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By Roger Jordan
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Trudeau exploits coronavirus crisis to strengthen Canada-US imperialist alliance

While Canada's ruling elite has wasted critical weeks in initiating efforts to combat the coronavirus pandemic, Justin Trudeau's Liberal government suddenly swung into action yesterday. In a press conference, Trudeau announced a series of nationalist and xenophobic measures that were clearly motivated by pressure from, and a desire to coordinate policy with, the Trump administration and US imperialism.

Like Trump earlier in the week, Trudeau's address, albeit in less aggressive language, focused on the need to strengthen Canada's borders and portrayed the virus as a foreign problem. Speaking from self-isolation at Redhall Cottage, where he will remain for two weeks after his wife was diagnosed with COVID-19, Trudeau warned Canadians against all foreign travel and declared that a "Team Canada response" was required to manage the crisis.

He also announced unprecedented restrictions to travellers coming into Canada, including reductions in flights and the number of airports to which passengers can fly. "We are looking to reduce the number of airports that will accept travellers from overseas in order to be able to give the proper resources on all arrivals to ensure we're doing everything we can to keep Canadians and Canada safe," stated Trudeau.

A group of federal ministers, including Health Minister Patty Hajdu, Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland, and Transport Minister Mark Garneau, unveiled additional measures at a separate press conference. These included enhanced security checks at

airports, the banning of all cruise ships from Canada, and the recommendation that all international travellers entering Canada go into two weeks of voluntary self-isolation.

These measures were clearly a response to Trump's Wednesday night address, during which he banned virtually all travel from Europe for 30 days and sought to blame the coronavirus pandemic solely on China and the inaction of the European powers. Earlier this week, Canada's Foreign Minister, François-Philippe Champagne, stressed that Canadian officials were in daily contact with their US counterparts to coordinate their policies.

This coordination has nothing to do with developing a concerted global response to the pandemic, systematically mobilizing the resources of the world to halt the spread of the virus and provide the quality health care urgently required by the population. On the contrary, it is aimed at exploiting the current deadly public health pandemic to strengthen the Canada-US imperialist alliance.

This was underscored Friday when the Trudeau government announced an agreement with the opposition Conservatives, New Democrats, Bloc Québécois and Greens to suspend Parliament for five weeks. One of the terms of the agreement was that Parliament would rush through passage of the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) by the end of the day. The deal, which replaces NAFTA, contains provisions aimed at consolidating North America as a continental trade bloc against international rivals, above all China, so it can serve as a basis for trade war and military conflict.

Also Friday, the Bank of Canada announced a snap decision to cut interest rates by 0.5 per cent for the second time in ten days, funneling billions of dollars into the coffers of the financial markets and big business.

Meanwhile, the attempts by all levels of government in Canada to combat the virus have been utterly inadequate. Trudeau announced the derisory sum of \$1 billion in assistance for Canada's dilapidated health system on Wednesday, which is a mere drop in the bucket compared to the tens of billions required to repair the damage done by decades of austerity measures. Hospitals in Ontario and British Columbia are already reporting a shortage of critical medical supplies, resulting in patients seeking treatment being turned away. Additionally, the measures announced to help workers who fall ill or who have to go into self-quarantine were no more than a tiny fraction of what is needed to provide millions of Canadians with the financial resources to support their families through illness, self-isolation or the loss of income due to workplace shutdowns.

The attitude of the ruling class to the vast majority of the population was summed up in comments by Hajdu to the House of Commons Health Committee Wednesday. After describing the coronavirus outbreak as a “national emergency and crisis,” she went on to blandly declare, “There are a range of estimates. But I would say that it is safe to assume that it could be between 30 per cent of the population that acquires COVID-19 and 70 per cent of the population.”

The *Globe and Mail* article that reported her remarks did not indicate that any MP challenged Hajdu’s incredible statement, which accepted the worst prognoses of the World Health Organization and other experts as an accomplished fact. Nor did anyone ask why, given that this crisis has been developing internationally for several months, nothing was done by the Canadian government to expand hospital facilities, purchase critical medical equipment, roll out testing to all communities, and establish isolation facilities for those who need them.

Even taking the lower end of Hajdu’s estimate as a starting point, this would mean that 12 million Canadians would be infected. The general medical advice states that 15–20 per cent of all cases will require an intensive care bed due to breathing problems, which would translate into between 2 million and 2.4 million people. Assuming a mortality rate of 2 per cent, which is well below the rate in several countries, 240,000 Canadians would die. If the higher end of Hajdu’s projection comes to pass, with a rate of infection of 70 per cent, the death toll would be 560,000.

There is no reason for working people to passively accept that the vast majority of the population in Canada and internationally must contract the virus. What is required is billions of dollars of investments in testing, high quality medical care and supplies, including breathing equipment, masks, gloves and gowns. Billions more must be made available to compensate workers for loss of pay, allowing them to stay at home and follow medical advice rather than risking infection by continuing to work to make ends meet.

But none of this will be forthcoming from Canada’s criminal ruling elite. Instead, workers must mobilize independently to fight for the urgent measures needed to prevent the coronavirus pandemic from becoming a human and social catastrophe.

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