

Harper Promotes Canadian Militarism: Introducing University Undergraduates to a Form of Military Service on Campus

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The Conservatives' militarism is unrelenting.

Last month the Harper government launched a Civil Military Leadership Pilot Initiative at the University of Alberta. The program "allow[s] people to simultaneously obtain a university degree while also gaining leadership experience in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Reserves." The four-year Civil Military Leadership Pilot Initiative will be "co-directed by the University of Alberta and the CAF" and the government hopes to export this "test model" to other universities.

The program is an attempt to reestablish the Canadian Officer Training Corps, which was offered at universities from 1912 until 1968. According to Lee Windsor, deputy director of the University of New Brunswick's Gregg Centre for the Study of War and Society, the Canadian Officers Training Corps program "introduced university undergraduates to a form of military service on campus, providing them with leadership and other military training and preparing them to join the reserve or the regular force if they wished to do so."

This latest move onto campus is part of a multifaceted effort to expand the military's role in Canadian society. When the Conservative government updated the citizenship handbook, 'Discover Canada: the Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship,' they added over a dozen photos of armed forces personnel. Citizenship and Immigration Canada also decreed that citizenship ceremonies include a military speaker. Introduced at the start of the ceremony, the veteran should declare: "As a Canadian citizen, you live in a democratic country where individual rights and freedoms are respected. Thousands of brave Canadians have fought and died for these rights and freedoms. The commitment to Canada of our men and women in uniform should never be forgotten."

Huge sums of public money have been spent promoting the military at Canada Day festivities, the Calgary Stampede, the Canadian National Exhibition, Santa Claus Parades, the Grey Cup, NHL hockey games and other cultural and sporting events. Of recent, the Canadian Forces have been spending over \$350 million a year and directing 650 staff members to carrying out these public relations efforts.

The federal government's deference has gone to the military's heads. Five years into the Conservative government, the Canadian Forces openly proclaimed that it should determine public opinion. In November 2011 *Embassy* reported: "An annual report from the Department of National Defence says Canadians should appreciate that their values are

shaped in part by their military. That represents a shift from past annual departmental reports that said departmental activities were informed by Canadian interests and values. Now it's the other way around."

While strengthening the military's role in the cultural and ideological arena, the Conservatives have also taken a decidedly pro-military position on arms control. Ottawa has refused to ratify the UN Arms Trade Treaty, which is designed to limit weapons from getting into conflict zones or into the hands of human rights violators.

The Harper government also watered down Canada's adherence to the Convention on Cluster Munitions. The director of the Cluster Munition Coalition, Laura Cheeseman, explained "Canada cannot claim to have banned cluster bombs when it proposes to allow its military to help others use the weapons, and even leaves open the possibility of Canadian forces using them."

Along with its ambivalence towards UN arms control measures, the Conservatives have expanded the list of nations that Canadian defence companies can export prohibited weapons to. In April 2008 Canada's Automatic Firearms Country Control List was increased from 20 to 31 states and in December they added Colombia, the worst human rights violator in the Americas, to the List. Now, they are looking to add four more countries to the Automatic Firearms Country Control List.

The Conservatives have helped military companies in numerous other ways. They have been supporting the Canadian Association of Defence and Security Industries, the arms industry's main lobby group, through grants and dedicated trade commissioners. CADSI is also benefiting from direct political support. Senior representatives from the Department of National Defense, the Canadian Forces, Foreign Affairs and the Canadian Commercial Corporation (CCC) have participated in recent CADSI trade missions. After a December 2011 visit to sell weapons to the Kuwaiti monarchy, CADSI president Tim Page applauded what he described as the Conservatives "whole of government effort."

During the Harper reign the CCC, whose board is appointed by the government, has taken on a more expansive role as a go-between on military sales with foreign governments. According to a June 2011 *Embassy* article, "the Canadian Commercial Corporation has been transformed from a low-profile Canadian intermediary agency to a major player in promoting Canadian global arms sales." Traditionally, the CCC sold Canadian weaponry to the US Department of Defense under the 1956 Defence Production Sharing Agreement but during the Conservative government it's begun emulating some aspects of the US defence department's Foreign Military Sales program, which facilitates that country's global arms sales.

In June of last year, *Embassy* noted: "In the last few years, the Canadian Commercial Corporation, a Crown corporation, has helped Canadian firms sell everything from military hardware and weapons to wiretapping technology, forensics for ballistics, surveillance, document detection, sensor systems, bulletproof vests and helmets, training, and other services." According to CCC president Marc Whittingham, who wrote in a May 2010 issue of *Hill Times* that "there is no better trade show for defence equipment than a military mission," the agency is "partnering with government ministers to get the job done."

The Conservatives have worked hard to expand Canadian arms sales as well as to convince the public that it should support this country's military-industrial complex.

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