on this issue and that it bears revisiting by PROC. PROC represents all parties, so it makes a great deal of sense for it to be the vehicle to do a deeper dive into this," he said.

Bill C-76 will introduce the requirement that political parties post their privacy policies on their websites in order to attain registration. However, the problem of privacy and how data about electors is used will not be resolved through Bill C-76, nor through the introduction of more stringent regulations subordinating political parties to privacy laws, such as the *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act*. The problem lies in an electoral process dominated by a cartel of state-financed political parties, each striving for power for themselves. They depoliticize the people and target them for manipulation as they try to win against their rivals. Requirements for stronger privacy policies will only become another avenue for the cartel parties to attack one another as well as marginalize and criminalize small parties and independent candidates for one thing or another.

The Marxist-Leninist Party of Canada bases itself on the principle that political parties should not come to power at all. Their aim should be the politicization and involvement of the people in political affairs and making decisions about what happens in the society. Canadians are more and more disgusted by these self-serving antics and recognize that something different is required to get out of this morass.

The Liberals' notice of closure of debate on Bill C-76 and their suggestion that PROC is the right place for the bill to be scrutinized, is another ill-advised attempt to get away with their habit of

making sure those things they do not want Canadians to see are simply made to disappear. They hope that simply denying the existence of a problem will make it go away even though that never happens.

For example, in Ontario the provincial Liberal government sought to prevent debate on the reforms to Ontario's electoral laws it brought forward in 2016 by moving the changes to committee even before second reading. After this, public debate on the legislation was effectively quashed and only now are many of the anti-democratic changes coming to light as working people, their unions and independent candidates seek to make their voices heard in the election. They face much more stringent limits on how they can participate and raise funds under threat of violating the law, while the cartel parties have given themselves public financing in the form of a per-vote subsidy to the tune of nearly \$20 million!^[1] In this respect, the participation of small parties and independent candidates in



elections deserves everyone's attention and support. The experience in Ontario is showing how important it is to oppose any electoral reforms which strengthen the power and privilege of the cartel parties while expanding police powers over the participation of the people, small parties and independents. By supporting those who are fighting to ensure the voice of the working people is heard, a definite statement can be made against what the Trudeau government is attempting to do.

Note

1. In Ontario a per-vote subsidy was brought in beginning in 2017. In 2017 alone the parties in the Legislature and the Green Party received a total of roughly \$12,873,915. The amounts each received were based on the number of votes they received in the 2014 Ontario election. The Liberals, PCs and NDP agreed to consult on the legislation with the Green Party so as to make it appear democratic. Meanwhile the other 17 political parties registered in Ontario were given no say.



Undemocratic Talk about Political Party Privilege

"[P]olitical parties play a unique role within Canadian democracy, educating and mobilizing the electorate" says one of the Liberal government's backgrounders on Bill C-76, *An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other Acts and to make certain consequential amendments*. This abridged rendition of the role political parties are supposed to fulfill in a system of party governance is so token it stands as an example of how the cartel parties do *not* educate the electorate. It is also cowardly because it omits to mention that the only thing for which the establishment parties mobilize the electorate is to vote.

Having asserted the unique role of political parties in educating and mobilizing the electorate, the backgrounder implies this role would be impeded if they do not have special privileges in regard to collecting data about the electors:

"Historically, political parties have relied on information provided to them by voters, and by Elections Canada, when communicating with Canadians about issues, events, and engagement opportunities. C-76, if passed, will ensure political parties are doing their part to protect Canadians' personal information, resulting in greater transparency about the ways political parties collect, secure and use data," the government backgrounder says.[1]

The information provided in this backgrounder is so paltry as to raise the question of whether it even intends to be taken seriously. But, given the contents of Bill C-76, the government seems to think that it can in this way justify the untrammled privilege of the establishment parties to compile data about the electorate and to stand above the law on this matter. The political parties, the biggest violators of the right to informed consent, will be transformed into the protectors of personal data. Meanwhile all political parties, even those who do not build elector data-bases and engage in voter surveillance, will be subjected to regulation and monitoring of their political affairs. Bill C-76 will require political parties to file privacy statements with Elections Canada and publish the statements on their websites.[2]



In the 1970s, official doctrine on the role of political parties started to be elaborated. At that time, when the political parties had fallen into disrepute, they started to be given legal recognition. It had become clear that the political parties could not raise enough funds on the basis of their own members to get themselves elected and they started lobbying for changes to electoral laws in a manner that would accord themselves an array of privileges. This included free broadcasting time and reimbursement for election expenses from the public purse, preferentially allocated to parties in the service of the establishment.

Here is how the role of political parties was defined in the British parliamentary system in the late 1970s: "Without [political parties] democracy withers and decays. Their role is all pervasive. They provide the men and women, and the policies for all levels of government ... The parties in opposition have the responsibility of scrutinizing and checking all actions of the Executive. Parties are the people's watchdog, the guardian of our liberties. At election times it is they who run the campaigns and whose job it is to give the voters a clear-cut choice between different men and different measures. At all times they are the vital link between the government and the governed. Their function is to maximize the participation of the people in decision-making at all levels of government. In short they are the mainspring of all the processes of democracy. If parties fail, whether from lack of resources or vision, democracy itself will fail."[3]

In Canada, in 1992 similar statements were made to argue the need for increased state funding of political parties. Increased state-funding for political parties was proposed as the cure for the people's low opinion of the big parties and a means to restore the credibility of the so-called representative democracy.

A study by the 1992 Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing noted the failings of Canadian parties in the education and mobilization of the people behind a vision for the society and suggested this was due to lack of resources. "If the parties do not have resources to think about their concepts of a liberal, conservative or socialist society, who will do such

thinking? To have a rich political debate we need intelligent party platforms. Public subsidy of party activity should therefore extend beyond the election period to include the regular activity of the parties. In particular the 'thinking' or policy roles of parties should be emphasized, by ensuring that a larger portion of the annual public subsidy is directed toward party foundations whose main activity would be to think about policies, rather than organize ridings."^[4]

Notes

1. "Empowering political parties to better protect Canadians' Privacy," Backgrounder, Minister for Democratic Institutions, April 30, 2018.

2. The government backgrounder states:

"If passed, C-76 will require that political parties have a publicly available, easily understandable policy for the protection of personal information containing the following:

- a statement outlining how and what information is collected;
- a statement on how the party will protect personal information;
- a statement informing Canadians on how the party will use personal information and under what circumstances personal information may be sold;
- a statement on employee training regarding the collection and use of personal information;
- a statement on the collection and use of personal information from online activity and the party's use of cookies on its website; and
- the name and contact information of a designated person to whom privacy concerns can be addressed.

"C-76 will also require political parties to submit their privacy policy as part of their application for registration with Elections Canada and [they] will have to maintain it to keep their registered status. They will also have to make it publicly available on their website."

3. Report of the Committee on Financial Aid to Political Parties, Great Britain, 1976.

4. Issues in Party and Election Finance in Canada, Volume 5, *Research Studies*, Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing.



State Funding Makes Political Parties Appendages of the State

The *Canada Elections Act* sets out the requirements and regulations governing the registration of political parties. The Liberal amendments to the electoral law introduce a new requirement: political parties must file privacy statements with Elections Canada before they can be registered. The other requirements remain unchanged. All parties must have 250 members, a leader, an official agent and an auditor, and meet financial reporting requirements, including reporting on all contributions over \$20. The starting point, however, is that to be registered a political party must have an electoral aim. The *Canada Elections Act* requires a political party seeking official status to declare that "one of the party's fundamental purposes is to participate in public affairs by

endorsing one or more of its members as candidates and supporting their election." A political party that has any other aim, such as educating and mobilizing the members of the polity to represent and empower themselves, would not qualify for registration and, to participate in an election, would have to register as a third party.

Once registered, all political parties are supposedly equal before the law. In practice, the *Canada Elections Act* favours those parties that have a chance of forming a majority government on the basis of a framework of prejudices set behind the backs of Canadians. It divides the parties into "major" and "minor," and further categorizes them as "fringe," "extremist" or simply irrelevant. Those accorded "major" status are permitted into the sanctum of the privileged. Individuals and organizations that agree to promote these prejudices are also permitted into the inner circles of the elite, which is collectively working to deprive the polity of its own outlook. Others are relegated to the sidelines on the basis of declarations such as those of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau who effectively said he could not end the first-past-the-post system because it might lead to a breach of this inner sanctum.[1]

All the corruption we see in the political sphere stems from this aim set by the state for political parties. The corruption begins with state-funding of the "major" parties. This was instituted because the parties could not raise enough money to finance themselves without depending on wealthy donors and corporations or on trade unions and this was viewed as a corrupting influence. This public financing of political parties was presented as a way of enhancing the democratic process and opposing corruption.

It continues to be presented in this way, even though corruption has only worsened and taken on new forms. Various schemes have been enacted to transform the major parties into dependants of the state. While tax credits are provided for donations to all registered political parties, other schemes of direct financing were established in such a way that only the parties of the establishment could ever access them. These range from generous and constantly increasing election campaign reimbursements through to per-vote subsidies. Public resources include not only funds from the state treasury but the use of publicly subsidized airwaves which are presently regulated by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission.

Because the state funds the parties, the state makes them account for themselves to Elections Canada based on criteria set by the state. Elections Canada, which administers the registration of political parties and the disbursement of funds to them, is expected to ensure that frivolous parties or organizations masquerading as parties do not get access to state funds. It administers how political parties fulfill their registration requirements which permit a party to issue political contribution tax-receipts, have its name on the ballot and receive state funds, if it qualifies. The law sets out, for instance, how many members a political party must have to qualify for registration. It falls upon Elections Canada to verify the membership submitted. This includes sending out letters to party members asking them to confirm that they are in fact members of the party. For a variety of reasons this is offensive and intimidating and goes against the fundamental right to freedom of conscience and freedom of association free from state monitoring.

The more political parties have become entrenched in election law as the holders of special privileges, the more state interference in the internal affairs of political parties has grown. Examples of this abound. For instance, when a registered political party elects a leader, it is required to report to Elections Canada, while party leadership contestants must file financial returns with Elections Canada. Contributions to party leadership contestants, totalling millions of dollars, are tax-deductible and all donors over \$200 must be reported and made public. All of this interference in the internal affairs of a political party is justified on the grounds that the leader may become the prime minister of the country and the political parties are more than willing to accept such interference because of the privileges they receive. Modern democratic organizational principle dictates that a political party should be accountable to its membership, not to outside

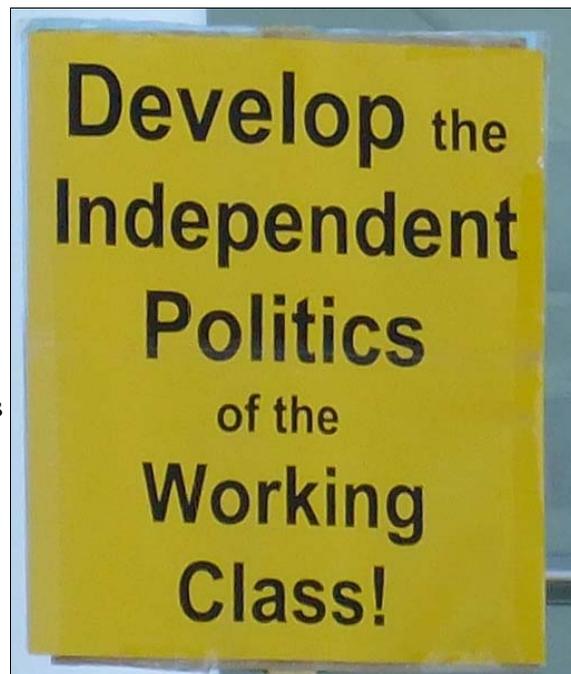
interests, especially, one might add, the state. In any case, the process by which an individual can become the prime minister of a country by virtue of being the leader of a party which holds a majority of seats is anathema to a legislative body which claims to be democratic. Its leader should be elected by its members.

All of this interference and regulation of political parties and its members violates the democratic principle of freedom of association and non-interference by the state in the affairs of political parties. It stems from the fact that the political parties of the establishment have become appendages of the state, heavily reliant and dependent on state financing. Even though it is generally only the "major" political parties that enjoy the privileges of state-funding, the impact of the rules and regulations and state interference in the internal affairs affects all political parties. It underscores that political freedom of association and organization needs a system in which public funding is provided for the electoral process, not political parties.

So long as public resources are provided to any registered political party, the Marxist-Leninist Party of Canada thinks the key democratic principle to be upheld is the one which stipulates that all candidates are equal and thus public resources should be provided on an equal basis, not on the basis of a self-serving formula decided by some parties which provides those same parties with more funding than others.

What exists in Canada is a system of hierarchical preferences given to the political parties in the House of Commons, through a web of electoral laws and broadcasting rules and regulations that they themselves have enacted. The political parties with seats in the Parliament enjoy privileged positions. The fact that they can use these privileged positions to make self-serving decisions to provide themselves with greater resources than others is rejected with contempt by Canadians who suffer the abuse of privileged positions of power every day of their lives.

The fact that this democracy is called representative is to cover up who precisely represents whom. The facts belie the implication that candidates and elected representatives and governments represent "the people." Any impartial inquiry into who sets the agenda, what issues are given priority, and how the concerns and problems of the people and their aspirations for social progress are blocked from taking their rightful place in the public sphere and being given the importance they merit, will reveal the truth of the matter. At the end of the day, the facts show that Canadians are not equal under the law in Canada. For purposes of elections, they are divided into those who are governed and those who are slated to be governors and, when electors cast their vote, they hand over their authority to make decisions to representatives of the "Sovereign."



In Canada, the "Sovereign" is not "the people" or their legislatures for that matter, as people are led to believe. The "Sovereign" is the one who wields the Sovereign Power through the Royal Prerogative. This refers to the discretionary powers wielded in the name of national security, the national interest and Canadian values. These are actually incorporated into what is called the person of state, nominally the Queen of England, but which are in fact supranational private interests, mainly in the camp of the Anglo-American imperialists, fighting over control at home and abroad.

These discretionary powers are also known as "police powers." It is the discretionary powers in the hands of the executive -- the prime minister and cabinet ministers and appointees of all kinds, as well as the Supreme Court of Canada which issues judgments that interpret the Constitution. These police powers set policy, especially the definition of rights, the direction of the economy and Canada's participation in matters related to war and peace, as well as regulations and information. When it comes to the people's participation in the affairs of the polity, they set what constitutes "reasonable limits" on rights and activities of all kinds. So too when it comes to the activities of rivals they seek to eliminate.

Note

1. Explaining why promised electoral reforms would not be implemented, Prime Minister Trudeau said, "If we were to make a change or risk a change that would augment individual voices -- that would augment extremist voices and activist voices that don't get to sit within a party that figures out what's best for the whole future of the country, like the three existing parties do -- I think we would be entering a period of instability and uncertainty. And we'd be putting at risk the very thing that makes us luckier than anyone on the planet." When questioned, he said: "If you have a party that represents fringe voices, or the periphery of our perspectives and they hold 10, 15, 20 seats in the House, they end up holding the balance of power. The strength of our democracy is, we have to pull people together into big parties that have all the diversity of Canada, and who learn to get along. You don't learn to amplify small voices, you learn to listen to all voices. And that's why we have a system that works so well."

Major Agenda Item for NAFTA Negotiations

Fueling the U.S. War Machine

- K.C. Adams -

Further integration of North American energy infrastructure and resources under the control of the U.S.-dominated energy monopolies is a major agenda item for the NAFTA renegotiations. NAFTA already obligates Canada to maintain energy exports to the U.S. in proportion to total energy production. This guarantees the U.S. access to Canada's energy resources so long as NAFTA remains in force. Essentially, this obligation under NAFTA reserves oil sands bitumen as a secure source of supply for the United States and its ever-expanding war machine. How the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain bitumen pipeline fits into this NAFTA commitment is being hidden under talk of new markets in Asia and lessening Canada's dependence on the U.S. market.

How the oil sands should be developed to serve Fortress North America, wage war against global competitors and destroy those who will not submit to U.S. dictate has already been decided through secret agreements dictated by the most powerful imperialist private interests. In 2006, two secret summits took place, one in Houston, Texas and another in Banff, Alberta to discuss and decide Canada's role in defending "North American energy security."

In Houston, U.S. and Canadian oil executives and government officials set a program to achieve a five-fold increase in Alberta oil sands production. Amongst other things, the oil sands would replace Venezuela's supply to the U.S. Gulf Coast refineries. The Banff meeting later in the year brought together top oil and other executives and the military establishment of the U.S., Canada and Mexico. Both these secret meetings set an agenda for the economic future of Canada, where decisions were made to divert billions of dollars from the socialized economy for investments in the oil sands to secure energy supply for Fortress North America and U.S. imperialism's war preparations.

The U.S. West Coast, a key location of military bases and production of weapons of mass destruction, is not linked through pipelines to the main U.S. oil fields in Texas and North Dakota. Its traditional sources in California and Alaska are in decline. California in particular relies on imports from West Asia and South America for the majority of its oil. While the U.S. has doubled its oil production in the past ten years mainly from the fracking of tight shale oil, this increased production is centred in Texas and North Dakota. With oil production on the West Coast in decline, the existing Kinder Morgan pipeline and its expansion provide access to the Alberta oil sands.



The U.S. military itself is the single largest consumer of energy in the world. This is so without even considering the additional massive oil and other energy required to produce its weapons, military vehicles, war planes and ships etc. The U.S. military under the rule of exception for national security and classified information has a blanket exemption in all international climate agreements and its carbon footprint cannot be counted.

The U.S. war machine and the production of weapons of mass destruction are significant factors in energy consumption on the U.S. West Coast, particularly in California but also in Washington state. California is second only to Virginia in total official military spending at \$49.6 billion a year, and Washington is seventh at \$12.6 billion a year.

California and Washington state are home to major naval bases including a shipyard in Washington. San Diego and Puget Sound are amongst the most heavily militarized centres in the world. Major war production also takes place in both states, including fighter jets and ballistic missiles with monopoly arms manufacturers Boeing, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, Northrop Grumman and others having sprawling facilities on the U.S. West Coast.

The 2018 *National Defense Authorization Act* allots \$700 billion for the U.S. war budget, up from \$619 billion the previous year. This includes new navy ships, warplanes, vehicles, missiles, bombs and ammunition that further increase the demand for oil both in war production and active duty.



The decisions made behind the backs of Canadians and Albertans to divert billions from the Canadian socialized economy to provide raw resources and energy security for the U.S. war machine within an integrated Fortress North America do not serve a Canadian nation-building project or the right to decide of working people and the Indigenous peoples.

Within this political annexation and subservience, the Canadian state at all levels guarantees the profit of the big oil companies with grants, exemptions from taxes, the seizure of Canada's raw material, the provision of educated and skilled workers and necessary infrastructure. The Trudeau government's plan to indemnify Kinder Morgan from any potential losses from building and operating the Trans Mountain expansion project is yet another pay-the-rich scheme and is an indication of what really

goes on in NAFTA renegotiations as well. Powerful private interests decided in secret on the direction of Canada's energy sector. The federal government has been mobilized to enforce that decision using its authority and police powers. Opposition to the direction and specifically to the Kinder Morgan pipeline expansion is being criminalized with Trudeau declaring that the project is in the national interest.

Canadians' outlook is disinformed into believing that governments formed by different parties make policy to serve the national interest, making it difficult for people to grasp the essence of what is happening in the energy sector, the economy generally and what role the pipeline expansion is designed to play. The media use their power to promote what the private interests have decided and to depoliticize public opinion which is not allowed to coalesce around a new direction in opposition to war, war preparations and annexation into U.S. imperialism's system of states.



But Canadian working people are not powerless in the face of the situation. They can build their own independent institutions and voice. They can unite with one another in discussion and actions with analysis to oppose what they see as wrong and find out what needs to be done for the country to step out in a new direction of self-reliance and nation-building in defiance of U.S. imperialism, where through democratic renewal the people have the power to decide and Canada is made a zone for peace with an anti-war government.

Matters of Concern for the Workers' Movement

Rio Tinto Group Concerned with "Resurgence of Resource Nationalism"

- André Bédard -



Graphic on Quebec United Steelworkers facebook page points out that ABI lockout deprives Hydro Quebec and the people of Quebec of \$604,464/day.

The global financial/industrial cartel Rio Tinto together with Alcoa have locked out 1,030 aluminum workers from their smelter in Becancour Quebec. The two companies are pressuring the workers to make concessions on a host of issues but that is not all. The lockout is also directed at squeezing the Quebec government for even lower prices for state-supplied electricity and other concessions and at limiting the supply of aluminum on world markets in the short term to force higher prices.

The Rio Tinto Group is no minor imperialist oligopoly. "Last year, Rio Tinto was responsible for half of the total cash returns across the mining sector," CEO Jean-Sebastien Jacques recently boasted. Always on the prowl to enlarge its empire, Rio Tinto engages in such nefarious activities as the lockout in Quebec and threats against governments everywhere to toe the company line or face unspecified consequences.

Rio Tinto expropriates the value workers produce and then uses it in part to defend its private interests in opposition to the people's interests. Politics is the concentrated expression of economics and, where Rio Tinto's private economic interests reside, so must those it supports and finances as its political representatives. And if that proves insufficient, it can call upon the military and espionage services of the Anglo-U.S. imperialists and their mercenaries to engage in violent regime change to remove anyone, or any political force, that seeks a new direction or even to improve the well-being of the people and guarantee their rights, such as the right to benefit from their own land, resources and work.

Speaking at a Bank of America Merrill Lynch conference in Miami on May 15, Rio Tinto CEO Jacques expressed concern with "a resurgence of resource nationalism" and the efforts of certain governments "to get a greater share of their mineral wealth -- most times to the detriment of private companies."

"From the [Democratic Republic of the Congo -- DRC] and South Africa to Mongolia and Australia, [resource nationalism] is gaining momentum," he said, but added that he was "optimistic that common sense in all those cases would prevail."

He told the Bank of America conference that major private mining companies, including Rio Tinto, operating in the DRC, Africa's top copper producer and source of over 60 per cent of the global cobalt supply, "are vigorously fighting a new mining code." He said the fresh legislation strips away a stability clause protecting existing investments from changes to the fiscal and customs' regime for 10 years, introduces a 50 per cent windfall profits tax and gives powers to the mines minister to hike royalties on minerals considered strategic.



"It all began in Indonesia," the CEO said, "which imposed new rules on the exports of unprocessed ore early last year. Tanzania followed suit imposing two months later a ban on exports of gold concentrates. Something similar happened in South Africa, which last year unveiled a revised mining code that would have imposed a one per cent tax on mining companies' revenues -- as opposed to their profits, as is common."

He called on other imperialist resource cartels to unite in ever larger, more powerful oligopolies or a sort of "United Nations of the mining industry to tackle rising resource nationalism" and forcefully confront certain "challenging jurisdictions." The reports from the conference did not go

into details as to what battle plans Jacques and others were plotting to defeat the "resurgence of resource nationalism" but the threats were palpable.

The CEO failed to mention that global cartels such as Rio Tinto rarely pay any corporate income tax and only minimal royalty fees. The oligopolies hire hundreds of tax accountants who are expert at moving gross income around within a cartel's hundreds of company holdings to reduce the apparent particular company profit to near zero. In some cases, a cartel will borrow at generous interest rates from one of its own lending institutions located outside the country sometimes in a tax haven. In imperialist accounting, the interest profit expropriated from the new value workers produce is calculated as a "cost" to the equity owners and taxable in the country where the loan originates.

The Rio Tinto CEO went on to denounce the government in Mongolia, which claims that Oyu Tolgoi, a copper joint venture run by Rio Tinto, should pay more for state-supplied electricity and owes \$155 million in unpaid taxes. The cartel refutes the tax claim and refuses to pay, and similar to the situation in Quebec, demands state-supplied electricity at subsidized rates below the price of production.

It should also not be forgotten that on May 9 Canada launched a new military mission to Mali where Canadian mining companies are demanding the government back down on changes to its mining code which would hit the companies' long term rights over its resources. See "[No to Expanding Canada's Military Presence in Africa](#)," *TML Weekly*, April 7, 2018.

Note

Bank of America owns a large stake in the Rio Tinto Group so the words of CEO Jacques at the bank's conference are of particular importance to its private interests.

(With files from mining.com, Reuters)



Criminalization of Quebec Construction Workers -- Anti-Worker Outlook of Parties in Government and in Opposition

- Pierre Chénier -

The Quebec National Assembly is currently in the process of adopting Bill 152, which amends various labour-related legislative provisions to strengthen the criminalization of construction workers who defend their rights. After two days of parliamentary hearings, Bill 152 was unanimously adopted in principle on February 22. The Committee on Labour and the Economy held a clause-by-clause study of the bill for three days and adopted all its clauses with only slight amendments. The Committee submitted its report to the National Assembly on May 10 and the National Assembly is now proceeding towards the bill's adoption.



Bill 152 and the Assembly's deliberations reveal the extent to which the ruling class is intent on depriving Quebec construction workers of the ability to uphold their rights in practice. Assembly members are shamelessly going all out in the service of construction employers to criminalize workers and their organizations.

The bill and Assembly deliberations reveal several striking features:

- No reference is made to the working conditions and terms of employment of Quebec construction workers. No material or historical context is made of the construction industry and the human factor involved in producing value, and the long class struggle to defend the rights of the working class and establish norms and standards regarding terms of employment and conditions on worksites.

- No reference is found of the extremely hazardous conditions on Quebec construction sites. No mention is made that the construction sector has the highest number of annual workplace fatalities, injuries and health-related problems.

- No reference exists to the fact that construction workers have no job security from jobsite to jobsite making them vulnerable to arbitrary dismissals; to a situation where they are not called for work at another site if they defend their rights; where they are often paid under the table with no legal paycheque showing deductions for EI or pensions, suffering truncated work hours, varied working days with no overtime paid and often no record of even having worked etc.

These phenomena are well known and documented. Construction workers and their organizations have been fighting for years to bring about changes that would improve their working conditions and benefit the construction sector itself. None of this is referred to in the bill; nothing emerged during deliberations or was even mentioned in passing by any party member in government or opposition. One could say the bill and Assembly members disappeared the reality of the construction industry, especially the actual conditions for the human factor.

The overall theme of Bill 152 and all the talk in the National Assembly centres on "intimidation." It became clear that "intimidation" in the minds of the government and opposition members is the organized struggle of construction workers to change the conditions mentioned above, and specifically the practice and actions of the workers and their unions to defend their rights on construction sites.

The government shamelessly invokes the Charbonneau Commission to attack construction workers. In fact, the Commission was supposed to have been about fighting corruption and the presence of organized crime in the awarding of public construction contracts and the link between this corruption and the financing of many of the same political parties now pushing Bill 152. Instead of dealing with the Commission's mandate, it appears the Assembly members, in fear perhaps of being tainted with corruption, introduced Bill 152. This has

deflected all talk away from their own involvement in the awarding of government contracts to the accusation that construction workers are using intimidation to defend themselves and to



equate their trade unions with organized crime.

What a leap, but leap they did, from criminal intimidation in the awarding of government contracts to the activities of workers defending themselves against owners and managers that give themselves the right to do whatever they want. This management right often degenerates into the Wild West outside any law on construction sites endangering lives and creating chaos in workers' lives and the sector. The Charbonneau Commission showed real instances of the Wild West of corruption and intimidation in capturing government contracts and then handing over money to certain political parties in power and opposition, but this does not appear in Bill 152.

The real intimidation of organized crime and corruption, even involving political parties, has disappeared in Bill 152. Instead, the Assembly members and parties have invented a fiction to attack workers and their collectives, and deflect attention away from themselves and the actual conditions workers face and which they attempt to correct through their organized struggles.

Look at the shameful words of Minister of Labour Dominique Vien who presents herself as an indignant employer wanting the powers of King Canute to hold back the tide of workers' rights to be made real through the exercise of police powers:

Right now, you have to understand that it is forbidden for anyone to impose on an employer the hiring of a construction worker ... you must always put yourself in the context as well, ... that even if these articles are not necessarily a request from Commissioner Charbonneau, we are still in the same process that the Charbonneau Commission followed, which gave rise to a report in 2015. What we want to do ... is to specify, because the Quebec Construction Commission needs it, these clarifications. So we are not going to merely talk about not imposing, we are going to add the notions of threats, we are going to add the notion of intimidation, and I mean, not only in the hiring of staff, but also in the whole issue of management rights, and this, this is new, in the whole issue of management rights of an employer in the construction sector. This means that you will not be allowed to use intimidation, you will not be able to make a threat to, for example, play with management rights, be it a dismissal, a disciplinary action, a displacement of workers. Thus, we are no longer limited to the concept of hiring, but we expand to other situations that may occur, basically, that's what we are doing.

Wow! What a leap from corruption in awarding government contracts to advocating a full-blown police regime against construction workers to serve the narrow private interests of the very construction companies that were said to be involved in corrupt practices. Let them get away with the injuries, deaths and mistreatment of workers! If you and your collective object to the injuries, deaths and mistreatment of one of your fellow construction workers you are guilty of intimidating the person accused of committing these crimes and abuses. The members of the Assembly will not allow construction workers to defend their rights, lives and livelihoods because they stand with the employers through thick and thin. From accusations of corruption in the awarding of government contracts, they shift to the breaking of construction norms and standards and terms of employment. They swear to uphold "management rights" and will not allow management and employers to be intimidated by the workers fighting for their lives and livelihoods.

All the parties in the National Assembly support criminalizing construction workers. Representatives of the Liberal Party, Parti Québécois and Coalition Avenir Québec spoke at length during the clause-by-clause study, supporting the attacks against the construction workers under the hoax of fighting intimidation and disruption on worksites. Some suggested the bill goes too far in terms of the scope of the criminalization, but only in the matter of degree, and they did not object in principle or do anything to oppose the bill.

No differences emerged in the basic position of all parties that the organized struggle of workers

amounts to intimidation of employers and represents a threat to production, the economy and the private interests of construction companies. The fourth party, Québec Solidaire, did not have a representative on the Committee. However, it voted in favour of the bill in principle. Its co-leader called the bill a "legislative effort" to clean up practices on construction sites, to put an end to corruption and intimidation. He referred to workers' actions as "out of control," while criticizing the bill for targeting freedom of association of workers. This is common liberal talk of workers' rights in theory but to oppose the exercise of workers' rights in practice and to denounce workers' actions in defence of their rights as intimidation of their employer and a restriction of trade.

The National Assembly and its Committee on Labour and the Economy refuse to recognize the actual working conditions in the construction sector and the necessity for construction workers to organize themselves in defence of their rights, lives and livelihoods. The Assembly wants to deprive workers of their rights through the use of the state's police powers in the service of the construction companies' narrow private interests.

This attack will not deter workers from organizing and defending their rights because to do so is to give up on life itself and succumb to the tyranny of the rich oligarchs and their political representatives. To deprive workers of their rights is untenable in modern society and will only lead to intensified class struggle and disruption. Equilibrium in the class struggle can be found, but it requires those who buy workers' capacity to work to recognize that workers will only work if they can reach terms of employment acceptable to themselves and that those terms are respected and adhered to in practice.



Dangerous Escalation of War Preparations

Largest Troop Movement in Ontario Since the Ice Storm of 1998

The City of Greater Sudbury was visited April 30 by a convoy of 37 Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) vehicles, mainly LAV-6 light armoured vehicles and 200 troops. Based in Petawawa, the troops were on their first overnight stop of a six-day, 1,300 km trip in preparation for their NATO deployment to Latvia in July. They travelled from Petawawa, through North Bay, detouring through Temagami and then to Sudbury. They continued to Peterborough, Kingston, Toronto and ended up at Meaford. It was the largest troop movement in Ontario since the ice storm of 1998.



One reporter made light of the convoy's visit to Sudbury, joking that the reason was to train in the conditions of the city's infamous potholes. In response, a CAF spokesperson likened the exercise to a tourist and public relations trip, showing the flag in different communities, and allowing urban residents to see military equipment that is normally confined to rural and isolated areas. He also quipped that the troops were looking forward to their mission because Latvia is a hockey nation.

Questions of war and peace are not laughing matters. The Canadian government of Justin

Trudeau, like that of Stephen Harper before him, is acting like a lapdog of U.S. imperialism in Eastern Europe. This visit to Sudbury and other communities by a CAF convoy is part of the war preparations of U.S. imperialism in its efforts to dominate the world. Sudburians want an anti-war government to keep Canada out of war preparations and to act as a force for peace.



U.S. Navy Refurbishes Second Fleet to Control Caribbean and North Atlantic



Protest against warships in Halifax harbour, May 29, 2012.

The U.S. Navy is reestablishing its Second Fleet to control the North Atlantic, navy sources report.[1] It will be operational by July 1 and headquartered in Norfolk, Virginia. According to reports, U.S. plans are to increase its fleet, including reactivating the *Oliver Hazard Perry*-class frigates. The lives of the ships already in active service could be extended in order to meet the goal of a 355-strong navy. There are plans to install vertical launch systems on at least six *San Antonio*-class landing ship docks and six auxiliary vessels, in order to increase the navy's missile strike capability.

The Second Fleet was disbanded in 2011, as nothing challenged the U.S. Navy in the Atlantic Ocean at that time. However, the 2018 National Defense Strategy lists the mission to counter Russia and China as a top priority and the U.S. Navy's announcement makes it clear that the competition between the world's leading naval powers is back on again. Russia's modernization efforts have made its navy a formidable force for the U.S. to reckon with, military sources report. U.S. ships and aircraft have recently stepped up their activities in the Atlantic Ocean and the Baltic Sea.



The proposed NATO Joint Forces Command (JFC), also operating out of Norfolk, Virginia, will be responsible for much the same region. Protecting sea lanes to transfer troops and equipment

has become a mission of paramount importance. In this regard, the U.S. is also reactivating and modernizing its naval aviation base at Keflavik, Iceland, which includes renovating a hangar to accommodate P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft that are designed to hunt Russian submarines. Iceland is essentially an unsinkable aircraft carrier. A military presence there makes it possible to control the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom gap, which Russia's Northern Fleet surface ships and submarines have to cross on their way to the Atlantic Ocean. Roughly 300 U.S. Marines are based out of Norway.

An analysis published May 8 by the Russian-based Strategic Culture Foundation says:

Having crossed the Atlantic, the Second Fleet ships will join the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean. The *Harry S. Truman* carrier strike group entered the Sixth Fleet's area of operations on April 18, which was a change from the previous plan to operate in the Persian Gulf. This is the first time a carrier has been deployed in the Mediterranean Sea since July 2017. It looks like from now on, a flat top will be present in the region permanently, just like back during the days of the Cold War. After all, any forces that are based in Europe could easily move to other theatres, if need be. The carrier group is being drawn into combat operations on Syrian soil. The Sixth Fleet has considerably boosted its firepower. Today it can launch about 90 flat top-based aircraft and over 1,000 ship-based long-range surface-to-shore cruise missiles.

After Crimea joined Russia in 2014, the U.S. substantially increased its military presence in Europe by deploying an armoured brigade combat team supported by a combat aviation brigade. The Army has also prepositioned equipment for another armoured brigade.

Since 2015, four Aegis-equipped guided-missile destroyers have been based out of Rota, Spain, as an element of NATO's ballistic missile defence. They can always move to the Mediterranean. Meanwhile, the bloc has stepped up its naval training activities in the region.

The U.S. Navy has doubled its deployments to the Black Sea. NATO has followed suit.

The Military Sealift Command (MSC) is increasing its logistics support of the Sixth Fleet as more warships are deployed to counter Russia. Last year the command transported twice the ordnance, three times as many critical parts, and 33 per cent more cargo to Europe and Africa than in 2016. This is a very important fact that illustrates a trend.

According to Chief of Naval Operations Admiral John Richardson, the Navy is "spending a lot more time in the European theatre." It is "working the Russian presence problem' there. The U.S. Naval Institute is sounding the alarm, claiming that those poor Europeans have been left grappling with 'aggressive' Russian operations. And the U.S. Navy has to reluctantly do something about the impending 'Russian threat.'"

In reality, the revival of the Second Fleet is part of a well-planned preparation for possible war against Russia that could take place on the land, on the sea, and in the air. It is offensive -- not defensive -- operations that the U.S.-led bloc is getting ready for. The West is engaged in a multi-front and multi-domain campaign against Moscow. It has just taken another step down that path. With so many problems threatening its existence, it needs someone to unite it and distract the public's attention from those other problems that Russia has nothing to do with. An imaginary threat justifying all the steps that have been taken to boost its military capabilities fits that bill nicely.

Note

1. The Second Fleet played a crucial role during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 and invaded Grenada in 1983.

(military.com, Washington Post, Strategic Culture Foundation)



U.S. Increases Its Military Presence in Scandinavia



Demonstration against military exercise "Arctic Challenge" in Rovaneimi, Finland, May 23, 2017.

The U.S., Sweden, and Finland entered into a new military alliance on May 8 when defence ministers signed a trilateral Statement of Intent (SOI) to expand defence cooperation on all fronts. Both Sweden and Finland have previously finalized separate defence SOIs with the U.S. Now they have signed a joint document to unify those previous agreements and enhance their interoperability, news agencies report.

The agreement emphasizes the countries' combined joint exercises and streamlines the procedures that have been established to manage them. By transforming bilateral agreements into enhanced trilateral cooperation, a new U.S.-led defence alliance has been created which skirts the issue that neither Sweden nor Finland have joined NATO due to opposition by their people.



Other issues covered by the SOI include regular trilateral meetings at all levels, the exchange of information (including about weapons systems), increased practical interaction, cooperation in multinational operations, improved communications, and the promotion of the EU-NATO strategic partnership. The latter issue will transform the two Scandinavian countries into a connecting link that will eliminate the chance of any European deterrent that could operate with any real independence from the U.S. One of the U.S. aims is to make sure that the Permanent Structured Cooperation

Agreement which is part of the European Union's security and defence policy will not protect Europe's defence industry from U.S. companies.

Sweden hosted the Aurora military exercise in September 2017, the largest such event on its soil. The U.S. supplied most of the visiting troops. The American military has also taken part in a

number of drills in Finland recently. Finland will host a large-scale NATO exercise as early as 2020 or 2021. The U.S. has already been invited. The militarization of the Scandinavian Peninsula is moving full speed ahead.

The analysis provided by the online journal *Strategic Culture* of these developments expresses concern that "the increased tempo of exercises anticipates a larger U.S. presence. It has far-reaching implications. With American military personnel rotating in and out of Sweden and Finland, any offensive action against one of those states would officially be an attack on a NATO member. It would trigger a response as envisaged by Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. Russia considers any American military presence there as provocative. The U.S. is not a Scandinavian country. If an incident took place that resulted in a clash between Russian and U.S. forces, the two Scandinavian nations would be pulled against their will into a conflict they may have nothing to do with. The American soldiers on their soil will never be under the control of their national commands. More U.S. presence means less sovereignty and more risk."



Anti-NATO demonstration in Gothenburg, Sweden, September 16, 2017.

Strategic Culture points out that, in fact, since Sweden and Finland are EU members "they don't even need Article 5 [of the Washington Treaty], because Article 42.7 of the EU treaty also contains a binding mutual-assistance clause. France invoked it after the 2015 Paris terror attacks." *Strategic Culture* says further:

Last year Sweden and Finland joined the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF). All other participants in the nine-nation formation are NATO members. It means that in an emergency their armed forces will operate under NATO command, becoming parties to a conflict they could avoid if they were really neutral. The two also cooperate with Washington through the Northern Group (NG), which consists of 12 countries, although Sweden and Finland are the only non-NATO participants. That organization holds its own dialog with the U.S. Another venue is the five-nation Nordic Countries group that includes these two non-aligned members.

In reality, Sweden and Finland have already joined NATO through other groups and agreements. They did so informally, avoiding referendums and the relevant parliamentary procedures at home. This should be viewed as part of a broader picture. In early April, the first-ever U.S.-Baltic States summit took place in Washington. It was an unprecedented event that somehow was kept out of the media spotlight.

The U.S. already has forces deployed in Norway and Poland and is now considering rotating American troops through the Baltic states as well. Poland and the Baltic states are a focus of NATO'S strategy to encircle Russia and prepare for war despite the 1997 *Russia-NATO Founding Act* (1997), which states that no substantial forces should be deployed in the proximity of Russia's

borders. That document has already been breached by NATO. Furthermore, Lithuania began importing liquefied natural gas (LNG) from America. Poland has also built an LNG terminal to expand the shipments of U.S. gas to Europe, which compete with Russia's energy supplies.

The new military alliance between the U.S., Sweden and Finland is to strengthen U.S. hegemonism in Europe at a time France and Germany are taking their own measures to increase European defence interoperability on their own. "Northern Europe is being turned into a hornet's nest, with its good-neighbour policy gradually being replaced with confrontation that benefits the U.S. but makes the region less secure," *Strategic Culture* concludes.

(*Strategic Culture Foundation, May 14, 2018*)



New York State Funds Drone Corridor

There is an unmanned aircraft system traffic management (UTM) corridor in Central New York. It runs from Central New York to the Mohawk Valley. The most advanced drone testing corridor in the United States, it is the first of its kind.

On May 1, New York Governor Cuomo announced that "The state-supported Northeast UAS Airspace Integration Research Alliance Gryphon Sensors, a world leader in intelligent drone detection, and Raytheon, a technology and innovation leader specializing in defence, civil government and cybersecurity solutions, have both received awards to complete the UTM corridor. The overall project will consist of the system planning, design, implementation, commissioning, and operational support of a state-of-the-art UTM research, development, test and evaluation infrastructure."



Coumo boasted that the "multi-million dollar corridor creates unparalleled drone testing capability." In the name of "strengthening the economy," the corridor will mainly serve drone warfare and drone spying and police use inside the country.



The development of the drone corridor is a multi-million dollar project with significant funding by New York State. Its development is part of "Central New York Rising" through which the state has already invested more than \$4.7 billion since 2012. This includes \$500 million through the Upstate Revitalization Initiative, announced by Governor Cuomo in December 2015. Another \$30 million in state public funds were provided in 2016 specifically for development of the 50-mile flight traffic management system between Syracuse and Griffiss International Airport in Rome, New York. While there are potential commercial uses for the drone corridor, Raytheon's participation

indicates it will largely be used to further develop the military's drone warfare and use of drones for "public safety" -- meaning spying on and disrupting protests, strikes and similar organizing.

New York is already home to two military bases that fly drones, one near Syracuse. Certainly it is no accident the drone corridor is in this vicinity. Niagara Air Force base near Buffalo is also involved in drone warfare. Drones are illegal weapons of war, as they are used to carry out aggression against many countries in the Middle East and Africa, like Yemen, that have not attacked the U.S. and pose no threat. Indeed the Niagara base is currently also being used for re-fueling missions for U.S.-supplied Saudi planes that are bombing Yemen and committing massacres and other war crimes against the people there.

Raytheon is one of the largest military monopolies, with sales of \$24 billion in 2016 alone. It is yearly provided with guaranteed Pentagon contracts -- meaning guaranteed payments of public dollars for war. It also is a weapons manufacturer and involved in sales of weapons of war abroad. Now Raytheon and Gryphon Sensors are getting public dollars at the state level to do their war-making research. No doubt New York's universities will also contribute free researchers, development and trained engineers.



Military Contractor Opens New Facility in Buffalo, New York

On April 26, New York's Governor Cuomo announced that military contractor Research and Engineering Development, or RED-INC. will open a new facility in Buffalo. His statement said, "Since 1998, RED-INC has provided expert research, engineering and development services for military weapons systems and warfighter solutions in the fields of conventional and irregular warfare. The new division, known as Team 2, develops new and emerging technologies that include Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, Artificial Intelligence and other solutions," for military purposes. This war company will provide some 40 jobs while it takes advantage of the free training and educational development provided by University at Buffalo. Most of their employees are graduates of the University.



The statement also makes clear that RED-INC is a main contractor for the Navy, that it develops technology for war and its employees, some of them former military, will be engaged in supporting war. It explains, "RED-INC has ... positioned itself as a valuable resource for Department of Defense customers and commercial companies alike. The new employees will be experts in areas such as product development; physics; numerous engineering disciplines to include computer, software, mechanical and aeronautical; and will be former military operators with specific and relevant mission experience. They are presently working on tools and systems to support the United States Navy's MQ-8C "Fire Scout," which is a combat proven, autonomous helicopter system that provides real-time Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Target-acquisition (ISR&T), laser designation, and battle

management to tactical users without relying on manned aircraft or space-based assets."

Governor Cuomo also promised to continue to attract high-tech companies like RED-INC, meaning potentially more military contractors will be going to Buffalo.



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