

Antiwar Forces Need to Challenge Trudeau Government, Not Praise It

By [Yves Engler](#)

Global Research, October 19, 2020

[Yves Engler](#) 17 October 2020

Region: [Canada](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

Should antiwar forces challenge power or praise government officials in the hopes of getting some crumbs for their pet issue?

Douglas Roche's recent *Hill Times* column suggests the latter. In an article extolling Canada's new ambassador to the UN Roche writes:

"[When Canada](#) lost its bid for a seat on the UN Security Council the second successive time last June, I thought a foreign policy review from top to bottom was the solution to get Canada back on track internationally. But I've changed my mind for two reasons: the world is in multiple crises revolving around COVID-19 that need to be acted on now, and Bob Rae has arrived on the scene. I don't mean to present the estimable new Canadian ambassador to the UN as a world saviour, but he has quickly established himself as a champion of the UN humanitarian agenda, which centres around reducing the grotesque economic inequalities that the pandemic has worsened."

In essence Roche is saying that a few months ago he was troubled by the world's rejection of Canadian foreign policy but now that Rae and Prime Minister Trudeau have delivered a couple of high-minded, internationalist statements there's little need to challenge government policy.

But things are far from all fine and dandy. The Trudeau government refused to join [122](#) countries at a UN conference to ban nuclear weapons in 2017 and has failed to sign the resulting treaty. They have announced a [70%](#) increase in military spending, oversaw [record](#) (non-US) arms exports last year and dispatched troops on US and NATO missions to Iraq and Latvia (not to mention breaking their promise to rein in Canadian mining companies' abuses, support for a repressive Haitian president, unprecedented campaign to overthrow Venezuela's government, anti-Palestinian positions, etc.)

Rather than representing a break from the Liberals' pro-US, pro-militarist and pro-capitalist policies, Rae's appointment reflects a continuation of this outlook. As I detailed in "[New UN ambassador Bob Rae pushes pro-US, militarist and anti-Palestinian positions](#)", Rae aggressively promoted bombing Libya in 2011, allied with Stephen Harper to extend the occupation of Afghanistan and has repeatedly undercut Palestinian rights.

A few high-minded speeches by Rae and other government officials does not make a just

foreign policy. Rather than make nice with Rae, peace and antiwar minded individuals should directly confront the Trudeau government's foreign policy. The two recent national days of action at dozens of MPs' offices against purchasing new fighter jets and selling arms to Saudi Arabia are a good step. So was the "no Canada on UN Security Council" campaign.

Unfortunately, Roche's perspective on this issue matters. A former ambassador for disarmament, Progressive Conservative MP and senator has significant influence in peace circles. He's influential within the Canadian Network for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons and two weeks ago Roche did an [event](#) with World Beyond War. But, Roche's perspective is deleterious even if you stick to Roche's main issue: nuclear disarmament.

If we are serious about forcing Ottawa to sign the UN nuclear ban treaty we need to grow the broader peace/demilitarization/anti-imperialist movement. More specifically, if many begin agitating against fighter jets and arms exports, or for Canada to leave the nuclear armed NATO alliance the government is more likely to concede to a push to sign the nuclear ban treaty.

Roche's column praising Bob Rae should serve as a wakeup call to antiwar activists. The movement is far too focused on insider lobbying and policy wonkery. It needs to be much more oriented towards broad principled positions and social movement mobilization.

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