



The Bullet

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People's Summit Against War and Militarism to be Held in Montréal

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The Montréal-based antiwar collective *Échec à la guerre* (which translates roughly as "Stop war") is organizing a [People's Summit Against War and Militarism](#) to be held March 19-21 in that city. Featuring workshops and panels as well as a plenary session that will issue a Joint Declaration, the People's Summit promises to be an important step in creating an understanding of the underlying issues that alone can sustain and build an ongoing movement against war and imperialism in this country.

This is not the first major initiative of this type by *Échec à la guerre* – which, in the months leading up to the Iraq war, organized massive demonstrations in Quebec including the march in Montréal of nearly a quarter million people, the largest antiwar demonstration in Canadian history. In February 2008 the collective held [Public hearings for the withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan](#), and in October 2008 it sponsored publication of an Open Letter to federal election candidates under the heading "[Sur le retrait des troupes canadiennes de l'Afghanistan, la démocratie c'est pour quand?](#)" (When will we have a democratic decision on the withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan?).

The call-out for the People's Summit explains:

The purpose of the Summit is to strengthen the movement against war and militarism in Québec by deepening its reflection, clarifying its demands and consolidating its unity in action. It is urgent to do so. As the war of occupation in Afghanistan runs into more and more resistance and is now spilling over into Pakistan, the voices in favour of extending Canada's military intervention in the region are already starting to be heard.

In this context, the period of preparations for the Summit and the Summit itself will offer a space and tools for further deconstructing the warmongers' rhetoric and arguments. [Canada's role in the occupation of Afghanistan](#), a pamphlet in 18 talking points put out by Collectif *Échec à la guerre*, is still very pertinent. But although opposed to the war in Afghanistan, many Quebecers may feel at a loss when faced with some of the arguments put forward in militarist propaganda, such as:

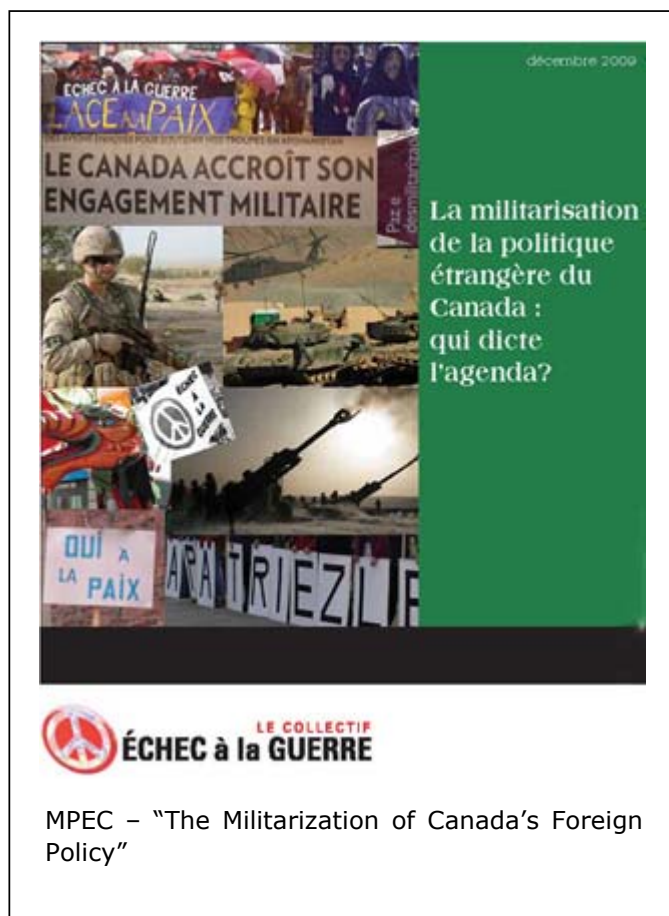
- "It's a UN mission";
- "We have to honour our NATO commitments";

- “Immediate withdrawal would be irresponsible.”

Countering such arguments requires a more thorough examination of important topics on which people often don't have much information: the UN, NATO and issues of war and peace in our times. A shared understanding of these major issues becomes a necessity for the citizen-based anti-war movement if it wants to help transform the majority opinion against the war into a force capable of obtaining the withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan and questioning the alignment of Canada's foreign policy on that of the U.S. empire.

And the call-out adds:

It goes without saying that these objectives are in no way specific to the Québec context, and the Collectif Échec à la guerre will work in close collaboration with the Canadian Peace Alliance and its member groups to hold similar summits in other cities across Canada.



As part of the preparation for the People's Summit, the collective has published [three downloadable pamphlets](#) discussing the major topics to be addressed at the Summit. The first two were issued in June 2009. One, entitled (in translation) "NATO: Defensive Alliance or Instrument of War?", outlines the alliance's origins in the Cold War and its evolution since 1991 as a keystone in imperialist foreign policy. The other, the title of which could be translated as "Are They Making War on Behalf of Women?", exposes the faux-feminist rationale frequently peddled in defense of the Canadian and NATO war on Afghanistan. It makes effective use of quotations from [Ms. Malalai Joya](#), the Afghan antiwar MP who recently toured North America.

Canada's Corporate-Military Linkages

Last month, the collective published a third pamphlet, *La militarisation de la politique étrangère du Canada: qui dicte l'agenda?* (MPEC – "The Militarization of Canada's Foreign Policy: Who Dictates the Agenda?") A fourth pamphlet, yet to be published, will analyze the role of the UN Security Council and international law.

MPEC makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of Canadian foreign policy since the Second World War. It describes Canada's central role as a close partner of the United States in the founding of NATO in 1949 and how the alliance

provided the framework for Canada's intervention in the Korean civil war in the early 1950s, the occupation of Germany, and this country's production, sale and research and development of weapons throughout the Cold War. Since the Cold War, it explains, NATO has expanded its role as an instrument for Washington to secure its global hegemony amidst increasing inter-capitalist rivalry for resources and markets.

The pamphlet outlines the corresponding militarist shift in Canada's foreign policy in the post-Cold War period, tracing its evolution through the build-up of the Canadian military as a "true combat force" participating in the 1991 Gulf War, the naval blockade of Iraq between 1990 and 2003, the army's intervention in Somalia in 1992-93, the air force participation in the 78-day NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999, and of course most recently in the now almost decade-long intervention in Afghanistan. It analyzes this shift in the context of the increasing trade and investment linkages with Washington through "free trade" and investment blocs and the related repressive measures in the post-9/11 period as expressed in the *Anti-Terrorism Act* (modeled on the U.S. *Patriot Act*), the security certificate detentions, the Security and Prosperity Partnership, and of course the massive increases in military expenditures.

Finally, *MPEC* documents the leading role of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE) in promoting the deepening alignment of Canadian foreign and military policy with that of the United States. The CCCE includes the country's major business executives, including the heads of the banks, oil companies and military producers – among them such leading stalwarts of "Québec Inc." as Bombardier, SNC-Lavalin, Power Corporation and CAE. It is now headed by John Manley, the former deputy prime minister. In short, Canada's ruling class. *MPEC* notes: "A comparison of the CCCE's positions since 2001 with the Canadian government's foreign policy and defence statements reveals a troubling fact: they often contain the same ideas, the same arguments, sometimes even word for word...."

Peacekeeping?

There are some weaknesses in the pamphlet, in my view. In its discussion of Canadian policy in the Cold War, it unduly emphasizes Ottawa's "differences" with Washington, citing such examples as the refusal to deploy nuclear arms on Canadian soil, the maintaining of economic (and diplomatic) links with Cuba, and the welcome accorded to U.S. draft resisters and deserters during the Vietnam war. A further examination would reveal that these examples had their limitations; they were exceptions, not the rule, and often served as cover for more nefarious practices.

Canada partnered with the U.S. in the North American Air Defence Alliance and allowed the U.S. to establish air bases on Canadian territory. It even built two nuclear missile bases of its own north of Toronto and Montréal-Ottawa, but then declined to equip the Bomarc missiles with nuclear arms – a decision Lester "Peace Prize" Pearson campaigned against as leader of the Liberal Party.

Although it did not send troops to Vietnam, Canada covered for U.S. aggression through its membership in the International Control Commission, while (as *MPEC* acknowledges) selling hundreds of millions of dollars in weapons annually to the U.S. throughout the war. The influx of young educated Americans fleeing the war helped temporarily to reverse the Canadian "brain drain" to the U.S. during a period when this country was rapidly expanding its post-secondary education facilities.

More seriously, *MPEC* fails to note how Canadian participation in "peacekeeping" forces under UN auspices, which it lauds as an example of Canada's "mediation role," was actually part and parcel of its alignment with the U.S. and other imperialist powers, often in opposition to the national liberation struggles that the pamphlet correctly cites as an important feature of the post-WWII world. In fact, Pearson's role in establishing UN peacekeeping (for which he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize) was part of an attempt on Washington's behalf to extricate its NATO allies Britain and France, along with Israel, from the consequences in the Arab world of their attack on Egypt in the wake of its nationalization of the Suez Canal. The more recent "peacekeeping" operations in Somalia, the Balkans and, yes, Afghanistan (which the UN has ex post facto endorsed) are likewise motivated by pro-imperialist considerations, now in the post-Cold War context of a less fettered scope for imperialist aggression in the dependent nations.

This omission is especially regrettable in light of Canada's ongoing "peacekeeping" effort in Haiti, the second largest recipient (after Afghanistan) of Ottawa's "foreign aid." In 2004 the Canadian military participated in the overthrow and kidnapping of the country's elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, and since then the RCMP have been heavily involved in training police and security forces in Haiti. Canada's response to the recent earthquake was primarily military, sending up to 2,000 soldiers to Haiti to patrol the streets of Port au Prince while Haitians frantically searched the ruins for loved ones and neighbours. Ottawa now has as many troops in Haiti as it does in Afghanistan! Yet Haiti is not even mentioned in this pamphlet.

However, these are the kind of questions that can be discussed at the forthcoming People's Summit. The *MPEC* pamphlet concludes with a call for a public debate and redefinition of Canada's foreign policy, and in particular for "the immediate withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan." The Summit is an important initiative by *Échec à la guerre* that deserves the support of all antiwar activists, and not only in Quebec. •

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